



American Foreign Service Association

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July 16, 2007

The Honorable Charles Rangel
Chairman
Committee on Ways and Means
U.S. House of Representatives
1102 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Rangel,

The American Foreign Service Association (AFSA) supports H.R. 1974, The Federal Employee Combat Zone Parity Act, which was referred to your committee on April 19. AFSA represents 28,000 active and retired Foreign Service employees, so this bill is particularly important to our members and their families.

Members of the Foreign Service living and working in United States military combat zones are exposed to unique dangers and potentially life threatening situations. Consequently, stress runs high. The sacrifice of a long-term separation from one's family and friends in serving our country abroad is not limited to the military. United States civilians working in combat zones deserve similar tax benefits as H.R. 1974 advocates. This bill is designed to help employees in the lower pay grades, so it would not exempt income above the highest level eligible for exemption by military members. This year the exemption is \$5,300 a month.

Currently, this tax exemption is used to alleviate the hardship felt by families of both federal contractors and military personnel. Yet members of the Foreign Service who live and work in the same situation are not receiving these tax benefits. The federal government relies on civilian volunteers to fill the positions needed for reconstruction assignments and other tasks in areas such as Afghanistan and Iraq. There have been difficulties in filling volunteer staff positions in combat zones, so this tax break would provide a greater incentive and help increase the number of volunteers for these positions.

Asking civilians to perform at the same level as military personnel in these dangerous areas but not giving them the same tax benefits does not encourage people to volunteer. This bill would recognize their contributions as being equal to that of the military and federal contractors.

We would appreciate your support of H.R. 1974. Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely,

John K. Naland
President