



Dear Ms. Smiley,

I write regarding your June 9, 2013 article entitled, “Put down the ketchup and hear the question”.

As a military spouse and spokesperson for *The Coalition to Save Our Military Shopping Benefits* ([www.saveourbenefit.org](http://www.saveourbenefit.org)), I appreciate that your article calls for an honest discussion of military benefits. The military community, as taxpayers ourselves, should be concerned with Defense spending. However, the Washington Post article, “Plan to shut military supermarkets shows difficulty of cutting defense spending” suggests that if we can’t reduce commissary spending, spending can’t be reduced anywhere. It completely ignores the fact that this is one place where spending has been reduced and continues to be reduced.

Contrary to what the Washington Post article would have you believe, the Defense Commissary Agency (DeCA), which manages commissary operations worldwide, is a model of efficiency. DeCA has driven over \$700 million a year in costs from the system through store closures, consolidation, and supply chain efficiencies at a time when the Department of Defense (DoD) budget has doubled and tripled. In fact, DeCA has received a clean audit for the past 13 years, making them an organization within the Department to emulate not sacrifice.

In your article, you cite what you believe were the “better points” of the Washington Post article. The article suggests that the private sector could take over the system and save taxpayers \$1 billion a year. However, we believe that large retailers would hand pick the big, high volume stores and leave the smaller, remote operations to fend for themselves. There is no guarantee that other retailers would offer the same discount in remote locations – where active duty families, retirees, and National Guard and Reserve members need them most. Furthermore, this suggestion overlooks the fact that commissary patrons have contributed billions of dollars to the government to finance the construction of their own commissaries. Yet the cost of reimbursing military families for their investment is not factored into this discussion.

I understand why many within our military community have taken the Washington Post article to task, not only for its tone, but because the article is laced with inaccuracies. While others organizations and individuals have addressed the military personnel misinformation, we want to address the inaccuracies regarding commissaries. The article claims a high volume store, like Fort Belvoir, costs more to operate. The operative number should be unit cost per dollar of sales. In fact, stores like Fort Belvoir actually help fund commissary operations in lower volume areas, such as overseas and in remote locations. DeCA also pays for every service it receives from the installation – there are no “hidden” costs like rent or

security services. Lastly, commissaries never sold leftovers from the mess hall. In fact the mess hall usually ordered goods from the commissary or its sister organization.

With all of that said, what struck me most about your article is that as a proud commissary user, you are prepared to give up this important benefit to support the mission. I am not surprised because as a community we are used to sacrificing our needs for the greater good. However, if the benefit has a proven track record of efficiency, it does support the mission. Commissaries are part of the solution to the Defense Department's and the Nation's budget concerns, not part of the problem.

Although the intent of the Washington Post article was to highlight how difficult it is to cut defense spending, choosing the commissary – a model of efficiency - to illustrate the point was disingenuous. We hope you and your readers continue to ask “hard questions” so that an honest dialog can occur.

For further information, please read Costs and Benefits of the DoD Resale System:

[http://www.saveourbenefit.org/uploads/wp\\_economic\\_analysis\\_Dec2012.pdf](http://www.saveourbenefit.org/uploads/wp_economic_analysis_Dec2012.pdf)

Report summary and press release:

[http://www.saveourbenefit.org/uploads/Economic\\_Analysis\\_Press\\_Release\\_with\\_Findings\\_v2\\_130610.pdf](http://www.saveourbenefit.org/uploads/Economic_Analysis_Press_Release_with_Findings_v2_130610.pdf)

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The Coalition to Save Our Military Shopping Benefits  
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