

Retired military critical of ins. increase

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Military advocacy groups are criticizing a Pentagon proposal that could triple the insurance cost for U.S. military retirees.

The plan, under consideration as part of the 2007 budget request to be unveiled Feb. 6, would increase Tricare fees for retirees under age 65 beginning Oct. 1 -- with fees rising by as much as \$1,200 more a year by 2009, the Army Times reported Friday.

Because of the controversy, the Joint Chiefs of Staff are considering sending a rare joint letter to Congress explaining why the fee increases are important if needed weapons programs are to be funded.

Active-duty members of the military would not be directly affected by the fee increases, but military advocacy groups say the program will have an impact on morale.

"Don't try to tell us that a country that can afford hundreds of billions of dollars in pork spending and tax cuts can't afford to pay for both military weapons and retiree health care," said Steve Strobeck of the Military Officers Association of America.

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