VFW Calls on POTUS to End Bonus Payback Issue Now

‘The president can end all this by executive order’

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WASHINGTON — Secretary of Defense Ash Carter this week ordered the Defense Finance and Accounting Services to “suspend all efforts to collect reimbursements from affected California National Guard members, effective as soon as practical.”

The national commander of the near 1.7 million-member Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States and its Auxiliary said the suspension decision doesn’t go deep enough, and is now calling on President Obama to issue an executive order to eliminate the collection process altogether, to repay those monies already collected plus interest, and to restore any damaged credit ratings that resulted from a horrendous abuse of power and lack of oversight within the California Army National Guard.

“The president must get personally involved and not leave it to a weak system of checks and balances that created a financial crisis that is tremendously impacting the lives of thousands of current and former Guard members,” exclaimed VFW National Commander Brian Duffy.

As it was recently learned in the Los Angeles Times but previously reported in the Sacramento Bee, one senior enlisted member of the California Army National Guard had both approval and auditing authority over the recruiting bonus program. She would subsequently be sentenced to 30 months in federal prison and ordered to repay $15.2 million in improperly authorized incentives. Others higher in her change of command would also be implicated.

What’s now known is 4,000 of the 14,000 recruiting and reenlistment bonuses paid have been ruled proper, whereas 2,000 were ruled improper, to include those Guardsmen who may have separated prior to the end of their enlistment contract. What’s also known is 8,000 others are now in a to-do bin to be reviewed by a special panel under the Army Board for Correction of Military Records. The Pentagon says it has the authority to waive the matter on an individual, case-by-case basis, but is unable to issue a blanket waiver for all

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8,000. That's why the VFW wants the president's involvement.

"A comprehensive program needs to be immediately created to help make these Guard members whole again," said Duffy. "They signed and fulfilled a contract when our nation needed them the most; when the Guard and Reserve were being called up and deployed in unprecedented numbers to help our nation fight a two-front war; and when the active Army was forced to extend overseas deployments to 15 months, use 'Stop Loss' to prevent soldiers from separating, and to lower its minimum acceptable standards just to enable more people to enlist," he explained.

"Whether these Guardsmen were authorized to receive a bonus is the fault of an exploited system, not of any recipient who raised their right hand to voluntarily do what most Americans never will. This witch hunt is hurting morale while we're still at war, and calling into question whether the Pentagon really does have the backs of our servicemen and women who have borne so much for so long. The president can end all this now by executive order," said the VFW national commander.

"The president often touts that he has a phone and a pen and is not afraid to use either. This would be a good time to use both."