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POSITION PAPER

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Support for Reserve Officers Training Corps (ROTC)

Requested Action:

- Continue to fund ROTC programs for the Army, Air Force and Naval Services.
- Increase the number and amount paid for ROTC scholarships and textbook allowances.
- Include information about the Reserve and National Guard roles, missions and careers in ROTC curriculum.
- Fund additional active duty for officers who enter the Reserve Force immediately following commissioning.
- Better use of separating officers who affiliate in the Reserves at ROTC and JROTC programs
- Calculate Mandatory Removal Date for commissioned officers from the date of entry onto active duty or Initial Military Training, not from the date of commissioning.

Discussion:

A shrinking ROTC footprint, combined with a smaller military and a reduction in active duty bases around the country has reduced the military's presence in communities and on campuses. Less than one percent of the American population is serving in the military. During a period of budget reductions and downsizing, Congressional and Department of Defense (DoD) leadership should avoid the temptation to reduce the ROTC commissioning program under the misimpression that a large supply of new officers aren't needed, and that service academies can be the primary commissioning source.

The Army faces an ongoing shortage of mid-grade officers (Capt and Major). To turn off the commissioning spigot only reduces the inflow that could fill such vacancies.

Uneasy with the prospect of a professional military elite trained by service academies, political leaders prior to World War I sought to diversify the education of the officer corps through ROTC at state colleges and universities; seeking a more liberal education and a broader set of societal values for military officers.

With an all-volunteer force, the need for such diversification is even greater. In 2010, former secretary of defense Robert Gates, in a speech at Duke University, suggested that the military needed to broaden its recruiting base stating that “there is a risk over time of developing a cadre of military leaders that politically, culturally, and geographically have less and less in common with the people they have sworn to defend.”

Both as a contingency against future threats and as a military presence within states, there is a need to maintain ROTC prominence. The service branches that sponsor ROTC have been cutting back on paid ROTC scholarships, assuming that students voluntarily entering ROTC programs will self finance. As the U.S. withdraws from Afghanistan, volunteer rates are likely to fall off, and ROTC will have to again compete for recruits with corporations.

Another temptation may be to relocate ROTC into urban centers. A concentrated population may lower recruiting costs. Yet, rural areas and mid-west states should not be shunned. In addition to attracting students from all geographic areas, the cost of tuition and housing allowance will be cheaper.

Ironically, the Reserve Officers Training Corps often fail to feature a Reserve component career in their curriculum. Yet, last year of the 5,600 officers commissioned through the Army ROTC, only 48 percent of them were given active duty orders, with the balance being sent into the Army Reserve and Army National Guard. Those young officers who are sent into the Reserve Forces need to be activated for longer than the 14 days a year as specified by US Code.

ROTC staff duty is often a reward to career Active component members. Opportunities should be offered to mid-grade and senior officers and enlisted serving in the Reserve Force, or those Reservists who may have recently retired, in order to share a different viewpoint from just an Active duty perspective.

With restricted funding, many newly commissioned officers are being placed into the Individual Ready Reserve while they await their orders. Congress did change the law to provide health care and other benefits during this gray zone, but despite being inactive this period counts against their longevity when calculated against a mandatory separation date. A career clock should not start until an officer’s first pay check or upon initial training.

