

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Ike Skelton
Chairman
Committee on Armed Services
United States House of Representatives
Washington D.C., 20515

The Honorable Howard McKeon
Ranking Member
Committee on Armed Services
United States House of Representatives
Washington D.C., 20515

Dear Chairman Skelton and Ranking Member McKeon:

As you begin to conference on the H.R. 2647, the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2010, we respectfully ask that you retain Section 706, "Health Care for Members of the Reserve Components" of the House-passed version of H.R. 2647. Section 706 extends the early TRICARE benefit for members of the reserve component and would allow for the treatment, rehabilitation, and successful mobilization of the service member.

As you know, when a reserve component member is identified, screened and determined to be required for mobilization, on average, he or she has only a short time to take advantage of the Early Eligibility Period for TRICARE Benefits. For members of the reserve component who are identified as non-deployable due to a medical issue, the current 90-day period of pre-mobilization healthcare access is frequently insufficient for treatment and rehabilitation. Conditions that could be easily addressed given sufficient time are currently preventing service members from mobilizing with their units. To fill the resulting vacancy, troops must be "cross-leveled" from one unit to another. This degrades unit readiness, increases the strain on our citizen soldiers and their families, and is a waste of the dollars previously invested to recruit, train and retain personnel. As reserve component members are normally not eligible for TRICARE and are often underinsured, this access to pre-mobilization healthcare often provides the only possibility of addressing treatable issues that prevent mobilization and deployment.


Section 706 makes two important changes to address the readiness of our reserve component. First, Section 706 extends the current 90-day period of pre-deployment access to TRICARE to 180 days. Extending the pre-mobilization TRICARE access period to 180 days would allow additional time for the treatment, rehabilitation, and successful mobilization of reserve component service members. This change will enable the fullest utilization of the service member's training and experience, and preserve unit cohesion prior to deployment by decreasing cross-leveling.


Second, at present TRICARE benefits do not take effect until the date of the order to active duty. Frequently, reserve components do not issue delayed-effective-date active duty orders until just before mobilization providing insufficient time for medically non-deployable service members to receive treatment and rehabilitation. However, these components do provide their members with an "official notification" of the impending active duty well in advance of mobilization. Section 706 would make issuance of "official notification" as a means of activating early TRICARE benefits, subject to the 180 day limit. This will allow reserve personnel to access the necessarily medical and rehabilitative treatment to enable deployment.

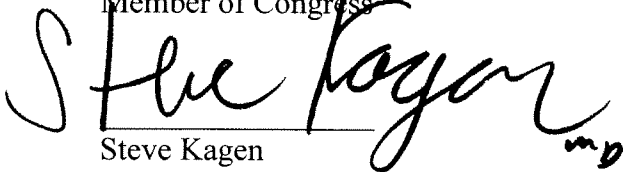
According to the Army National Guard, in 2007, of the 60,000 personnel mobilized to include voluntary and involuntary mobilizations, none were able to use TRICARE eligibility for the full 90 days because the orders were all issued close to the date of active duty. Section 706 would allow reserve component service members the maximum use of Early Eligibility for TRICARE. Increasing the eligibility period in conjunction with other reserve component initiatives to incentivize retention, increase unit stabilization and enable pre-mobilization training will result in higher unit readiness and cohesion.

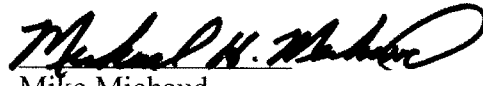
We respectfully ask that this important provision be retained in conference.


Sincerely,

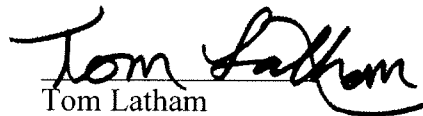

Niki Tsongas
Member of Congress

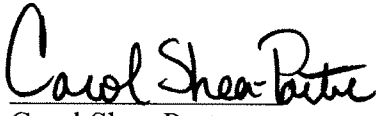

John Hall
Member of Congress

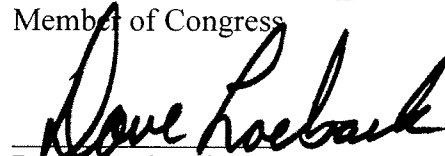

Steve Kagen
Member of Congress

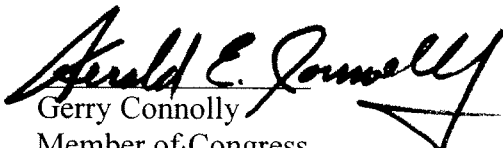

Mike Michaud
Member of Congress

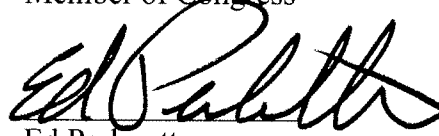

Bill Shuster
Member of Congress

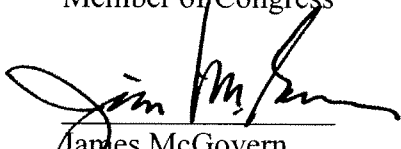

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