

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

April 4, 2024

General Daniel R. Hokanson
Chief
National Guard Bureau
111 S. George Mason Drive
Arlington, VA 22204

Dear General Hokanson:

I write to share concern following your March 1, 2024, memorandum suspending reenlistment bonuses for the Army National Guard. While the National Guard Bureau (NGB) has restarted the incentives program as of March 8, 2024, disruptions to soldier incentives have become a troubling trend.

In October 2023, over 9,000 soldiers were identified as experiencing delays receiving their enlistment bonus payment – including South Dakotans, some by up to five years. My office assisted other soldiers who experienced similar delays receiving their retention bonuses in 2021. Further, the Army National Guard suspended payments to soldiers eligible for student loan repayment in July of 2023. This suspension was, according to an NGB spokesperson, due to insufficient funding for the incentive initiative.

The NGB's statement on the most recent suspension indicates the popularity of the reenlistment bonuses exceeded the original budgetary projections. While we are encouraged to hear the high interest in the reenlistment bonus program, we are concerned the NGB did not properly account for this interest. This is especially concerning given the armed services collectively fell short of their recruitment goals by over 40,000 in 2023. If the NGB was reportedly five percent short of their recruiting goal, the budget line item for incentive bonuses should have been sufficient to meet the need.

Given these concerns, we respectfully ask answers to the following questions by April 30:

1. Regarding the March 1 pause to the reenlistment incentive program, why did the NGB fail to anticipate the budget shortfall?
 - a. What actions were taken by the NGB to reverse this budget shortfall and restart the incentives program on March 8?
 - b. What can be done in the future to act proactively and ensure a pause is not needed?
2. Has the NGB sufficiently addressed the issues with the incentives program that resulted in the 2023 and 2021 bonus delays?

The importance of enlistment and reenlistment bonuses cannot be overstated. At a time when recruitment is at a record low, the NGB should prioritize the availability of bonus contracts to ensure the Guard is attracting and retaining the best talent America has to offer. Members of the

National Guard have made tremendous commitments to serve our nation, and our government should uphold the commitments we make in return.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Dusty Johnson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Dusty Johnson
Member of Congress