

# Stop-Loss stops in January, Army leaders say

*C. Todd Lopez, Army News Service*

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*Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates responds to a reporter's question during a press conference at the Pentagon, March 18. Gates announced a comprehensive plan to eliminate the current use of "stop-loss" policy while retaining the authority for future use under extraordinary circumstances. Photo by R. D. Ward.*

WASHINGTON (Army News Service, March 18, 2009) -- The Army plans to phase out its reliance on stop-loss by January, leaders say.

Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates announced Thursday a phased plan to begin cutting off stop-loss later this year. During a discussion with members of the press, Lt. Gen. Michael Rochelle, deputy chief of staff for Personnel, G-1, discussed the Army's plan to implement the phased reduction in use of the program that involuntarily extends Soldiers beyond the end of their enlistment or retirement dates in units deploying to combat areas.

"It has been a vital tool that has allowed the Army to sustain cohesive operational forces that train and serve together through their deployments," Rochelle said.

The general said the president's recent announcement of a troop drawdown in Iraq, a gradual restoration of balance between deployments, and an increase in the size of the Army have given the service the opportunity to reduce stop-loss.

Rochelle said the number of Soldiers affected by stop-loss will be reduced, in a phased approach, across all components of the Army. The Army Reserve will begin mobilizing units without stop-loss in August, he said. For the National Guard, that will happen in September. For the active-duty Army, the change will happen in January.

"This is great news for the Army family," Rochelle said. "Limiting stop-loss balances our need for unit effectiveness with the impact on individual Soldiers and their families."

Rochelle also said the Army will implement a special congressionally approved payment for Soldiers currently affected by stop-loss. Soldiers who are under stop-loss this month will begin receiving a \$500 per month payment on top of their regular pay for the months they serve on stop-loss. That payment will begin with their March pay, which Soldiers see in their April 1 check.

The congressional approval also allows the Army to retroactively pay Soldiers as far back as Oct. 1, 2008 for time served under stop-loss. Most Soldiers that qualify to receive the retroactive payments will receive that money in May or June as a lump-sum payment, Rochelle said.

Additionally, the \$500 per month payments for stop-loss time served in a combat tax-exclusion zone will not be taxed, said Col. Larry Lock, Army director of compensation and entitlements.

The funds Congress appropriated for stop-loss pay are only for Fiscal Year 2009, which runs Oct. 1, 2008 through Sept. 30, 2009. Future funding is being discussed.

Rochelle pointed out that there is risk associated in eliminating the use of stop-loss, such as an unexpected demand for forces beyond what the Army anticipates. But he said such things as the projected reduction of forces in Iraq will mitigate that risk.

"Let's not diminish the significance of the reduction in demand, anticipated as a result of the drawdown in Iraq. The anticipated reduction in demand, recently announced by President Obama, is a major factor," Rochelle said. He added that were demand not so high for Army forces around the world, the Army would eliminate stop-loss "tomorrow."

An additional factor in the Army's ability to pare down its use of stop-loss is that the service was able to meet its resize objectives ahead of schedule.

"The Army has now achieved its end strength growth to its (547,400) end strength, three years ahead of schedule," Rochelle said. "We were on track and projected to achieve that growth through 2012 -- we are there now."

Thirdly, he said, is the Army's enterprise-wide approach to match up accessions, individual training and leader development training with the Army's Force Generation.

Rochelle said the Army will create a policy to offer incentives to Soldiers to encourage them to extend their enlistment beyond their date of separation in order to allow them to stay with their unit for the duration of a deployment.

Those incentives would most likely be financial, said Maj. Gen. Gina Farrisee, director of personnel management.

"I think it would be safe to say they will be monetary incentives, but the policy has not been written yet as to what the incentives will be," she said. "We would offer incentives for people to extend through the deployment. We currently do not offer extensions. You may re-enlist, and re-enlist only. We would now offer incentives to extend through the deployment and we hope that that would help to continue to fill the unit as needed."

There are currently around 13,000 Soldiers affected by stop-loss within all three components of the Army. According to Army officials, the active component has some 7,307 affected; the National Guard has 4,458 affected Soldiers; and in the Army Reserve, 1,452 Soldiers are affected. Stop-loss is spelled out in Title 10, United States Code, Section 12305(a).

The law allowing the military services to implement stop-loss has not changed, and the Army may again use the policy in the future if extraordinary needs require it.