

Military Retirement Update

On 25 October the Subcommittee on Military Personnel conducted a hearing on the uniformed services retirement system. MOAA's Steve Strobridge as a co-chair of The Military Coalition was there a one of the participants.

Below is the report published by the Association of the United States Army (AUSA) this hearing was on CSPAN and Steve did a masterful job in addressing the issues.

Full hearing info can be found at:

http://armedservices.house.gov/index.cfm/hearings-display?ContentRe_co rd_id=383a04d3-b48d-479a-ab26-3e9fc972ee70&ContentType_id=14f995b9-dfa5-407a-9d35-56cc7152a7ed&Group_id=64562e79-731a-4ac6-aab0-7bd8d1b7e890

Representatives from The Military Coalition (TMC), a group of 34 military, veterans and uniformed services organizations of which AUSA is a member, testified at a hearing last week on recent proposals to overhaul military retirement.

Offering testimony before the House Armed Services Military Personnel Subcommittee, TMC Co-chair Steve Strobridge said that the "primary purpose of the military retirement package is to induce top quality people to serve multiple decades under conditions few Americans are willing to endure for even one term. After a decade of war in which career service members deployed time after time after time with ever-increasing odds of coming home a changed person, we found it shockingly insensitive that some now seek to curtail their retirement package to, quote, 'make it more like civilian workers.'"

Subcommittee Chairman Rep. Joe Wilson, R-S.C., agreed. He said that a proposal released earlier this year by the Defense Business Board was a "radical solution that would result in a significant reduction of retired benefits for all service members. Wilson suggested that the plan "injected considerable uncertainty into the force, to include troops fighting in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The proposal created an immediate morale firestorm as service members feared that senior members within the Department of Defense and the military departments were seriously considering its implementation."

We were pleased when a witness testifying on behalf of the Defense Department said that while "the military retirement system appears expensive, it is neither unaffordable nor spiraling out of control, as some would contend."

Dr. Jo Ann Rooney, Principal Deputy Undersecretary of Defense for Readiness and Personnel added that any change or any system must ensure that the Department is able to recruit and retain the all-volunteer force and not damage the troop's faith.

One of the recurring reasons we hear with regards to changing the current retirement system is the fact that **only 17 percent of the force actually completes a full 20 years of service in order qualify for retirement.** Many, including the Subcommittee's ranking member, Rep. Susan Davis, D-Calif., ask if it is fair that a person who may have been deployed once and stays to retirement is eligible for a lifetime benefit while an individual who may have multiple deployments in a combat theater walks away with nothing.

Strobridge offered this in reply, "When we acknowledge that the military service conditions are unique and vastly different from civilian conditions, the fact that we can only get 17 percent of enlisted people to stay for the current system to me speaks for itself about the arduousness of the career and the few people who are willing to endure that for a long time.

"To then turn around and say, "But we need to pay more to people who leave," to me any time you have a vesting system it by definition detracts from a career incentive. It can't do anything else. And in bad budget times, it leaves the government bidding against itself for their services, which only drives up costs.

"So to me if you want to talk fairness, the first thing we have to do is be fair to the people who suffer and sacrifice the longest, and that's the career person. **And the last thing we should be doing is cutting their package to fund a better package for people who leave.**"