

VFW Report from Afghanistan

Threats to military pay and benefits impacting troop morale

Nov 03, 2011

The national commander of America's oldest and largest major combat veterans' organization is returning from Afghanistan today extremely concerned that White House and congressional proposals to eliminate or reduce military pay and benefits is impacting the morale of 190,000 deployed American troops.

"The troops are of one voice against proposals to change their pay and allowances, the existing military retirement system, and the overall TRICARE health program," said Richard L. DeNoyer, the national commander of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the U.S., who arrived in Afghanistan on Monday as part of a Defense Department-sponsored trip that also included the leadership of the American Legion, AMVETS, and the Military Officers Association of America.

"They see it as a breach of faith and a complete lack of support, understanding and appreciation for what it is they do daily for the rest of America," said DeNoyer, a retired Marine and Vietnam combat veteran from Middleton, Mass. "They also cannot comprehend why anyone would even propose such measures while our nation is still engaged in two wars."

The VFW national commander promised everyone he met that the VFW will fight any proposal that eliminates or reduces military and veterans' programs just to balance the federal deficit. He also asked the troops to help spread the VFW's message to their families and friends, because "it is critical that our voices not be lost in the ongoing budget debate," he said.

DeNoyer met on several occasions in Kabul with Marine Corps Gen. John R. Allen, who

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commands all coalition forces, as well as with Army Maj. Gen. Daniel B. Allyn, the 1st Cavalry Division commander, and with Special Forces' commanders who are training Afghan troops.

Based on briefings and meetings, the VFW national commander reports that Afghanistan is difficult, it is complicated, and any definition of success involves the Afghan government assuming total control over their own country. Yet he calls the Afghan army a good fighting force that is respected by fellow Afghans, and said Afghan President Hamid Karzai is very supportive and appreciative of America's commitment to his country.

"Everyone I spoke to believes in the mission and are proud of their accomplishments," said DeNoyer, who added that future successes could be complicated by the announced troop reduction to below 70,000 next fall. Yet despite the threat to their military pay and benefits, the VFW national commander said troop morale is as good as one can expect from veteran warriors who have spent more time in Afghanistan or Iraq over the past decade than they have at home.

"I am so proud of their continued motivation, dedication, and selfless service not only to America but for Afghanistan as well," he said. "That's why it is so important for both military and veteran communities to join together with one voice to defeat these proposals. Morale wins wars."

In continuing his call to action, the VFW national commander is asking his 2 million VFW and Auxiliary members, along with their friends and families, to contact their congressional members today to urge their support to protect the current military retirement and pay and allowance system, all TRICARE programs for military families and retirees, and all VA healthcare programs for wounded, ill and injured veterans. Click [here](#) to contact your members of Congress.