



CURRENT HIGHLIGHTS

For the 108th Congress

October 14, 2004

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CONGRESS ADJOURNED UNTIL 16 NOVEMBER 2004

STATUS OF DEFENSE LEGISLATION

	HOUSE	SENATE	CONFERENCE
AUTHORIZATION	H.R. 4200 House Report 108-491 5/20/04 - Approved by the House	S. 2400 Senate Report 108-260 Senate approved 6/23/04	Conference began 9/29/04 - anticipated completion 10/7/04.
APPROPRIATIONS	H.R. 4613 Committee completed Mark up 6/16/04 House Report 108-553 House approved 6/22/04	S.2559 Committee completed mark 6/23/04 Senate Report 108-284 Senate approved 6/24/04	Conference completed 10/8/04 Conference Report 108-767 House and Senate approved 10/9/04. Cleared for White House on 10/9/04
MILCON	H.R. 4424 House Report 108-607 Full Committee markup completed 7/9/04 House passed 7/22/04	S. 2402 Senate Report 108-309 Full Committee markup completed 7/15/04 Senate passed on 9/20/04	Conference completed House and Senate approved President signed on 10/13/04
FEDERAL WORKPLACE FLEXIBILITY ACT	H.R. 1601 6/25/04 - House Government Reform Committee approved bill.	S. 129 4/8/04 - Passed Senate 6/24/04 - House Government Reform Committee ordered	

House Approves Employee Bonuses, Comp Time for Travel

Federal agencies would be able to give generous recruitment and retention bonuses when trying to hire and keep employees under legislation approved by the House.

Rep. Thomas M. Davis III (R-Va.) called the bill, which also provides federal employees with time off for travel during off-duty hours, "a momentous step toward effectively reforming the federal civil service system." Agencies will be able to "build a strong workforce" by using bonuses "in a more strategic manner," Davis said.

The bill, probably the only legislation calling for changes in federal employment policy that will pass Congress this year, was approved on a voice vote Wednesday. The bill goes to the Senate, which approved a different version in the spring.

Under the House bill, agencies could pay bonuses of up to 25 percent of an employee's annual pay for up to four consecutive years. In cases in which an employee meets a "critical agency need," the Office of Personnel Management could authorize a bonus of up to 100 percent of base pay, at the time of the recruitment, if the applicant agreed to work for at least two years.

To retain employees, agencies could pay bonuses up to 25 percent of base pay. To retain groups of employees, agencies could give bonuses worth 10 percent of annual pay. In cases in which agencies believed they need to pay even more to keep employees from leaving, the bonuses could be increased to up to 50 percent of base pay in a given year.

Employees given recruitment and retention bonuses would agree to remain in federal service for a specified period, usually no longer than four years. The bonuses would not be counted as part of base pay, which is used to calculate retirement benefits, and would not be available to political appointees. They could be paid in installments or in lump sums.

The legislation effectively waives current limits, which hold bonuses to 25 percent of base pay.

During debate on the bill, Rep. Danny K. Davis (D-Ill.) noted that the bill would require the Office of Personnel Management to report the number of bonuses being paid so that Congress will have information available to evaluate their effectiveness in hiring and keeping federal employees.

The legislation also would allow federal employees who travel on their own time -- such as spending Sunday on an airplane to attend a Monday morning meeting -- to claim compensatory time off. Current rules make it difficult for employees to qualify for pay while traveling outside duty hours.

The House bill dropped some provisions contained in an earlier version, primarily because of budgetary considerations, Davis said. Among the dropped provisions was a proposal to correct inequities in pension calculations for part-time work covered under the Civil Service Retirement System. (WashingtonPost.com)