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National Reserve Plan

Strom Thurmond

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The hearings on the so-called National Reserve Plan are now completed and the bill H.R. 2967 which is to implement that plan is now being considered in executive session, by the subcommittee which is headed by Congressman Overton Brooks of Louisiana.

If enacted, in its present form, certain significant changes in manpower procurement for the reserves will be effected.

First of all, the bill creates a Ready Reserve of 2.9 million men. In addition, there is a Standby Reserve without numerical limitation. Within the Ready Reserve one million members, in units, or as individuals could be ordered to active duty during a period of national emergency decreed by the President. If units are ordered up for this purpose, the members thereof must be ordered so that no cannibalization of units is possible. It is hoped that the services will earmark the units and individuals liable for such duty. Second, significant requirements are in the bill for participation in reserve activities. Any individual who is inducted or enlisted in the regular forces, unless he serves for a total period of five years, is required to serve in the Ready Reserve upon leaving active duty. He must participate satisfactorily and in order to maintain the required level of proficiency he must either affiliate with a unit for a minimum of 48 drills per year, or the equivalent thereof. If he cannot affiliate with such a unit he may take thirty days of active duty annually. Those who are able but refuse to participate in one of those alternative programs may be ordered to active duty for training without their consent for not to exceed forty-five days annually.
In addition to the prior service personnel who must participate, a system of acquiring non-prior service people is established. First of all, the authority of the National Guard, which permitted individuals to enlist in the National Guard before reaching 18½ years of age and thereafter be deferred from induction in the active forces if they performed their Reserve duties satisfactorily, has been repealed. In lieu thereof, individuals under 19 years of age may enlist in the National Guard or the Reserves, take six months active duty and return for service in a National Guard unit or a Reserve unit. So long as he is satisfactory he is deferred from further active duty. Similarly, an individual can enlist in the National Guard or the Reserve with the understanding that within a period of two years he will go on active duty for two years and then return to the unit. There are certain deferments to cover high school students and those in the Officer Candidate programs.

It is believed that even though the compulsion to enforce participation of individuals has been materially reduced, that the principles of requiring participation as written into this bill will result in a significant improvement in the over-all size and efficiency of the Reserves.

The Association worked very closely with the Department of Defense in bringing about agreement on certain necessary amendments. As originally presented, an individual in the Standby Reserve was not permitted to earn retirement points or be considered for promotion. As amended, a member of the Standby Reserve has considerable more opportunity to improve himself and better his chances for retirement under Title III, as well as being
considered for promotion than he would have if on the Inactive Duty list under the present law. Similarly, the six months training program was creating a class of individuals to be called "military trainees." The Association secured necessary amendments to avoid creating such a separate class within the Ready Reserves. In addition to enumerated provisions to secure manpower the bill originally continued the National Guard authority covering 18 1/2 year olds and extended it to the Reserves. However, this would have resulted in a large number of non-prior service personnel without basic training being in the Reserves, and the Association helped bring about the necessary amendments to delete those provisions for both the Guards and the Reserves.

While recognizing that additional administrative steps are necessary to earmark units and individuals who would be subject to call in the event of national emergency declared by the President, the Association led the fight to give the President limited authority to order reserves to duty. In the bill as introduced the Department of Defense had requested that the entire Ready Reserve of 2.9 million men be subject to the call of the President. The Association objected to this concept and recommended that 750,000 men in units or as individuals be the maximum that the President could call.

There were other more or less technical amendments that the Association helped work out. One Section which would have permitted the appropriate Service Secretary to discharge any member of a Reserve component who was in excess of mobilization requirements was deleted entirely due to the Association's objections. It pointed out that present law provided an equitable procedure to eliminate such individuals by proper Board action.
and it was believed wrong to give such broad authority as indicated in the bill.

With these amendments the bill in its present form, while not perfect, should do much to increase the size, readiness and effectiveness of our over-all Defense structure.