

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE

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Senate Rules Committee

SPONSOR STATEMENT

CS for SJR 5

A RESOLUTION

Urging the United States Department of Defense to continue to provide retirement benefits for members of the Alaska Territorial Guard who served during World War II.

In the middle of January 2009, the U.S. Army Human Resources Command mailed letters to approximately 25 elderly Alaskans, telling them that the Army has changed its mind, based on a legal interpretation, about whether their service in the Alaska Territorial Guard (ATG) during World War II -- defending the United States from Japanese invasion -- counts toward military retirement. The effect of this abrupt reversal in position is to reduce the monthly retirement payments to each of these elderly Alaskans by an average of \$386 per month. Six will lose more than \$500 a month in retirement pay. These reductions were to take effect on February 1, 2009, during the middle of a very cold winter in communities where resources are scarce and the cost of fuel has risen to levels that most people simply cannot afford.

Since the news broke of the Army's decision, there has been significant critical response from Alaskans and citizens across the country directed towards the Army and Congress. Our Alaska delegation in Washington immediately fought to bring this tragic decision to the attention of the President and the rest of Congress.

Since this resolution was first introduced, at the urging of Alaska's Congressional delegation, the U.S. Army has agreed to provide immediate temporary 60-day financial assistance to these elderly ATG members out of the "emergency and extraordinary expense fund".

We thank the Alaska delegation for introducing legislation on January 28, 2009 that would permanently clarify that service in the ATG is credible toward military retirement. We support S. 342 and H.R. 744, and it is our hope that this legislation will move swiftly through Congress and pass within the 60-day reprieve by the Army.

In an effort to further encourage immediate action, SJR 5 urges the Department of the Defense to continue to use their "emergency and extraordinary expense funds" to provide retirement benefits for these ATG members until either Congress passes S.342 or H.R. 744; or the Department of the Defense reverses their decision made in January.

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