

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-4502

**To:** Vermont National Guard Senior Leadership  
**From:** Senator Patrick Leahy  
**Subject:** Legislation Affecting the Vermont Guard  
**Date:** April 6, 2003

*As part of my long partnership with the members and officers of the Vermont National Guard, I thought you might find useful this update on several legislative and policy issues that I am working on for you as co-chair of the 85-member U.S. Senate National Guard Caucus. More information is also available on my website, [leahy.senate.gov](http://leahy.senate.gov).*

*all my best  
Patrick*

## Personnel Issues

**Ensuring Seamless Health Insurance Access:** This month I will introduce legislation that will open the TRICARE program to members of the Guard and Reserve on a premium basis, with the reservist paying about 30 percent of the annual cost. The legislation will also reimburse families of activated reservists for the costs of maintaining their civilian health insurance and allow returning reservists to gain access to TRICARE. This new program will increase the overall health and readiness of the Guard and Reserves.

**Maintaining Separate Personnel Accounts:** The Department of Defense has proposed in the Fiscal Year 2004 defense budget to merge the personnel accounts of the National Guard and Reserves into the active account. I have formed a coalition to block this merger because it would lead to a steady deterioration in Guard force levels. More than 20 senators have joined me to oppose the consolidation.

**Making up for Lost Pay:** Families of deployed citizen-soldiers have suffered severe losses in income as a result of repeated call-ups. I am supporting a variety of legislative measures to help those who have been deployed, and their families. One piece of legislation that I am cosponsoring will establish a monthly special pay for active and reserve component members who are deployed for 191 or more consecutive days, as well as citizen-soldiers who are mobilized for a second time within a year of being released from active duty. I am also cosponsoring legislation that will allow civilian employers to write off the expenses of making up the difference of a reservist's civilian and active duty salary.

**Protecting Deployed Reservists:** The Soldiers Sailors Relief Act of 1940 has provided good protection for deploying reservists, but I am working with several other senators to develop a range of new, much-needed protections.

**Age 55 Retirement:** Currently, members of the Guard and Reserves can only access their full retirement benefits, including retirement pay, when they reach the age of 60. I support legislation that would bring the age for receiving full benefits to 55, reducing the gap that can exist between reservists and active forces.

## Homeland Security

**Establishing New Weapons of Mass Destruction/Civil Support Teams:** Vermont is one of only a handful of states that do not have a Weapons of Mass Destruction-Civil Support Team, which would help the state respond to natural disasters and terrorist attacks. I included a broad authorization in last year's defense bill to allow expansion of the number of WMD-CSTs to every state. This year I am working to include the first funding and personnel authorizations for these much-needed teams.

**Reaffirming Title 32 Call-Ups:** Title 32 offers a flexible way to call up the National Guard, ensuring that citizen-soldiers do not fall under Posse Comitatus restrictions, and Guard members can serve under the command-and-control of the state's Adjutant General and the governor. In recent months, the Department of Defense has openly questioned the validity of these call-ups, arguing that Guard forces should serve on Title 10 in homeland security missions. This view would prevent crucial missions like the airport security mission after September 11. I am pressing for legislation that would reauthorize these Title 32 missions and ensure states are reimbursed for these missions.

## Force Structure and Investments

**Questioning Army Guard Transformation Before Active Army Changes:** The Department of the Army has announced major changes to the National Guard force structure that will convert many heavy armor units, including Vermont's 86th Brigade, into so-called multifunction units, over the next decade. There is some validity to the idea of making the Army more mobile, but it is troubling that the Guard is being forced to make major force structure changes before the regular Army does. The Guard's force structure must reflect the whole Army. I have discussed this possible conversion with the senior Army leadership, and I will work with General Rainville to ensure that any conversion will actually increase the Vermont Guard's capability.

**Upgrading and Replacing the F-16:** The Green Mountain Boys' F-16C Fighting Falcons are some of the oldest F-16s in the U.S. Air Force inventory. I have worked closely with the National Guard Bureau to ensure that these aircraft remain capable. Last year, I added more than \$50 million to the defense budget to equip the Guard's F-16s with an Advanced IFF and Gateway datalink system, as well as secured funds for additional LITENING II targeting pods. I am reviewing the FALCON STAR structural upgrade, and I will work to ensure that the Air Force keeps these F-16s ready to fight. Eventually, a replacement will be needed for these aging aircraft. There are various options for the Vermont National Guard, including converting to the Joint Strike Fighter. I know General Rainville's leadership team is always refining the long-range plans, and I stand ready to support these plans.

**Helping Establishing New Missions:** I have been gratified to be in a position to have been able to secure well over \$11 million in the past couple of years to help launch the Army and Air Guard Information Operations programs, which have provided unique, much-needed training to members of the Guard, Reserves, and the Active force.

## Military Construction

**Helping the Army and Air Guard Grow:** I try to make sure the Vermont Guard has an adequate infrastructure to carry out its missions. Over the past several years I have secured more than \$10 million for the new Norwich armory and for new maintenance buildings at the Air Guard. This year, I hope to secure funding to complete the new \$34 million Blackhawk flight facility. Also, this year I will work to fund a new deployment facility at the Air Guard and a security facility at Camp Johnson.