

MIKE GARCIA
27TH DISTRICT, CALIFORNIA
WASHINGTON, DC OFFICE
144 CANNON HOB
WASHINGTON, DC 20515
(202) 225-1956



Congress of the United States
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-0527

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON COMMERCE,
JUSTICE, & SCIENCE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON DEFENSE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON ENERGY
& WATER DEVELOPMENT

HOUSE PERMANENT SELECT COMMITTEE
ON INTELLIGENCE
DEFENSE INTELLIGENCE & OVERHEAD
ARCHITECTURE SUBCOMMITTEE
NATIONAL SECURITY AGENCY & CYBER
SUBCOMMITTEE

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE, SPACE,
& TECHNOLOGY
SUBCOMMITTEE ON SPACE & AERONAUTICS

September 15, 2023

President Joseph R. Biden
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave
Washington, D.C., 20500

CC: The Honorable Lloyd J. Austin III, Secretary of Defense

Dear Mr. President,

As a former naval aviator and member of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Defense, I write on behalf of the 916,000 junior enlisted servicemembers (E-6 and below) who are seeing your veto statement on H.R. 4365, the Department of Defense Appropriations Act for Fiscal Year 2024. They, just like me, are in shock that their Commander-In-Chief is citing a historic and long overdue pay raise for junior enlisted members as the rationale for vetoing the Department of Defense appropriations bill. In the midst of record high inflation, record high pay gaps between military members and their civilian counterparts, record low recruiting figures from all branches of the military and on the heels of the 22 year long Global War on Terror, such an objection is offensive to our war fighters and I respectfully urge you to reconsider. This short-sighted veto threat would make us more vulnerable at home and abroad, and I find it unconscionable that you believe a record-high pay raise of 30% on average for our most junior servicemembers is veto-worthy.

You claim that raising the basic pay for thousands of servicemembers, many of whom make the equivalent of \$11/hour (one-third of our enlisted troops qualify for food stamps), would “remove an important incentive for enlisted members to seek increased responsibilities and earn promotions at the grade of E-6 and higher, harming military readiness.” Mr. President, I cannot overstate how wrong and backward this belief is. The simple reality is that there will be no recruits to promote – and those who do join will separate well before they reach E-6 or beyond – if we do not take significant steps to improve the quality of life for our junior enlisted ranks. The troops will forgive “pay compression” within the tables in exchange for a 30-40% average increase in pay through the junior enlisted ranks. If you need evidence to support my claim, you can look at the current recruiting and retention data within those ranks. More effectively you should ask the troops for their perspective.

Fast-food and entry-level retail employees in many states, including my home state of California, make at least \$18/hour. E-1s out of bootcamp make \$11/hour. Department leadership asserts that our personnel also receive housing allowances, but the reality is that these allowances are also lagging behind inflationary pressures and actually drive our troops deeper in the hole if they choose to live off base. The cause of our recruiting crisis is not a mystery – it is basic economics.

My fellow Republican colleagues on the Appropriations Committee and I have worked toward a solution for a significant move in the right direction to right-size basic pay for our most vulnerable troops. This gets them off food stamps, above the poverty line, and closer to parity with their civilian peers. Now that we have put forward that solution and have provided the pay-for to fund it, you have demonstrated a tone-deaf mentality to the needs and welfare of our troops and, by definition, our nation's security. Your rationale for this veto threat is unfounded, short-sighted, and dangerous.

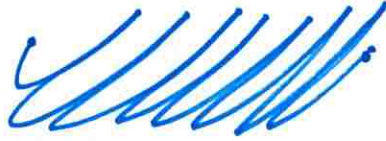
You claim in your veto threat that my proposed pay raise would create a \$4.4 billion unfunded mandate. However, a Congressional Budget Office analysis of my provision determined that the pay raise would only cost \$800 million, which is what was provided and fully paid for within the bill. Your administration has consistently argued that guaranteeing our troops a sufficient wage would be too expensive to be feasible. I would argue we can afford it and it is a small price to pay to encourage people to join and stay in an all-volunteer military. We must keep pace with China and our troops are our secret weapons.

Despite your statement's claims that we should wait for the Fourteenth Quadrennial Review of Military Compensation to conclude, the time to support our junior servicemembers is now. The study will reinforce the need for a significant compensation adjustment in the end. But the time to act is now, before we sink deeper into this recruiting and retention hole. These troops have waited too long already for the basic support required to justify their continued enlistment. Many cannot afford to wait another six months, much less a year for a study to tell us what we already know: These American heroes are underappreciated and underpaid.

It is my sincere hope that you will reconsider your position on this much needed, and well-deserved pay raise. I would appreciate the opportunity to outline this legislation to you and Secretary of Defense Austin at your earliest convenience. Taking care of our nation's most precious assets, our troops, should be a bipartisan issue and I implore you to work with me on this historic and deserved raise for our junior enlisted personnel. As elected officials, we need to protect those who protect us.

Let's strip out the politics, filter out the ill-advised recommendations of bureaucrats, and work together to make history for our troops.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of several overlapping, sweeping strokes that form a stylized representation of the name 'Mike Garcia'.

Mike Garcia
Member of Congress, CA-27