



## T H E M I L I T A R Y C O A L I T I O N

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October 19, 2007

The Honorable Carl Levin  
Chairman, Committee on Armed Services  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Mr. Chairman:

The Military Coalition (TMC), a consortium of uniformed services and veterans associations representing more than 5.5 million current and former servicemembers and their families and survivors, is grateful to you and the Armed Services Committee for your efforts to protect the interests of servicemembers in the FY2008 National Defense Authorization Bill.

*We are particularly grateful for both chambers' support of larger Army and Marine Corps end strengths, a 3.5% military pay raise, extending Combat-Related Special Compensation to certain disability retirees with less than 20 years of service, recognizing inequities imposed on SBP-DIC widows, prohibiting most TRICARE fee increases for FY2008, and particularly for your efforts to improve conditions and benefits for wounded warriors and their families.*

The attached matrix highlights Coalition recommendations concerning selected differences between the House- and Senate-passed bills. Several priorities merit special mention:

### **Wounded Warriors**

Both bills contain numerous laudable provisions. The Coalition particularly urges retention of:

- Among many needed TBI/PTSD initiatives, the Coalition particularly supports House section 711 requiring cognitive testing, rather than limited pilot projects;
- Senate section 1621 authorizing three years of *active duty level* care for disability retirees and their families to correct gaps between active, retired, and VA care (as authorized for survivors of members killed on active duty; wounded warriors deserve no less);
- Senate sections 1652-1654 to reform the disability retirement system and review all post-9/11 disability separations under previous inequitable rules;

- House sections 1412 and 1415-1417 to ensure fair representation of members' interests in the disability process; the Coalition does not support ending the military disability retirement system, as some would interpret the Dole/Shalala recommendations.
- Senate section 1641 (joint office to implement the DoD/VA electronic health record); and
- Senate sections 1626, 1627, 1681 and House section 1412 for improved support for family members and caregivers.

### **End Strength**

The Coalition continues to believe that active duty and Guard/Reserve ground forces are too small to meet the mission requirements expected for the foreseeable future. TMC supports the increases proposed by both Committees for the Army and Marine Corps. However, we continue to be very concerned that reductions in active duty and Reserve components for the Navy and Air Force are driven by budget considerations rather than requirements and have the potential to cause significant operations tempo problems in facing future military needs.

### **Concurrent Receipt**

The Coalition strongly endorses the Senate provisions extending Combat-Related Special Compensation to all disability retirees with less than 20 years' service – recognizing that early termination of their careers was involuntarily imposed upon them by combat wounds. The Coalition fully endorses the Senate proposal to provide full, immediate concurrent retired disability pay for otherwise qualifying retirees deemed “unemployable”. It is wrong that the only group certified by the VA as being unable to work has to wait until 2009 for full payment. The Veterans Disability Benefits Commission endorsed both initiatives as priority needs.

### **Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP) Fixes**

The Coalition very strongly favors the Senate-passed provisions that would end deduction of Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) from SBP annuities when the member's death is service-connected and require immediate implementation of 30-year paid-up SBP coverage. Recent SGLI and death gratuity increases and the authority to transfer SBP to children help only a small minority of survivors, while the vast majority of survivors affected by the SBP/DIC offset received no benefit from those initiatives. The Veterans Disability Benefits Commission has joined the Coalition in urging an end to this unfair offset. As for paid-up SBP, thousands of World War II and Korea retirees already have met statutory eligibility criteria and in fact have paid 28% more SBP premiums than post-1978 retirees will ever pay. These “Greatest Generation” retirees have earned and deserve immediate paid-up SBP status.

### **TRICARE Fees**

The Coalition strongly supports the Committees' actions in barring any increase in TRICARE Prime fees for 2008. We urge the conferees to adopt the Senate “sense of Congress” provision on this topic. While non-binding, the Coalition believes it is essential to recognize the essential role of military health benefits in offsetting the unique conditions of service and to recognize that military people pay far larger premiums in service and sacrifice for their career health benefits than the relatively small portion of those premiums that happens to be paid in cash.

## **Military Pay Raise**

The Coalition urges the conferees most strongly to adopt the House-approved provision that would set military pay raises one-half percentage point above the Employment Cost Index each year for the next five years. Restoration of pay comparability is a fundamental underpinning of the all-volunteer force, and this expression of Congress' unwavering commitment to that goal will send a much-needed message to servicemembers who continue to strain under a grossly disproportional burden of the national wartime sacrifice.

## **Guard and Reserve Retirement**

The Military Coalition strongly endorses the Senate initiatives to reduce the Reserve retirement age proportional to active duty service since Oct. 7, 2001 and authorize up to 130 retirement-creditable points per year. The government has changed the rules to require these members to spend up to 25% of their working lives in uniform -- which means less opportunity to build the kind of civilian retirement plan they envisioned when they joined the Selected Reserve. These changes will help address that inequity and encourage continued service.

## **Montgomery GI Bill**

The Military Coalition urges the Committees to retain the House provision to consolidate all GI Bill authorities under title 38 and the Senate provision to authorize a 10-year portability period for Selected Reserve members. It is unconscionable that all participating active duty members enjoy such portability, but Guard/Reserve members -- many with multiple Iraq tours -- do not.

## **Support for Military Families**

The Military Coalition appreciates the numerous provisions to improve family support. There is a need to consolidate these in a comprehensive package addressing family readiness, access to counseling and mental health services, and support through all cycles from pre-deployment to reintegration. It is essential to evaluate how families, especially the youngest members, deal with deployment to tailor the services they need. Changes to the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) are urgently needed to help families take advantage of existing programs to enhance their resilience during deployment. The Coalition urges particular vigilance to ensure all facilities and family support services are fully in place to meet BRAC and rebasing timelines.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide the Coalition's views on these important issues.

Sincerely,

The Military Coalition  
(Signatures enclosed)

Attachment: [TMC Recommendations on House/Senate Differences](#)

Cc: Armed Services Committee Members

Air Force Association  
Air Force Sergeants Association  
Air Force Women Officers Associated  
American Logistics Association  
AMVETS (American Veterans)  
Army Aviation Association of America  
Association of Military Surgeons of the United States  
Association of the United States Army  
Chief Warrant Officer and Warrant Officer Association, U.S. Coast Guard  
Commissioned Officers Association of the U.S. Public Health Service, Inc.  
Enlisted Association of the National Guard of the United States  
Fleet Reserve Association  
Gold Star Wives of America, Inc.  
Jewish War Veterans of the United States of America  
Marine Corps League  
Marine Corps Reserve Association  
Military Chaplains Association of the United States of America  
Military Officers Association of America  
Military Order of the Purple Heart  
National Association for Uniformed Services  
National Guard Association of the United States  
National Military Family Association  
National Order of Battlefield Commissions  
Naval Enlisted Reserve Association  
Naval Reserve Association  
Non Commissioned Officers Association  
Reserve Enlisted Association of the United States  
Reserve Officers Association  
The Retired Enlisted Association  
United States Army Warrant Officers Association  
United States Coast Guard Chief Petty Officers Association  
Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States  
Veterans' Widows International Network