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## REALity Checks

Someone recently asked me, “If I join this association, what benefits do I get for my \$30 (a year)?” I can’t spout off a list of discounted services or established educational programs, and I won’t be able to until our membership numbers support affinity relationships or we have the financial resources. Until then, my answer is *advocacy*: having an advocate that focuses 100 percent of its efforts on enlisted Reserve issues. The benefit you get for a \$30-per-year investment is having education assistance available longer, health care that is affordable, and direct access to the Commission on the National Guard and Reserve with the assurance that the enlisted perspective will be heard.

REA exists to improve your quality of life by educating Congress and others responsible for changing law and policy that impact you and your family. The reality is that enlisted Reservists across the board benefit if we are successful—REA member or not.

### Legislative Update

After a long August recess, the House and Senate headed back to town facing a lot of work to close out the year. Typically, Oct. 15 is the target date to end the session. But with elections in November, and the fact that Congress is in town only on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays, this won’t happen. What we will see is congressional members taking more recesses to spend time in their home districts. This may be great for their constituents, but it increases the chance that some bills won’t be completed: in our case, the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA).

When we last left the Senate Appropriations Committee, members were slogging through 150-plus amendments to their bill in an effort to get it to the Senate floor for final vote. Well, that didn’t happen before the August recess; they now have to finalize that bill, along with several others.

In the meantime, the professional staffs of the House and Senate Armed Services Committees worked through the summer recess to reconcile differences in their bills. There is a good chance the NDAA will see a final vote before the elections. This is the bill that affects you most because it includes pay raises, bonuses, and promotion and retirement legislation.

In all likelihood, the reports listed below will pass. The requirement for reports is interesting because it usually means we will see proposed legislation in the upcoming year to fix these identified problems:

- Timely notice of long-term deployments—A report to see if members deployed for more than 180 days are receiving at least 30 days’ notice;
- Post-mobilization private-sector promotion and resignation—A report that would look into civilian job promotions and resignations among Reservists who found working conditions unbearable upon returning from deployments.
- Process for awarding decorations—A report on whether Reserve Component members are awarded decorations in line with Active Component members;
- Study on allowing dependants of activated Citizen Warriors to retain civilian health coverage.

The following proposed legislation has less chance of passing because money was not provided in the president’s budget, and the committee didn’t choose to add any. If any of these pass, money will need to be found:

- Educational assistance for Reserve Component members supporting contingency operations and other operations to extend the entitlement to 10 years beyond date of separation;
- Free postage on some postal mailings for members of the armed forces serving in operations Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom (we’re pushing language to ensure it includes Reserve Component members);
- Non-regular-service retired pay by members of the Ready Reserve on active federal status or active duty for significant periods—Reduce retirement age below age 60 by three months for each aggregate of 90 days for mobilization or duty performed under Sec. 12301(d) not to be reduced below 50 years of age, and health-care coverage under Tricare will begin at age 60;
- Expanded eligibility of Tricare for Selected Reserve members, providing standard for all members except those covered under the Federal Employees Health Benefits Plan (5 USC, Chapter 89).

### Lani’s Bottom Line

Increasing REA’s membership is essential to our success. Please SpREAD the word! ▲