

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-4704

October 13, 2005

The Honorable Thomas F. Hall
Assistant Secretary of Defense for Reserve Affairs
1500 Defense Pentagon, Rm. 2E220
Washington, D.C. 20310

Dear Secretary Hall:

I am writing to you in regards to your directive to withhold the payment of bonuses entitled to members of the Active Guard Reserve (AGR) upon extension of their service. It is my understanding that your office decided to deny extension bonuses for AGR members, even after AGR members in combat zones were told they would receive a bonus if they extended their service. I request an explanation on your decision to deny these bonuses, and request that you reverse your directive and allow AGR members to receive the bonuses they earned.

AGR members in Iraq and Afghanistan extended their service to their country with the expectation of, and a commitment from the Department of Defense to provide, a \$15,000 service extension bonus. Those AGR members found out weeks and months later that their bonuses were denied because you did not agree with the policy and directed the National Guard Bureau (NGB) to not fulfill the commitment.

In a time when our up-tempo combat model involves a heavy reliance on Guard and Reserve members your actions send the wrong signal to our men and women in uniform. Guard and Reserve members from Washington state and all across the country are playing a larger than expected role in Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom. They are answering the country's call to duty everyday and making great sacrifices here at home. Guard and Reserve members including AGR members deserve to be treated fairly, and given the honor and respect they deserve – not given false promises and arbitrarily denied compensation they were told they would receive.

As you know, information regarding the bonus was originally distributed in a memorandum by the National Guard Bureau (NGB) dated January 14, 2005. As described in the memorandum, the bonus was the result of Policy Number 05-02, which defined one of the standards for receiving the bonus by the signing of a six year reenlistment contract with the AGR. Despite this new policy, the NGB was abruptly ordered to cease payments of the bonuses by a directive issued from your office in April of 2005.

In a letter from the NGB, Donna Warren, Chief of Congressional Inquiries, wrote:

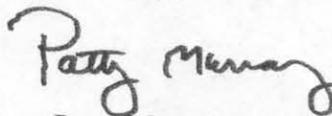
“The Office of the Secretary of Defense for Reserve Affairs became aware of the policy in April 2005, and directed the Army National Guard to cease all AGR and Mil Tech payments.”

It is my understanding that the bonuses in question were an important factor in their decision to reenlist. Consequently, the denial of the bonus has caused tremendous uncertainty among those Guard Members who anticipated its receipt as part of their financial planning. Furthermore, actions such as this hinder recruiting and retention efforts. To that end, I request an immediate explanation of why you choose to deny these bonuses, and that you reverse your directive and allow payments of AGR member service extension bonuses without further delay.

I trust that you will recognize the urgency of my request, as our Guard Members do not deserve any further impediment to receiving the bonuses they were promised.

Thank you for your consideration, I look forward to receiving your timely response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Patty Murray". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Patty Murray
United States Senator

Cc: Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld