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# Jason Smith's Capitol Report - All Tricks, No Treats

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**Congressman Jason Smith Capitol Report  
For Service – All Tricks, No Treats  
October 28th, 2016**

Thousands of brave Americans have answered the call of duty to serve our country and protect us from terrorism. These brave soldiers fought tirelessly to defend our country in Iraq, Afghanistan and other places around the globe. I was appalled this week to learn along with millions of Americans that now some fifteen years later, many of these soldiers are being asked to repay enlistment bonuses doled out during the global war on terror.

In order to keep highly trained and desirable personnel in the service, the US military has long used incentives such as re-enlistment bonuses. In the early 2000's the US military used re-enlistment bonuses and other incentives for thousands of National Guard Troops in California. In 2010, revelations about mismanagement by the California National Guard surfaced. Following these findings, nearly 10,000 soldiers who were given bonuses were ordered to repay them or face serious financial penalties such as wage garnishments and tax liens. That's right, because of bureaucratic mismanagement, our country's soldiers were being asked to make up for the mistakes of paper pushers.

It is clear that Military recruiters betrayed these soldiers, making promises they could not keep and offering incentives they were not authorized to give, but our nation's heroes

should not have to pay for the mistakes of military officials' from over a decade ago. In May I helped pass the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) to help correct this injustice by putting a stop to the military going after soldiers for mistakes like this that military personnel make. Simply put, our troops should not be punished for the mistakes made by the Department of Defense.

In 2007, President Obama made a promise to the American people to 'ensure that our troops have the resources, support, and equipment they need to protect themselves and fulfill their mission', but the reality today is that throughout his presidency he has consistently put military readiness and the interests of our troops on the back burner. In early September, a leaked Pentagon memo revealed the Obama Administration's plan to veto this year's National Defense Bill which would have ended the outrageous action of recouping 15 year old military payments. That same Defense Authorization Act included a much needed pay raise for our troops and \$2.5 billion for necessary training and maintenance which are funding needs identified as critical by the military services.

Whether they are still on the battlefield or back home, we have a duty to take care of our soldiers. Just this week I met with VA officials to discuss the VA facilities in southeast and south central Missouri. I had previously shared with them the signatures of 5,700 Missourians seeking increased care and services for the veterans in our area and I reiterated my support for such in our meeting. I was pleased that during the meeting the VA confirmed they would expand services, options and care hours at a facility in south central Missouri. Additionally, later in the day the pentagon finally announced that they would no longer be trying to recoup the old bonus payments from our soldiers. While millions of American families are struggling to make ends meet, asking our military members to make repayments because of bureaucratic errors was not appropriate or fair.

With so many problems facing our country and our government it is embarrassing that going after payments to our soldiers was ever a priority. The Department of Defense owes it to the American people to be focused on eradicating entities like ISIS and staying vigilant against terror threats abroad and here at home. The White House should be less focused on vetoing legislation containing pay increases and resources for American troops and instead on how to mitigate the threats from countries like Iran and North Korea. It's time your government put at the top of its responsibility list the safety and security of you and your family, not its own misguided agenda.

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