

News from U.S. Rep. John Spratt (D-SC)

Assistant to the Democratic Leader

Ranking Member, Committee on the Budget

US House of Representatives – Washington, DC

www.house.gov/spratt | www.house.gov/budget_democrats

Friday, August 15, 2003 – For Immediate Release

Contact: Chuck Fant, 202-225-5501

Spratt, Skelton Blast Pentagon Move to Cut Pay for Military Serving in Iraq and Afghanistan

WASHINGTON – U.S. Reps. John Spratt (D-SC) and Ike Skelton (D-MO) today issued the following statement on military pay. Spratt is the Ranking Member on the Budget Committee and a senior member on the Armed Services Committee. Skelton is the Ranking Member on the Armed Services Committee.

“We learned late yesterday that the Pentagon has asked Congress not to renew pay increases approved last April for military men and women serving in Iraq and Afghanistan, on the grounds that we cannot afford to continue them. This is a direct affront to the men and women of the United States military and their families, it is unconscionable, and the Pentagon should immediately and unequivocally reverse this decision.

“In the spring, in a bipartisan fashion, Congress approved a \$75/month increase in ‘imminent danger pay’ and \$150/month boost in ‘family separation allowances’ for those serving in combat zones around the world, including Iraq and Afghanistan. ‘Imminent danger pay’ – given to uniformed personnel in combat zones – was raised to \$225/month from \$150/month, while ‘family separation allowance’ – which goes to help military families pay rent, child care or other expenses while soldiers are away – was raised to \$250/month from \$100/month.

“In a midsummer budget report to Congress last month, the Pentagon said it could not afford the increase in the two pay categories, which it says is costing about \$25 million more a month, or \$300 million for a full year. The Pentagon recommended returning to the old, lower rates of special pay and offered to study the question of combat pay in coming months.

“Our troops in Iraq lay their lives on the line every day for their country, in what our commanders acknowledge is guerrilla warfare. Since President Bush announced an end to so-called major combat, 60 U.S. soldiers have been killed, and another 69 have died from disease, heat, or accidents in Iraq. And the Army just confirmed this week that soldiers and their families should expect one-year deployments as the rule, not the exception.

“Back home, their families struggle, adjusting to a longer separation than anyone expected. The least we can do to show our gratitude is continue these supplements. And the idea that in a \$400 billion annual defense budget we cannot find \$300 million is preposterous.

“Congress is prepared to appropriate funds to continue the higher payments, and the Pentagon should follow suit. The Department of Defense hurriedly released a statement late yesterday that implied a willingness to reverse last month’s recommendation. The Department would be wise to do just that.”

#