



T H E M I L I T A R Y C O A L I T I O N

201 North Washington Street
Alexandria, Virginia 22314
(703) 838-8113

July 8, 2011

The Honorable Mark Begich
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Begich:

The Military Coalition (TMC), a consortium of nationally prominent military and veterans organizations representing more than 5.5 million members plus their families and survivors, strongly opposes the proposed funding of the “Caring for Camp Lejeune Veterans Act of 2011” (S.277), passed recently by the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee. TMC supports authorizing VA health care for former military family members, veterans, and family members stationed at Camp Lejeune between 1957 and 1987, when the water at the base was acknowledged to have been contaminated with carcinogens. But, the Committee voted to change the bill, without notice or hearing, to fund the care by eliminating the federal subsidy for military commissaries and directing consolidation of all Department of Defense (DoD) commissaries and exchanges.

The Military Coalition strongly opposes this surprise attack on a valued and effective military benefit.

First, the Veterans Affairs Committee has no jurisdiction over and little knowledge of DoD commissary and exchange systems, which are under the purview of the Armed Services Committee.

Second, the Committee proposes virtually dismantling the commissary system without a hearing or other efforts to assess the adverse impact of such a dramatic cut to a core military benefit. There are good reasons why the Armed Services Committees, who more fully understand the commissary and exchange programs, have ardently rejected similar proposals for the last four decades.

Third, the Committee seeks to poach DoD funds to pay for VA health care at a time when DoD personnel budgets already are under threat.

We believe another way must be found to fund VA care to cover Camp Lejeune veterans and their families besides raiding the military commissary system. Without the federal subsidy, military commissaries would go out of business, as prices would have to rise, and savings to customers would be lost.

The commissary is one of DoD’s most cost-effective people programs. Every dollar of the subsidy translates to nearly three dollars of benefit value to patrons and considerably more than that for lower-grade enlisted families. In addition, the commissary is consistently considered by military families to be one of their most important benefits. Commissaries provide average savings of more than 30 percent, which is especially important to young military families during these tough economic times.

Military families who have sacrificed so much during ten years of war deserve to know the savings and support they depend on from the commissaries will not go away. The Military Coalition urges Congress to reject eliminating the federal subsidy for military commissaries and this latest attempt to consolidate DoD commissaries and exchanges.

Sincerely,

The Military Coalition
(signatures enclosed)

Air Force Association
Air Force Sergeants Association
Air Force Women Officers Associated
Association of Military Surgeons of the United States
Association of the United States Army
Association of the United States Navy
Chief Warrant Officer and Warrant Officer Association, U.S. Coast Guard
Commissioned Officers Association of the U.S. Public Health Service, Inc.
Enlisted Association of the National Guard of the United States
Fleet Reserve Association
Gold Star Wives
Iraq & Afghanistan Veterans of America
Jewish War Veterans of the United States of America
Marine Corps League
Marine Corps Reserve Association
Military Chaplains Association of the United States of America
Military Officers Association of America
Military Order of the Purple Heart
National Guard Association of the United States
National Military Family Association
Naval Enlisted Reserve Association
Non Commissioned Officers Association
Reserve Officers Association
Society of Medical Consultants to the Armed Forces
The Retired Enlisted Association
United States Army Warrant Officers Association
United States Coast Guard Chief Petty Officers Association
Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States