



NEWS FROM

Congressman

STEVE BUYER

326 Cannon Office Building • Washington, DC 20515 • (202) 225-5037



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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
April 30, 1998

CONTACT: Maureen Cragin  
Ryan Vaart  
(202) 225-2539

**OPENING REMARKS—CHAIRMAN BUYER  
MILITARY PERSONNEL SUBCOMMITTEE  
MARK-UP  
FISCAL YEAR 1999 DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT**

*April 30, 1998*

The summary of the Chairman's mark in front of you addresses a range of issues, but focuses initiatives in critical areas of concern. Major initiatives in my mark will:

- Address continuing manpower reductions which have already hollowed out many military units,
- Provide an enhanced pay raise,
- Bolster an inadequately funded recruiting effort,
- Increase or restore Reserve Component full-time manning
- Establish a standard of conduct for the civilian leadership of the military,
- Enact the separate basic training recommendations of the Kassebaum Baker panel,
- Provide for suitable military funeral support to our veterans
- Direct a reform of the military pharmacy benefit with the objective of expanding that benefit to all beneficiaries.

*District Offices:*

120 East Mulberry Street, Room 106 • Kokomo, Indiana 46901 • (317) 454-7551  
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- Require DOD to develop a health care system that guarantees access for all beneficiaries.

One element made putting this year's mark different from the others that I have done. With no new money coming in to personnel, all initiatives we took had to be self financing.

In making decisions about what new initiatives to fund, I paid close attention to measures that directly enhance military readiness, recruiting and retention, and directly address the unfunded requirements identified by the service chiefs.

That said, let me review a few specifics in the mark:

### **End Strength:**

- Floors on active duty end strength will be maintained. The mark authorizes an end strength about 11,000 above the requested levels, provides \$74 million to the Army to help maintain manning levels, and provides each service the authority to vary end strength by one percent below the floor. In this way, Congress will better control the rate of reduction, not DOD.

### **Reserve Component Support**

- The mark adds 1,000 full time personnel to the Army Reserve, restores 800 full time personnel to the Army National Guard, and adds \$52 million to support the two initiatives.
- Responding to requests by the service chiefs for funding to increase the use of the reserve components, the mark provides \$26 million to the Naval and Marine Corps reserves.
- The mark also provides a policy change that will permit mobilized reserve component members to receive imminent danger pay equitably with the active component.

### **Military Pay Raise:**

- The pay raise in the President's budget request undervalues the work and sacrifices being demanded by our military personnel.
- My mark recommends a 3.6 percent military pay raise (.5 percent more than the President's request), and provides \$186 million to fund it.
  - The President's budget request would allow the "pay gap" between military and private sector pay raises to grow to 14 percent.
  - The committee's one-half of one percent increase brings the pay raise level in line with pay raises in the private sector, and at least maintains the "pay gap" at its current level.
- J.C. Watts and others would have liked to have seen a larger plus-up of the pay raise, but the dollars were not available.

### **Military Recruiting**

- Recruiting in all services faces severe challenges. The severity of those challenges was reflected in the fact that each of the service chiefs identified the need for more recruiting funding as a high priority. To meet those needs, my mark provides the services an additional \$100 million.

- The mark also includes enhanced Army enlistment bonuses and college fund.

### **Military Retirement:**

- The Army/Navy/Air Force Times headlines recently were all the same: “No Deal, Military Members say the 40% Retirement Plan Just Doesn’t Cut It.”
- The service chiefs gave me an overwhelming YES when I asked them if it was time to reassess the 1980 and 1986 reductions to the military retirement system.
- My mark will call for DOD to examine the implications for retention of the 1980 and 1986 changes to the retirement system and submit a report.
- This report will be the starting point of a multi-year review.

### **Exemplary Conduct Requirement**

- For years, the Navy and Marine Corps commanders have had a legal, title 10 requirement, to conduct themselves in an exemplary manner. Last year Congress extended that requirement to the Army and Navy.
- This year, my mark extends it to the President and Secretary of Defense who exercise military chain of command responsibility.

