

**Editorial Response to “Cost and Benefits”
in the *Washington Post*, June 2, 2013**

June 5, 2013

Dear *Washington Post* Editors:

It’s important to clarify inaccuracies and provide context to the June 2, 2013, *Washington Post* cover story (“Cost and Benefits”) by Rajiv Chandrasekaran.

The Military Resale System is an important part of the military benefits package and highly valued by active, Reserve and retired personnel who are dutifully serving or have served our nation. The Defense Commissary Agency (DeCA) is widely recognized as a highly-efficient and well-run federal agency and characterizing DeCA-run commissaries as superfluous, and overly generous is simply not accurate.

Mr. Chandrasekaran omits important background information regarding military benefit enhancements enacted since 2000. These enhancements weren’t authorized because of Congress’ benevolent generosity; they were enacted to address a 13.5 percent pay gap that existed between military and civilian pay scales, major recruiting and retention concerns and a resulting decline in military readiness. Benefit improvements were also associated with “hollow force” concerns and to honor the government’s broken promises to personnel who served careers in the military.

Too few in our nation are familiar with the increasing and significant demands and associated stress on personnel defending our nation. The declining defense budget as a percentage of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) – particularly in comparison to past wartime periods – makes it increasingly difficult for the Pentagon to fulfill expanding military commitments with fewer personnel. Military compensation, health care, retirement benefits and quality of life programs differ from civilian workplace programs due to the level of risk and responsibility shouldered by the one percent of our population who are voluntarily serving in the armed forces.

Just as highly-vaunted and growing entitlement and social programs (and their associated budgets) are important to our country, military compensation, health care, retirement and benefit programs – including the Military Resale system - are essential to sustaining the All-Volunteer Force and are vital to maintaining military readiness and ensuring our national security.

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