

February 16, 2006

The Honorable Judd Gregg, Chairman
The Honorable Kent Conrad, Ranking Member
Committee on the Budget
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Gregg and Senator Conrad:

As you begin consideration of the President's FY 2007 budget request, we urge you to include a pay increase that meets the needs and reflects the sacrifice of America's military personnel and their families.

The President's budget request includes a 2.2% increase in military pay—the smallest increase since FY1994. Such a paltry increase neglects the value of their service and the very real challenges of recruiting and retaining an all-volunteer military in time of war.

The men and women of the American military are doing everything we ask of them—and more. They are being deployed at historic rates, many serving on their second, third, or even fourth combat deployments. In Iraq and Afghanistan, they are working with local and coalition partners to increase security so that those nations can stand on their own, free of tyranny. They are fighting terrorists and working with partners to win the War on Terror. They are deterring aggression in key strategic areas. We have seen American forces give aid to innocent victims of natural disasters, both here in the United States and around the world. We know they stand ready to defend our country, our allies, and our way of life on a moment's notice.

Surely they deserve a raise of more than 2.2%.

Last year, the Army, the Army National Guard, and the Army Reserve all failed to reach their recruiting targets. The Army, in fact, fell 6,700 recruits short in 2005—its biggest shortfall since 1979. Individuals choose to serve for many reasons: patriotism, a sense of duty, a desire to defend their country and make the world a better place. But we also know that adequate pay is one of the requirements of maintaining a professional, all-volunteer military.

In recent years, Congress has relied on a formula to increase military pay by 0.5% above the Employment Cost Index (ECI). This year, the administration's request is only equal to the ECI. Congress must do better.

Sincerely,

John Kerry
Edward Kennedy
Jeff Bingaman
Tim Johnson
Bill Nelson
Barack Obama
Christopher Dodd
Richard Durbin
Mark Dayton
Frank Lautenberg