

*Washington, D.C. – Speaker Nancy Pelosi, and 12 Democratic members of Congress hosted a roundtable discussion with leaders of Veterans’ and Military Service Organizations in the Capitol on November 4. Topics included jobs, veteran ownership of business, veterans health, and the super committee and defense. The Reserve Officers Association had a seat front and centered. ROA’s statement is below.*

*Two members of the super committee were in attendance. While they were unable to provide specifics, they acknowledged that veterans’ benefits were protected and that the super committee’s role was not to take a comprehensive look at military retirement, but they were sensitive to the issue. The committee was making a distinction between military personnel and Pentagon programs. These representatives from the super committee are hoping to achieve a balanced approach between increasing tax revenues and making budget cuts.*

*The invited associations had an opportunity to voice their concerns. Concerns were voiced that employers incentives included in the Hiring a Heroes Act differed based on the veteran’s length of service, and that veterans were more than tax credits. Veterans bring skills from the military that are value added to the work force.*

*Several associations challenged suggested military retirement reforms, reminding congressional members that military service has unique stresses and challenges. It was pointed out that it was not only unfair to change the retirement system for those currently serving, but for the next generation as well.*

*Tricare rates, veteran education, housing, and the need for the Doc Fix were also mentioned. ROA’s statement follows.*

Statement by CAPT Marshall Hanson, USNR (ret.), ROA Legislative Director.

“Part of the continuum of the Total Force is the National Guard and Reserve members who have fought in the current contingencies.

Leader Pelosi, the Reserve Officers Association would like to thank you and the members of the House for supporting Rep. Waltz’s bill, H.R.1025, recognizing the service of certain Guard and Reserve members as veterans, and passage of needed recognition, as many while on active duty haven’t served long enough to receive DD-214’s or be recognized as veterans.

Oftentimes, not only has their contributions been downplayed, but the place in their community is overlooked. And surprisingly, recognizing their military service is even important to the economy. Too often business take their signals from the federal government, and don’t offer the same type of incentives to Reserve Component members as they do to active duty military. Be it discounts into amusement parks, or rebates from auto manufactures, purchasing decisions by over 1.75 million Guard and Reserve members and retirees are often negated by lack of recognition of their service.

We hope that the leadership in the room can help get needed support in the Senate so that we can pass this legislation into law. We aren’t asking for new benefits, just the recognition that these individuals need.

The dual status of veteran and serving member also complicates the employment of Guard and Reserve members returning from mobilization. High numbers of them are unable to find reemployment during this recession.

The largest group that is unemployed is the 18 -24 year olds (over 35 % in August Department of Labor numbers). This group is entirely made up of Guard and Reserve members who either are affiliated with the Reserve, or leave Active Duty and are placed in the Reserve. ROA is concerned that the risk of recall causes employers to hesitate to hire this age group. ROA has published a list of USERRA corrections that would help.

Equally important is the reintegration of these returning veterans, but with a tightening budget there are indications that funding for the Yellow Ribbon program will no longer be federally funded.

We also must ensure that preventive and follow-up counseling and mental health services for service members and families and training continue to be funded so they know when to seek professional help related to their circumstances. This is more difficult for Guard and Reserve members who don't have easy access to military facilities, the military health network, or the Veteran Affairs health support.

Thank you again for the invitation to share these concerns and the Reserve Officers Association would like to work with you and your staffs in any way to correct these issues."