



News from Congressman

Tom Lantos

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FOR INFORMATION CALL
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Defense Funding Bill Goes at Least Part of the Way to Address Pay Gap for Reservists, National Guard

Washington, DC – In a sudden but welcome reversal of its stated policy during the past year, the House Armed Services Committee this week will mark up a defense authorization bill that provides much-needed assistance to the estimated 41% of Reservists who suffer financial setbacks due to the significant difference between their civilian and activated military pay.

“I am relieved that the unreasonable bureaucratic hurdles have been overcome, and that the government now appears ready to address this serious issue,” said Congressman Tom Lantos, who has been vigorously advocating a bill to address the pay gap since March 2003. “We must support our citizen-soldiers who answer the call of duty, but who still face the same financial obligations in their civilian lives. We cannot abandon these brave men and women and their families.”

Under a new provision in the defense authorization bill, the Department of Defense will bridge a deployed Reservist’s or National Guard member’s salary gap for up to \$3,000 per month, but only after 12 continuous months of active duty or if they have served 18 months out of the last 60.

Lantos pointed out that the pay gap for many Reservist and National Guard members is much larger than \$3,000 per month, and that their families suffer financial hardships from the first month that they are away – not just a year later. Lantos said he would continue to push for more generous legislation offering immediate relief.

The legislation Lantos introduced in March 2003, H.R. 1345, would fill the pay gap entirely for all federal employees who go on active duty, and it provides financial incentives for state and private employers to follow suit. Last year the Republican leadership struck down this bill on three occasions when it was introduced as part of other legislation. Despite these setbacks, Congressman Lantos remained committed to the troops’ interests and personally lobbied Armed Services Chairman Duncan Hunter to provide this crucial assistance to Reservists and National Guard soldiers.

“Although this new provision does not go as far as my own legislation, it is a good first step,” Lantos said. “And thankfully, it goes much farther than other Republican proposals to address Reservists’ and National Guard members’ financial woes, such as the tragically inadequate proposal last month to make it easier for them to raid their own retirement funds. Let us hope that support for this much more substantial aid remains strong.”

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