

Join the Fight!

Feb 23, 2012

WASHINGTON — The national commander of America’s largest and oldest major combat veterans’ organization is urging the entire military and veterans’ community to “Join the Fight” to stop the Defense Department from penny-pinching service members to the point of dismantling the all-volunteer force.

“There is no military personnel issue more sacrosanct than pay and benefits,” said Richard L. DeNoyer, who leads the 2 million-member Veterans of Foreign Wars of the U.S. and its Auxiliaries. “Any proposal that negatively impacts any Quality of Life program must be defeated, and that’s why the VFW is asking everyone to join the fight and send a united voice to Congress.”

The DOD budget unveiled February 13 recommends 1.7 percent military pay raises for 2013 and 2014, followed by a scant 0.5 percent increase in 2015, and 1 percent in 2016. Also announced were plans to almost quadruple Tricare Prime enrollment fees for some working age military retirees, impose Tricare for Life enrollment fees on those older than 65, and introduce enrollment fees and increased deductibles on Tricare Standard and Extra users. Included in DOD’s healthcare revenue plan are increased pharmaceutical copayments for retirees as well as military dependents.

DOD also recommends reducing the size of the active force by more than 100,000 troops over the next five years—mostly soldiers and Marines—through attrition, a reduction in force, mandatory retirements and high year of tenure separations, among others. In addition, DOD gave the White House the go-ahead to create a commission to examine overhauling the current military retirement system in a manner that would benefit the government more through savings than reward someone who first has to volunteer 20 or more years of their youth just to qualify.

Ideas already floated include older programs such as High-3 Pay and the reduced retirement plan (Redux), as well as new ones that would delay the receipt of retirement pay till age 60 (similar to current National Guard and Reserve programs), or be contributory, 401(k)-type programs (similar to corporate America). Newly authorized are 15 year retirements, which accrue at the normal rate of 2.5 percent of base pay annually, minus a 1-percent penalty for every year below 20.

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“Those currently serving in uniform or already retired are grandfathered under the existing system,” said DeNoyer, a retired Marine and Vietnam combat veteran from Middleton, Mass. “Our concern is for tomorrow’s recruits, the young 18-year-old enlistees and new 22-year-old officers who will be fighting tomorrow’s wars with the same force challenges as today—high operations tempos, too little dwell time, and not enough troops to meet worldwide threats and commitments.”

The VFW national commander said 10 years of war has produced a battle-hardened force that’s extremely proud of their accomplishments but 100 percent aware of the general public’s noninvolvement.

“They and their families worry about getting paid on time,” he said. “They worry about what will happen if the car breaks down or if a loved one should get hurt at home or during training exercises or real-world deployments. Most of all, especially with this defense budget submission, they worry about whether the folks who give all the orders really care about the troops who do all the fighting and sacrificing.”

DeNoyer wants America’s 22 million veterans, 2 million service members and all their families to “Join the Fight” to make their voices heard loud and clear to the lawmakers who have the power to override these negative Quality of Life proposals.

“A secure America needs a strong military,” he said, “and whether one serves honorably for four years or 40, messing with military pay and benefits is a clear signal to the troops and their families that the budget is more important than people. That is going to seriously hurt recruiting and retention, and potentially end the all-volunteer force, because nobody wants to work for an ungrateful employer in a vocation as inherently dangerous as ours.”

Click on “Join the Fight” and help the VFW tell your elected officials that it takes people to win our nation’s wars. Breaking faith with those who sacrifice the most will signal the end of America’s all-volunteer force, which in this extremely volatile and unpredictable world, is one expense our nation cannot afford.