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Sec. of Army Authorizes Emergency Payments to Alaska's ATG *Delegation continues to work on legislative long-term solution*

At the urging of Alaska's Congressional delegation, the U.S. Army has agreed to provide temporary financial assistance to 26 members of Alaska's Territorial Guard (ATG) whose retirement checks will be reduced on February 1 following a legal interpretation that ATG service does not count toward military retirement.

Secretary of the Army Pete Geren has authorized a two-month payment for each member, giving the delegation time to ask Congress to revisit the issue. Sec. Geren told delegation members early today the Army will use the "emergency and extraordinary expense fund" to bridge the shortfall through the end of March.

The move comes after the Army announced that it misinterpreted a section of federal law when it allowed service in the ATG to be counted toward military retirement.

"This is great news for these Alaska Territorial Guardsmen who fought bravely to defend our country during World War II," Sen. Begich said. "I appreciate Secretary Geren's intervention on this issue and giving it the priority attention it deserves. These emergency payments will give us some time to get the problem resolved while making sure these brave Alaskans get the retirement pay they so deserve."

"I am grateful that the Secretary of the Army has agreed to use emergency funds under his control to provide a temporary safety net for these 26 Native Elders who served Alaska and our Nation with distinction during World War II. In this era of high fuel and food costs, it would be tragic to reduce the retirement checks of these Elders who have done so much for our nation," Sen. Murkowski said. "This decision in no way lessens my resolve to ensure that their service in

the Alaska Territorial Guard is respected as active duty service and fully credited toward military retirement. This is an earned benefit and it must be restored.”

“I truly appreciate the assistance of my former colleague, Secretary Geren,” Rep. Young said. “The loss of retirement benefits for the brave Alaskans who served in the Alaska Territorial Guard is disgraceful and a huge misstep by the Department of Defense. I understand budgetary concerns, but cutting the retirement benefits of 26 Alaskans who fought for their country is not near the answer. Back in 2001, when we worked in getting recognition and benefits for members of the Territorial Guard, the intention was that it would be for life, not until the DOD reinterpreted legislative language to suit their needs. I spoke with Secretary Geren and am grateful that he was able to recognize this as a problem and is granting us the two-month extension while we work out a solution.”

When Alaska’s delegation members received word last week that the ATG retirement payments had been suspended, Sens. Begich and Murkowski and Congressman Don Young immediately sent a letter to President Barack Obama asking the administration to intervene on the matter.

The delegation today introduced legislation that would permanently clarify that service in the ATG is credible toward military retirement.

With Sen. Begich presiding over the Senate, Sen. Murkowski last Thursday evening spoke about the issue on the Senate floor criticizing the Defense Department for reducing the retirement pay of the former Territorial Guardsmen, most of whom are in their 80s, during the harsh Alaska winter. Sen. Begich brought the issue up Tuesday at the Armed Services Committee meeting with Sec. of Defense Robert Gates.

Sec. Geren has told the delegation the checks could be sent as soon as today.

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