



Reserve Officers Association of the United States

Statement for the

**House Committee on Veterans' Affairs
Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity
Subcommittee on Health**

**Hearing on
Legislation to Hire and Retain Physicians and Other Employees of the
Department of Veterans Affairs**

March 16, 2016

"Serving Citizen Warriors through Advocacy and Education since 1922."™

**Reserve Officers Association
1 Constitution Avenue N.E.
Washington, DC 20002-5618
(202) 646-7700**

The Reserve Officers Association of the United States (ROA) is a professional association of commissioned, non-commissioned and warrant officers of our nation's seven uniformed services. ROA was founded in 1922 by General of the Armies John "Black Jack" Pershing during the drawdown years following the end of World War I. It was formed as a permanent institution dedicated to national defense, with a goal to inform America regarding the dangers of unpreparedness. Under ROA's 1950 congressional charter, our purpose is to promote the development and execution of policies that will provide adequate national defense. We do so by developing and offering expertise on the use and resourcing of America's Reserve Components.

The association's members include Reserve and Guard Soldiers, Sailors, Marines, Airmen, and Coast Guardsmen who frequently serve on active duty to meet critical needs of the uniformed services. ROA's membership also includes commissioned officers from the United States Public Health Service and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration who often are first responders during national disasters and help prepare for homeland security.

President:

Col. James R. Sweeney II, USMC (Ret.) 202-646-7706

Executive Director:

Jeffrey E. Phillips 202-646-7726

Legislative Director:

Lt. Col. Susan Lukas, U.S. Air Force Reserve (Ret.) 202-646-7713

DISCLOSURE OF FEDERAL GRANTS OR CONTRACTS

The Reserve Officers Association is a member-supported organization. ROA has not received grants, contracts, or subcontracts from the federal government in the past three years. All other activities and services of the associations are accomplished free of any direct federal funding.

STATEMENT

ROA appreciates the opportunity to discuss proposed legislation for improving the authority of the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to hire and retain physicians and hire Guard and Reserve members. This statement addresses a legislative priority developed by ROA as a result of feedback from ROA members and Reserve Component service members.

SEC. 9. MODIFICATION TO VETERANS PREFERENCE

The Reserve Officers Association urges Congress to support SEC. 9. MODIFICATION TO VETERANS PREFERENCE, which changes title 5, USC 2108(1)(B) and (D) to strike the word “consecutive” and change it to “cumulative” in each instance.

Reserve Component Participation

During the present war, nearly a million Guard and Reserve members have been mobilized, proving essential to the war effort. The reliance of the nation on its Reserve Components will not diminish.

Since September 11, 2001, more than 900,000 members of our reserve components – the National Guard and Reserves of our Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines and Coast Guard – have served in support of the war on terrorism. More than 1,200 have died in that fight.

Guard and Reserve Title 10 Contingency Support

Unique SSAN Activations as of: March 8, 2016

Currently Activated: 25,267 change from last week (+422)
Deactivated Since 9/11: 896,992
Total: 922,259

Reserve Component	* Current Involuntary Activations	change from last week	** Current Voluntary Activations	change from last week	Total Currently Activated	change from last week	***Total Deactivated Since 9/11	***Total Activated Since 9/11
ARNG	6,858	(-14)	349	(-2)	7,207	(-16)	381,753	388,960
USAR	7,181	(+557)	254	(-11)	7,415	(+546)	217,888	225,101
USNR	2,729	(+73)	187	(+1)	2,916	(+74)	54,906	57,822
USMCR	302	(+0)	718	(+0)	1,020	(+0)	62,431	63,451
ANG	2,940	(-107)	1,589	(+51)	4,529	(-56)	102,334	106,863
USAFR	1,116	(-88)	788	(-38)	1,904	(-126)	89,605	71,509
USCGR	164	(+0)	112	(+0)	276	(+0)	8,277	8,553
TOTAL	21,270	(+421)	3,997	(+1)	25,267	(+422)	896,992	922,259

Notes:

* Includes members placed on Active Duty under 10 USC Sections 688, 12301(a), 12302 and 12304

** Includes members placed on Active Duty under 10 USC 12301(d) and members categorized as unknown in CTS statute code

*** Includes members who were activated for Operation Noble Eagle, Operation Enduring Freedom, Operation Iraqi Freedom, Operation New Dawn, Operation Inherent Resolve and Operation Freedom Sentinel

DRS# 21800

Source: Contingency Tracking System (CTS) Daily Processing Files

Produced by the Defense Manpower Data Center

“War is a national challenge, and, for our part, we cannot execute without the Guard and the Reserve,” said Army Chief of Staff Gen. Mark Milley. You can’t talk to a general or admiral for more than five minutes without hearing a variation on that theme.

