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# Defense Report

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## Once Again Military Pay Will Lag Behind Comparability— Where is the Logic?

Over the past four years, the Army and its sister services have attracted record levels of high quality enlistments and have been able to retain ample numbers of the new soldiers. However, there are serious concerns expressed in the media, in Congress and in the military that the all-volunteer force will face two severe tests in the coming decade. One is a decline in the numbers of potential recruits and the other is a reviving economy with its accompanying projections of increased civilian sector competition for technically trained people.

Solving these twin problems may prove to be extremely costly. As the youth pool shrinks, it will cost more to procure recruits, raising the question of affordability of the all-volunteer force. And, in order to meet the increased civilian competition for technically trained career personnel, a career in the volunteer armed force must be as attractive as employment in the civilian sector.

When military and civilian pay match, this coincidence is called "comparability." It was achieved briefly in 1972 but slid backwards as politicians decided it was too expensive. Comparability was regained in 1981, but only after several years of campaigning by a relative handful of Senators and Representatives who recognized the inequity.

Now that the services are having little difficulty in recruiting high caliber volunteers, it appears that the principle of comparability has been submerged once again in the drive to trim the federal deficit. As this was being written it appeared that the adjustment to military pay scheduled to go into effect on October 1 would be a mere three percent and there would be no further adjustment until at least October 1, 1986. If that holds true, it will mean that the military-civilian pay gap will be roughly nine percent by the end of fiscal 1986.

The continued success of the all-volunteer force depends on the ability of the armed services to meet enlistment and reenlistment goals consistently. Otherwise, we could witness a return to the "hollow Army" of the late 1970s. Of course, there is another alternative. We could strengthen our conventional deterrent by reactivating the Selective Service System.