### **Response to the Kassebaum Panel Recommendations**

- As recommended by the Kassebaum Baker panel, the mark requires the Army, Navy and Air Force to house male and female basic trainees in separate buildings, and to organize basic training units into all-male or all-female platoons, flights and divisions.
- Such separate organization will still permit integrated training to predominate in basic.
- In order to allow time for the services, particularly the Army, to provide the facility adjustments needed to house men and women in separate barracks, the mark provides each of the service secretaries the authority to waive the separate facility requirement initially in certain cases. If the Secretary determines that a particular installation does not have sufficient facilities to implement the separate barracks requirement, he may allow that installation to house male and female recruits on separate floors until sufficient facilities are available. This requirement takes effect beginning in April 1999, and must be fully implemented, with no waivers, by October 2001.
- Using sources under the jurisdiction of the personnel subcommittee, I will be offering an amendment during full committee mark-up to provide additional O&M funding to assist the services, particularly the Army, in meeting the fiscal year 1999 requirement for housing recruits on separate floors at a minimum.

### **Veterans Burial Honors**

- Requires a DOD and VA study, in cooperation with veterans organizations, to create system to ensure appropriate honors are rendered at veterans funerals and to provide a comprehensive solution for nation.
- Requires wide range of groups to be considered as part of the solution.
- Mandates honors be provided on request after October 1999.

### **Bosnia R&R**

- Provides authority for more efficient and effective R&R to better meet the morale needs of our troops in Bosnia.
- The issue was brought to us by Mr. Skelton.

### **Improvements to the Boards for Correction of Military Records**

- Follows two-year review of BCMR activities.
- Protects board manpower from threatened reduction and improves the independence, fairness, and timeliness of board actions.

### **Pharmacy Benefit Reform**

- At our direction, GAO has reviewed the entire DOD pharmacy program. The GAO report, expected next month, will recommend that the Secretary of Defense redesign the entire pharmacy system to incorporate pharmacy “best practices” of the private sector and to achieve integrated, cost-effective and uniform pharmacy programs.
- Such reform, GAO claims, would result in tremendous cost savings to the Department of Defense.
- Therefore, my mark includes a provision that requires a plan for a system-wide redesign of the military pharmacy system that would provide for a universal, uniform pharmacy benefit available to all categories of military beneficiaries, including those eligible for Medicare.

### **Guaranteed Health Care for All**

- The availability of medical care for military retirees and their families has become an issue of tremendous concern to the committee over the past few years. With budget cuts, medical personnel reductions and base closures, access to quality care within the Military Health System has become increasingly difficult for these beneficiaries, particularly those eligible for Medicare.
- While I strongly support efforts to enact legislation that would authorize full Medicare subvention, I’ve been a good listener to concerns expressed by the military associations that subvention would only help part of the military Medicare-eligible population. As a result, previously I directed both the General Accounting Office (GAO) and the Department of Defense to study alternatives to subvention, including authorizing eligibility in the Federal Employees Health Benefits Program (FEHBP) for military retirees, and making CHAMPUS or TRICARE a second-payer to Medicare.
- GAO completed its study of numerous alternatives in June 1997; however, to date, the Department has not presented any formal recommendations nor offered any viable alternatives for meeting the health

care needs of all military retirees. Apparently this inaction is due in part to concerns about the cost of the various options.

- I appreciate the fact that the costs of some of these options are substantial, but I find the Department preoccupation with cost to be somewhat disingenuous. DOD witnesses have told us that TRICARE is saving billions of dollars in health care costs, yet apparently, none of those savings are available to provide greater access to health care for military retirees.
- I believe that not addressing this issue could have an equally substantial impact on recruiting and retention. Therefore, my mark includes a provision that directs the Secretary of Defense to develop a plan for ensuring that all military beneficiaries will have access to an adequate health care benefit by October 1, 2001.
- While I strongly support improving access to health care for all military beneficiaries, I want to be sure that whatever action we take to improve retiree health care does not hurt military medical readiness. Therefore, I think it is critical for the Department and the service surgeons general to be involved in the development of an effective solution.

#### **TRICARE Claims Processing**

- At a TRICARE hearing in February, many of us were surprised to learn that military beneficiaries have been subjected to collection actions because of contractor delays in settling claims for health care services provided under the TRICARE program.
- Military beneficiaries should not have their credit records tarnished by a cumbersome TRICARE claims processing requirement.
- Therefore, my mark authorizes the Secretary to fix this problem by requiring TRICARE contractors to pay all provider claims in a timely manner, then seek recovery from third parties who may be liable.

#### **Maintaining TRICARE Access Standard**

- Based on complaints we heard at our February hearing that TRICARE access to care standards are not being met in many areas, my mark requires the Secretary of Defense to establish a system for measuring military treatment facilities (MTFs) and TRICARE contractors' performance in meeting the Department of Defense's standards for access to primary care services.

