American Legion on Bonuses:

‘We stand with the soldiers of the Guard’

INDIANAPOLIS (October 24, 2016) –The head of the nation’s largest veterans service organization is calling on the U.S. military to immediately cease collection efforts from National Guard members who were mistakenly awarded bonuses through no fault of their own.

“As far as The American Legion is concerned, the debt is backwards. America owes a debt to these heroes that we can never re-pay,” said National Commander Charles E. Schmidt. “It is outrageous that thousands of National Guard members in California and many other states were promised bonuses if they would re-enlist and go to war. Most did and now they are being hounded to re-pay the money because of bureaucratic incompetence. This is not how you treat our volunteers, who had no more obligation to serve than any other American. How can any potential military member ever believe what military recruiters promise them in the future? Congress and the White House need to fix this now and provide immediate relief to those who have already been bullied into paying this. There are a few documented cases where apparently fraud has been committed. Fraud is a crime and those who committed this offense should be punished. But there is no way that the overwhelming majority of these thousands of servicemembers are anything other than heroes who mistakenly believed the promises that their government was making to them. If their overpayments were not made due to malicious deception on their part, they should not be held responsible for it.”

Schmidt, a retired Air Force officer who served in Vietnam, pointed out that many of the veterans experienced combat, earned Purple Hearts and had to obtain loans to pay back the bonuses. “A few isolated cases might be excusable due to a misunderstanding, but the Los Angeles Times reported that nearly 10,000 Guard veterans were being ordered to repay bonuses in California alone,” he said. “The American Legion stands with all of the soldiers and families that have been affected by this. We will not rest until this problem is fixed.”

With a current membership of 2.2 million wartime veterans, The American Legion, www.legion.org, was founded in 1919 on the four pillars of a strong national security,
veterans affairs, Americanism, and youth programs. Legionnaires work for the betterment of their communities through more than 13,000 posts across the nation.

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