Defense Report
AUSA

Federal Employees Who Are Also in the Reserve Forces—Are They "Double Dippers?"

On three occasions in the past a President's legislative program has called for denial of annual reserve training pay for those Reservists and National Guardsmen who are also full-time federal employees. The amount they could be paid for the period of summer training camps would not exceed the amount they would normally receive in civilian pay for that period. Each time this plan has been put forth, the supporting arguments referred to these federal employee/reservists as "double dippers," a term that over the years has come to have a very negative connotation. In every instance the Congress has rejected the plan and, by inference at least, denied the applicability of the double-dipper stigma.

Now the same proposition has cropped up again in the Carter Administration's legislative plan for Fiscal Year 1980. The Administration claims that $30 million will be saved each year. About 95,000 federal employees fit into this category, many of them full-time technicians of the National Guard and Reserve. Asked if this reduction in pay for summer training would have a negative impact on voluntary affiliation with the reserves the Department of Defense said it doubted there would be a significant exodus from the reserve ranks.

Reservists who work at full-time jobs in the civilian sector are treated in a variety of ways, depending entirely on how strongly their employer supports the reserve program. Some draw full civilian salary plus their federal training pay, some draw a portion of their civilian pay and a few employers pay nothing if the training pay meets or exceeds civilian salary. There are, fortunately, only a small number of civilian employers who refuse any support of reserve participation. The Department of Defense for years has sponsored a program to encourage more widespread and generous support by employers of reservists.

There are two very obvious dangers inherent to the Administration's plan, dangers that were identified by Congress on three previous occasions and, hopefully, will be obvious once again this year. The first is the real risk of creating a disincentive to serve in the reserve forces. The second is the dangerous precendent set by the Federal government for state and local governments and for civilian employers whose inclination is to provide the fullest possible support for their reservist employees. In the past, Congress has identified a strong tendency for all employers to follow the lead of the federal government in this area.

These are risks that our already-lagging reserve strength cannot tolerate. There are times when pure economy creates more problems than it solves. This seems to be one of those times.

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