

BETTY McCOLLUM
4TH DISTRICT, MINNESOTA

1714 LONGWORTH HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515
(202) 225-6631
FAX: (202) 225-1968

165 WESTERN AVENUE NORTH
SUITE 17
ST. PAUL, MN 55102
(651) 224-9191
FAX: (651) 224-3056

www.house.gov/mccollum



UNITED STATES
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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SENIOR DEMOCRATIC WHIP

CONGRESSIONAL GLOBAL
HEALTH CAUCUS, CO-FOUNDER

May 2, 2008

The Honorable Robert M. Gates
Secretary of Defense
U.S. Department of Defense
The Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301

Dear Secretary Gates:

On January 18, 2008 I wrote to you regarding my concern about the failure to issue Post-Deployment Mobilization Respite Absence (PDMRA) program benefits to Reserve Component Soldiers who were eligible but released from active duty before the program was implemented.

My Washington Office received a telephone call yesterday from House Army Liaison who once again indicated that the issue is still under consideration and has not been resolved. I appreciate the update on the status of this matter; however, the delay in resolving this situation is unacceptable.

My Congressional District is home to many members of the Minnesota National Guard, including members of the 1st Brigade Combat Team, who served in the longest brigade level deployment in the history of the National Guard. National Guard and Reserve components have been called on to be an integral part of our forces in Iraq and Afghanistan, and many individuals have served multiple tours of duty. These servicemen and women deserve a timely resolution of this matter.

Enclosed is my original letter of January 18; 2008 and subsequent correspondence from the Department of the Army.

Thank you for your attention to this important issue.

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Betty McCollum in black ink.
Betty McCollum
Member of Congress



SECRETARY OF THE ARMY
WASHINGTON

MAR 17 2008

The Honorable Betty McCollum
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative McCollum:

I have been asked to keep you informed, on behalf of Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates, of the Army's ongoing efforts to compensate Soldiers who were released from active duty before the Army published its Post Deployment/Mobilization Respite Absence (PDMRA) implementation guidance.

The Army staff, in conjunction with the Office of the Secretary of Defense, is reviewing what legal authority is required to honor our commitment to those Soldiers who are no longer on active duty. I will get back with you as soon as we have determined a way ahead.

Again, thank you for your support of the men and women serving in our Army today.

Sincerely,


Pete Geren



SECRETARY OF THE ARMY
WASHINGTON

FEB 12 2008

The Honorable Betty McCollum
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative McCollum:

I have been asked to respond on behalf of Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates concerning your letter about the Department of Defense's Post Deployment/Mobilization Respite Absence (PDMRA) program, dated January 18, 2008.

We are aware that we released some Reserve Component Soldiers from active duty before the Army issued guidance to implement the PDMRA program in August 2007. The Army is currently exploring available courses of action to compensate these Soldiers. We expect to complete our review by the end of the month. I will provide you with a final response at that time.

Thank you for your support of the men and women serving in our Army today. I look forward to providing you with additional information to address your concerns regarding the PDMRA program in the near future.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Pete Geren".

Pete Geren

BETTY McCOLLUM
4TH DISTRICT, MINNESOTA

1714 LONGWORTH HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515
(202) 225-6831
FAX: (202) 225-1968

165 WESTERN AVENUE NORTH
SUITE 17
ST. PAUL, MN 55102
(651) 224-9101
FAX: (651) 224-3056

www.house.gov/mccollum



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SENIOR DEMOCRATIC WHIP

CONGRESSIONAL GLOBAL
HEALTH CAUCUS, CO-FOUNDER

January 18, 2007

The Honorable Robert M. Gates
Secretary of Defense
U.S. Department of Defense
The Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301-1155

Dear Secretary Gates:

I write to express my concern about the delay in implementation of the Post-Deployment/Mobilization Respite Absence (PDMRA) program as it applies to the reserve components of the U.S. Armed Forces. Activated reserve component soldiers have been crucial to meeting current military combat needs. In fact, it is estimated that as many as 40 percent of the soldiers currently serving in Iraq and Afghanistan are activated reserve component. These soldiers have had difficulty accessing the benefits to which they are entitled, particularly compared to the active component soldiers who served in combat along alongside them.

When members of the Minnesota National Guard returned in July 2007 from an extended deployment in Iraq, they found themselves unable to apply for the PDMRA benefits. Initial guidance for implementation of PDMRA was incomplete and did not fully address situations where soldiers were released from their active duty status prior to publication of the August 2007 policy. According to the National Guard Bureau, this gap affects approximately 16,000 National Guard personnel across the country, including 2,378 Minnesotans.

During December 2007, the Assistant Secretary of the Army and the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Manpower and Reserve Affairs proposed to the Secretary of Defense a one-time payment for accrued PDMRA for all reserve component soldiers caught in this gap. Today, the Secretary of Defense has yet to make a decision on this proposal.

PDMRA is important to reserve component soldiers who are on active duty, particularly those who have had their orders extend or who have been deployed multiple times, because it would help compensate for their hardship with earned leave time, better health benefits or financial restitution. The lack of timely action on the resolution of this matter is certainly unfair. Because the program has not been implemented, many eligible individuals have lost these potential benefits because of the current window of eligibility for the program has passed.

As soldiers who fought alongside their active component comrades, these reserve component soldiers deserve to have the PDMRA program implemented as soon as possible. I request that you provide details, including a timeline, on the plan to fully institute PDMRA to ensure that all those eligible receive their benefits. Additionally, I request information about the establishment of appropriate guidelines for soldiers as they prepare tax returns, and how written guidance will be provided to assist each Unit Administrator to manage these pay actions.

Fairness demands that activated reserve component soldiers receive equitable treatment and access to the DoD benefits that are available to their active duty service counterparts. Thank you for your timely and careful consideration of this matter.

Sincerely,



Betty McCollum
Member of Congress

Cc: Secretary of the U.S. Army, Mr. Pete Geren
Chief, National Guard Bureau, Lt. Gen. Steven Blum
Adjutant General, Minnesota National Guard, Maj. Gen. Larry W. Shellito