

**Oral Testimony**  
**Reserve Officers Association**  
**CAPT Marshall Hanson, USNR (ret.), Legislative Director**

Mister Chairman, Mr. Filner, members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify on the employment challenges facing today's veterans.

While April brought improvement to veteran unemployment rates, the 18 to 24 year old bracket remains high at 26.8 percent<sup>i</sup>. This group is the first tour veterans returning from active duty. Many remain in the Reserve Components, rather than leave the military. These are unique veterans who can return to active duty.

Three surveys<sup>ii</sup> show that between 60 to 70 percent of employers won't hire new employees who are affiliated with the Guard and Reserve, which is an upward trend<sup>iii</sup>. The risk of a future one year call-up discourages many potential employers.

This is in violation of the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act, but it is very difficult to prove.

Unemployment rates are even higher for returning units in the Army National Guard with the Guard Bureau reporting rates as high as 35 to 45 percent. Florida is a case study of corrections taken by proactive leadership.

The Guard numbers are high because, many returning veterans don't want to go back to the type of work that they did prior to deployment. Newly acquired skills and combat experiences can change career ambitions. The Post-9/11 GI Bill provides an opportunity for veterans to seek new employment paths.

Even though the United States will be winding down its overseas contingency operations, ROA sees the trend of veteran unemployment as an ongoing problem. With plans to keep the Guard and Reserve as an operational force, employers will continue to be hesitant to lose key employees without positive incentives.

Employers view USERRA as a negative incentive and would like to see positive encouragement to hire veterans. As employers look to their bottom line, tax credits or financial grants for hiring veterans is just one example. Small businesses are more likely to hire Guard and Reserve veterans if they could afford to hire temporary replacements.

The Reserve Officers Association established the Service Members Law Center with Navy Captain Sam Wright as its director. This service is provided to all members of the uniformed services, including Active, Reserve, and separated veterans. Sam receives 500 calls a month from veterans facing legal problems, 80 percent of which are about employment and reemployment rights. That calculates to about 4800 calls a year on USERRA issues.

There is a no fee service charged to the veteran, and demand is growing, but CAPT Wright has reached his personal capacity. ROA would like to expand the Law Center, but ROA can only do so much self funding this endeavor.

The Employer Support for the Guard and Reserve committee and the Department of Labor can't handle the number of requests as cases.

Most reemployment cases are being handled by private lawsuit. ROA finds that many veterans and employers do not know their rights are what the law is, as illustrated by the number of calls that ROA receives. Many veterans do not even know what resources are available thru ESGR and DoL and quietly surrender, simply seeking work elsewhere.

ROA would like to thank the Committee and its staff for its attention to this critical issue and looks forward to working with the committee on improving USERRA and helping Veterans with employment challenges.

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<sup>i</sup> Table 1, pg 2. Office of Employment and Unemployment Statistics Bureau of Labor Statistics

<sup>ii</sup> Business, Law Review, Society for Human Resource Management, and Work Force Management Magazine.

<sup>iii</sup> A 2009 survey by Workforce Management Research Center, more than half of civilian employers say they will not hire a Reserve component member