

ARMED FORCES MEMBERS DESERVE INCREASED PAY

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Properly compensating our armed service men and women for their faithful and unwavering service to the Nation continue to be an ethical dilemma. As Americans we have the privileged of living as free people. We are free to raise our children as we see fit, free to worship, free to work and earn a living and in some cases become very wealthy. Those are just a few rights we have as Americans living in a free nation. Our country has prospered for many years but some would say that the Government has not done a particularly good job compensating those who protect it; our brave men and women in uniform. Recently Congress approved the Department of Defense Appropriations Bill for FY 2006. The president asked for \$98.2 billion for basic pay and allowances, clothing, subsistence, other personnel costs for the uniformed members of the armed forces and the Department of Defense Military Retirement Fund. Congress only approved \$95.7 billion, \$2.55 billion below what the Bush Administration requested and \$1.73 billion below what the House of Representatives passed. Last year DOD awarded approximately 20 constructions contracts worth about \$13 billion to rebuild Iraq. The minimum that a contract worker makes in Iraq is \$80,000 per year. According to the 2006 pay chart a Specialist with three years time in service will earn \$1,842.60 per month. If the Specialist deploys to the Middle East for a year long deployment he will earn an additional \$700.00 per month in incentives. The Specialist would earn around \$30 thousand during the deployment which is \$50 thousand less than what a person would earn working for a contractor in Iraq and Afghanistan and the Specialist would be doing a much more demanding job.

Annual military pay raises are linked to the increase in private sector wages. Beginning with the January 1, 2000 pay raise, annual pay raises through 2006 were to be one-half percent above private-sector average increase as measured by the Employment Cost Index (ECI). The private-sector aren't asked to make the ultimate sacrifice and give their life for what they do like service members are, so therefore the military should be paid much more and not compared to the private-sector. I'm not aware of any private-sector jobs that ask their employees to contend with guerrilla-style attacks and 120 degree-plus heat in a foreign country. Professional athletes earn millions annually. Actors can earn up to \$20 million a movie. Most school teachers earn from \$30,000 to \$50,000 annually and policeman earns \$25,000 to \$40,000 annually. When you compare the salaries of athletes and actors to teachers and policemen you'll find that there is a major discrepancy somewhere in our society. Our Congressmen gets to vote on their own pay raises and normally it is a substantial increase. Imagine if you could vote for your own pay raise, I'm quite sure it will be enormous.

Attracting and keeping high-quality personnel has been a challenge for our Army over the past decade. For instance, why would a C130 pilot stay military earning a little over \$100,000 a year when he or she can go fly commercial planes and earn from \$220,000 up to \$440,000 per year or a Special Forces Master Sergeant earning \$65,000 in the military when he can earn up to \$200,000 in the private-sector. In response to growing concerns about missed recruiting goals we must acknowledge that compensation plays an important role. In our global war on terrorism, we are asking a lot from our most precious resources,

which is Americas sons and daughters, we should compensate them for the challenging job they do, and for the service they provide to this country. Many would say that the military is paid enough but the majority of those have never worn the uniform. The military is constantly facing stiffer competition from higher education as more and younger Americans attend college each year. My message to our Government is that more must be done if military pay is to be competitive now and in the future. No service members should have to struggle to make ends meet when we have the most powerful military the world has ever known.

Since President Bush declared the end to major combat operations in Iraq we have lost over two thousand service members there. Many soldiers are starting on their third and fourth tours of duty in the Middle East. Our service members are willing to do whatever it takes to win the war on terrorism because they understand that good must prevail over evil and believe it or not the majority serves out of patriotism for the country. The nation should not pray upon the patriotism of these brave souls and not pay them their true value and worth. Congress recently approved \$50 billion for operations in Iraq and Afghanistan and \$20 billion more for overseas affairs. Some of those funds should go towards military pay. National defense should always be of the highest priority but when you look at the overall amount spent on OEF and OIF, the numbers are staggering. Our politicians must be able to look in the mirror and give an honest, objective and fair answer to the question "do our service members deserve increased pay for their constant sacrifices". I guarantee the person staring back would say yes.