

Naval Reserve Issues for FY 05 National Defense Authorization Bills and Other Provisions Pending in Congress This Summer

By CAPT Ike Puzon, USNR (Ret)

At press time, Congress has completed individual house action on the National Defense Authorization Acts and the Defense Appropriations Bills. Conference on the differences in these defense bills is the next step. The below listed provisions are some of the differences that have to be solved in conference. These are just a few of the most important issues. It is imperative for you to fax a letter, call, or e-mail your representatives as soon as possible in support of the issues and suggested positions below. Since this is an election year, members will pay more close attention. Please note the issues that were not passed or addressed by either house members. These are important to address in your correspondence with your Congressional members!

Your e-mail, call, faxed letter will and can make the difference in passage, since your Congressional representative will listen to mass opinions. For House members <www.house.gov/writerep>, for Senators <www.senate.gov>.

Issue	House Bill (HR 4200)	Senate Bill (S 2400)	Position
Survivor Benefit Plan (SPB) age-62 annuity	Raise minimum annuity to 40% of covered retired pay in OCT 2005, 45% in APR 2006, 50% in APR 2007, & 55% in APR 2008	Sen Landrieu amendment; allows for a ten-year phase in	Strongly support the House provisions
2005 Military Pay Raise	3.5% pay raise in JAN 2005 for all uniformed service members	Similar Provision	Support both provisions
Special Commission on Guard and Reserve, and Yearly Guard and Reserve Review	No provision	Establish commission to review Guard and Reserve roles and missions and to assess the need for compensation, benefits, and other issues, including use of RC	In light of demand & use of Guard and Reserve Forces, strongly support the Senate provision; recommend e-mail, write, or call Representatives, Senators in support of Senate provision
TRICARE Standard coverage for certain Guard and Reserve members	Three-year test of fee-based TRICARE coverage at ten or more sites for Selected Reserve members who have no employer health coverage	Permanent nationwide fee-based TRICARE coverage for Selected Reserve members who have no employer health coverage	Strongly support the Senate provision, the House version would not apply or affect all Selected Reserve members
Employer insurance options for Guard and Reserve members	Direct General Accounting Office report by MAR 2005 about providing stipend to offset the cost of continuing private family health coverage while reserve member is mobilized	Allow Sel Res who have employer-provided coverage the option of having the government pay part of the premiums to continue family coverage during mobilization	Strongly support Senate provision to ensure continuity of members' family coverage when mobilized
Pharmacy cost shares for TFL-eligibles	Prohibit imposing higher pharmacy cost shares for Medicare-eligibles than for other beneficiaries	No provision	Support the House provision
Commissary	Establish in law as DoD-operated military benefit	No provision	Support the House provision
Guard and Reserve civilian income replacement payment	Pay differential from civilian pay for involuntarily mobilized Reservists after 12 months on active duty (up to \$3,000 a month); 18 months within five years; or if recalled again within six months	No provision	Support the House provision at this time
Service manpower levels	Increase Army force levels by 30,000 and Marine Corps levels by 9,000 Reduce Navy and Naval Reserve end strength by 7,900 for AC; 2,500 for RC	Allows for 30,000 increase for Army. Reduces Navy AC by 7,900 and RC by 2,500	Do not support the reductions in RC Navy. All the service components are overstressed – members and families. End strength reductions in RC and AC are untimely and should not be supported for budget purposes only
<u>JOBS Act (S.1637):</u> <u>Senator Landrieu</u> <u>Amendment – Tax Credit for</u> <u>Employers of Guard and Reserve</u> {not a part of NDAA}	No bill passed	This amendment to the JOBS Act Bill (S. 1637) could provide up to \$15,000 for Employers of Guard and Reserve members	We need to support strongly the Senate bill and encourage the House to act on their tax-related bill. Please watch this one closely. We have been trying to get tax credits for employers for many years

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Some of the provisions and issues that did not pass in either house:

- [Retirement at 55](#). This issue did not make it into either Congressional bill and will not be included in this year's FY 05 NDAA. Senator Corzine (NJ) did offer an amendment regarding this issue, which was defeated 49-49. Please review the link to see how your Senator voted! Let them know what you think. We have made progress this year and will address this issue again next year. Many organizations and associations have supported this issue, and we are hopeful and encouraged for next year's effort. Senator Miller's (GA) bill on Retirement at 55 did not get addressed in committee.

- [Funding for VA Health Care](#). Sen. Tom Daschle's (D-SD) amendment to

provide mandatory (vs discretionary) funding for all veterans enrolled in VA health care was defeated when it failed to muster 60 votes to waive a budget point of order.

- [Selected Reserve MGIB](#). Many Congressional representatives supported this initiative. However, the lack of resources defeated this very important provision. We hope to get this addressed again, as soon as possible. Your support on this issue that benefits our military members and all Reserve Components is critical for passage in the future.

I understand that it may be difficult for some of you to address these issues. It is important to our National Security Strategy, and National Military Strategy, that you get involved in resolution of these. If you follow the involvement of

the Guard and Reserve in OIFI, OIFII, and others events, then you know that there is not a decrease in use, nor will there be. DoD and the Services are not supportive of several initiatives that improve the benefits and conditions of Guard and Reserve because; "it costs too much." Shouldn't you decide what the cost is and what really costs too much!

***Note:** Fall conference in Washington, DC; please plan to visit your Congressional representatives. I will assist in making appointments and provide some visitation kits, but I must know that you wish to visit prior to the end of August! My e-mail <legislat@navy-reserve.org>.*