THANKS, CONGRESS

Notwithstanding the immense shortfalls we all know so well, the action of the second session of the 97th Congress including these add-ons to the FY 83 Authorization is an important article of faith and a significant testiment to congressional commitment to the worthiness not merely of the National Guard, but of the Total Force Policy.

Last month in this space we sounded the alarm that the first signs were beginning to emerge that the Total Force Policy was coming under attack. This remains a matter of serious concern and there is nothing to be gained by adopting an ostrich-like posture.

There is good and sound reason why the preponderance of Congress supports the National Guard and supports the Total Force Policy. It may be useful, from time to time, to review the benefits.

Our nation has become—like it or not—a world power, with a world power's obligations. Among these obligations we regard the maintenance of a fully trained, capable force as a matter of the utmost importance.

Despite the many blessings that have been bestowed upon our land, we have learned something of the incredible costs involved in global responsibility, and we have learned something of the limitations that must be placed even on this nation with its enormous wealth and abundance of resources.

Among the things we have learned, for example, is that we cannot sustain on a full-time basis the range of active forces, which would be needed to sustain the various scenarios in which U.S. forces might be called upon to fight independent of a national contingency.

How fortunate it is that in the original expressions of the federalism that characterized the birth of this nation, the Founding Fathers saw the potential viability in effect of huge standing armies and expressed a preference for a system that would provide for the use of militia, thereby insuring the involvement of Americans from all walks of life in great American undertakings.

The basis of the Total Force Policy is that it began—back in the summer of 1970 and to start going into effect in fiscal year 1971—to tailor the U.S. military strategy to the U.S. national psyche and the U.S. national spirit. It took cognizance of the need for a national consensus to insure public support of goals to protect the freedom of the U.S. and at the same time to sustain national civilization, culture and values.

Each time the Congress lends its name to "add-ons" to help improve the combat readiness of the National Guard. It is recognition of the "real world" role that has been prescribed for the National Guard. We believe it is also recognition of how much more the Guard could be expected to do if the necessary resources were provided within the established DoD programs. And it is a reminder that although what we call the Total Force Policy is a product of our time it is the implementation of a notion, which goes back to the infancy of our republic.

Given the letter and spirit of the law, let's keep the idea of a Total Force Policy in mind as we debate measures to strengthen the Guard, which is the backbone of the Armed Forces in peacetime.