

## **Soldiers and sailors qualify for food stamps**

Lance Corporal (E-3) Kara Dethlefsen and her husband are both proud Marines. They love their country and their young daughter. They have been deployed overseas and separated from each other in service to our country. They also have something in common with 23,000 other military families. They have to rely on food stamps and church food pantries to feed their young family.

An enlisted member of our armed services with 2 years of service has a base salary of \$2,004.30 per month. If that warrior was living in the State of New Hampshire they would qualify for food stamps. In fact, over 25% of our military families rely on some form of government welfare program or a food pantry to survive

An Army E-5 (sergeant) with 6 years of service makes \$2,856.60 a month before taxes or roughly \$34,280 a year. Many times the spouse cannot work because of extended deployments, lack of a familial support structure or frequent moves. Could your family live on \$34,000 a year before federal income tax?

45% of military children attending school qualify and receive free lunch. 80,000 military families have expressed worry about the groceries lasting until payday. We ask these young men and women to risk their lives for us, but we, as a country, don't pay them enough to live proudly. That is disgraceful.

The US House Armed Services Committee has proposed an amendment to increase the 2018 Defense Authorization Act to increase military base salaries by 0.3% bringing it to the civilian standard of a 2.4% growth. This isn't just the right thing to do – it's the law.

USC 37, calls for a mandatory pay raise of 2.4%. Between 2014-2016 however, military pay only rose by 1% annually. The current Administration is seeking to address this issue with a proposed 2.1% pay raise but I believe it is critically important that our soldiers get the full 2.4% pay raise that they are entitled to by law.

The naysayers will state that the military receives money for food (BAS, basic allowance for sustenance) and housing (BAQ, basic allowance for quarters). While that is correct, it isn't sufficient. A military family of 4 stationed at the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard will pay an average of \$1,800 rent for a 2 bedroom apartment, which is more than the current DoD housing assistance, and receive about \$23 per person per week in food allowance. Can you feed each member of your family with only \$23 per week? Once you factor in that NH has some of the highest energy costs in the country, things like home heating oil or a car repair become budget busters.

While enlisted in the Air Force, I witnessed first-hand airmen with families who struggled to pay their bills and feed their families every month. This is a practice

that has to end. We have the most technologically advanced, best trained, and best equipped military fighting force in history. Our capability for fighting evil and our capacity for bringing peace and hope to the darkest corners of the world are unparalleled. The work our military does in defending our nation, and making the globe a safer place is amazing – we owe them the dignity of not having to stand in line at a food pantry or rely on food stamps to feed their children.

I ask that you please call our Senators and Congressmen at 202.225.3121 and ask that they show respect to our soldiers, sailors, marines and airmen by giving them a fighting chance to take care of their own families and support a 2.4% pay raise, it's the law.

*Matt Mayberry is an Air Force veteran living in Dover.*