

News From The U.S. Senate National Guard Caucus

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Pentagon On Thursday Backtracks On National Guard Cuts, As A Supermajority Of U.S. Senators Release Letter Objecting To Plans For Deep Personnel Reductions In The Guard

. . . Bond And Leahy Head Up Letter Signed By 75 Senators

(THURSDAY, Feb. 2) -- More than 75 U.S. senators – a filibuster-proof majority -- have joined with National Guard Caucus co-chairs Sen. Kit Bond (R-Mo.) and Sen. Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.) in signaling the Senate's overwhelming opposition to the Defense Department's plans for unspecified funding cuts for the Army National Guard and Air National Guard, in the FY2007 defense budget. The bipartisan coalition of senators Thursday released the letter they sent to Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, explaining why they believe the cuts are not cost-effective and are detrimental to the nation's defense.

The letter, widely publicized and well-known in Pentagon circles while it was being circulated for senators' signatures, was released on the day that Army officials announced their intention to back off a plan to cut 17,000 National Guard personnel and instead to maintain its earlier recommended force level. The Air Force has yet to reveal its full plans.

Sens. Bond and Leahy issued the following joint statement on the Army's Thursday announcement: "The Army has decided against recommending some of its precipitous cuts in the force structure of the Army National Guard, which the Caucus believes would have led to continual downward pressure on size and ability of this essential force to carry out its critical missions at home and abroad. The Caucus plans to review the Army's revised proposal and overall budget submission to ensure that the Guard remains a capable, robust force, not just in terms of personnel end-strength, but also in terms of equipment and the presence of armories. The Caucus will work to ensure the Guard is not forced to close armories across the country, transfer out essential helicopters, and reduce other critical equipment such as communications gear and trucks. The Senate National Guard Caucus looks forward to working with the Army in taking a more collaborative approach in working with the Guard and its needs."

Bond and Leahy are encouraging the Army to work with governors, Guard officials and Congress to best determine the Guard's funding needs, and they expressed their concern that the recent budget decisions show a bias against the National Guard. The Guard comprises almost 40 percent of U.S. ground personnel currently deployed to Iraq, where members have integrated seamlessly with Reservists and active duty military forces. They noted that the Guard has not only reinforced active duty forces engaged in the global war on terror but has also proved instrumental in rescue and recovery efforts in the Gulf Coast following Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. The letter spells out why the dual roles the National Guard serves render it indispensable and in need of full funding for both personnel and equipment needs.

Leahy and Bond last year led successful efforts in the Senate to increase equipment funding for the National Guard by almost \$1 billion (in the recently enacted Defense Appropriations Bill for FY2006), as well as to boost the housing allowance available to Guard and Reserve members called to active duty for more than 30 days. They intend to lead opposition in the Senate to any proposed cuts to the National Guard.

A PDF of the letter is available online:

<http://leahy.senate.gov/press/200602/SenateDoD02-02-06.pdf>.

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