The chart below shows that the Guard and Reserve have been used in increasingly higher amounts per year. While usage is dropping it will not go down to previous peacetime levels because threats to the nation and world have increased.

Usage of the Reserve Components

Fiscal Year	Man-Days Per Year
1986-1989	1 million
1996-2001	13 million
2002	41.3 million
2005	68.3 million
2012	25.8 million

Data from the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Reserve Affairs (OASD/RA).

Background

According to Jeff Phillips, ROA Executive Director, in a recent op-ed, “It was over my first Philly cheesesteak sandwich – in Philadelphia – that I learned Maj. Bonnie Carroll was not a veteran despite her extraordinary service to our country.”

Reservists today serve virtually everywhere, alongside their “active component” comrades. In battle, the performance of these trained and courageous citizen-warriors of all ranks, specialties, and any other category has been recognized as indistinguishable from the “regulars.” They ask to serve; they deserve equity for that service.

Inequity is written into law; most of the legislation governing the military was written before and during the Cold War. The reserves in those days were a strategic reserve and not used much – that’s where the “one weekend per month and two weeks in the summer” model evolved.

Desert Shield, Desert Storm and the present war changed all that. The reserves are now considered “operational.” They are used continually, like the active force. In the late 1980s, usage of the reserves was 1 million man-days per year; it is now about 25 million man-days. But the law hasn’t kept up as important benefits are limited only to those who serve in “active military, naval, or air service.”

By “important benefits,” we are talking about who you are in the eyes of federal law when it comes to being considered for hiring preferences accorded to veterans.

We are talking about helping young, dynamic new professionals – who understand service and dedication to higher cause – renew our graying and often hidebound federal bureaucracy.

Bonnie stunned me when she told me she wasn’t a veteran.

“But, of course you are, you’ve served in the Air Force,” I countered, momentarily forgetting my cheesesteak sandwich.

No, she told me, she had never amassed enough days on “active duty” to qualify to be a veteran under titles 5 and 38 for federal hiring preference. To be a veteran for hiring preferences, she needed 180 or more *consecutive* days on active duty – and that did not include active duty while she was training. In those days, getting nearly six consecutive months on active duty was tough.

As the operational tempo of the recent past changes and fewer members of the Guard and Reserve deploy (a situation that will last only until the next war) achieving 180 or more consecutive days on active duty will become even more difficult. But it will always be much more likely for these reservists to amass 180 or more *cumulative* days on active duty. Inequity is an enduring theme unless we make this simple change.

Both the Department of Veterans Affairs and the top leaders of our reserve forces informally indicated to ROA there is no cost and they would not object to such a change the law.

Recent legislation sought to grant “honorary” veteran status to reservists with 20 or more years of service – legislation ROA supported. These reservists are a fraction of the whole. We are here urging a simple reform that would substantively help the *vast majority* of reservists who are still serving as citizen-warriors or who separated before military retirement.

Changing one word would provide significant equity to members of our Guard and Reserve who affirm the wisdom of our founders in their willingness to serve boldly, selflessly, and with great fidelity in the defense of our way of life. They balance military service – a consuming and uncompromising business – with the demands of a civilian work life and the care of their families.

According to SGM (Ret) Frank Yoakum, Executive Director, EANGUS, “Major Bonnie Carroll (retired) is one of thousands of National Guard and Reserve retirees who were part of the 1% of America who served in our military--not only served, but gave a lifetime of service--only to find out that our Congress and our government, based on a technicality, does not consider them veterans. In their careers, they were available to go to war; they were trained to go to war; they were ready to go to war; but the timing and placement of their service placed them in support

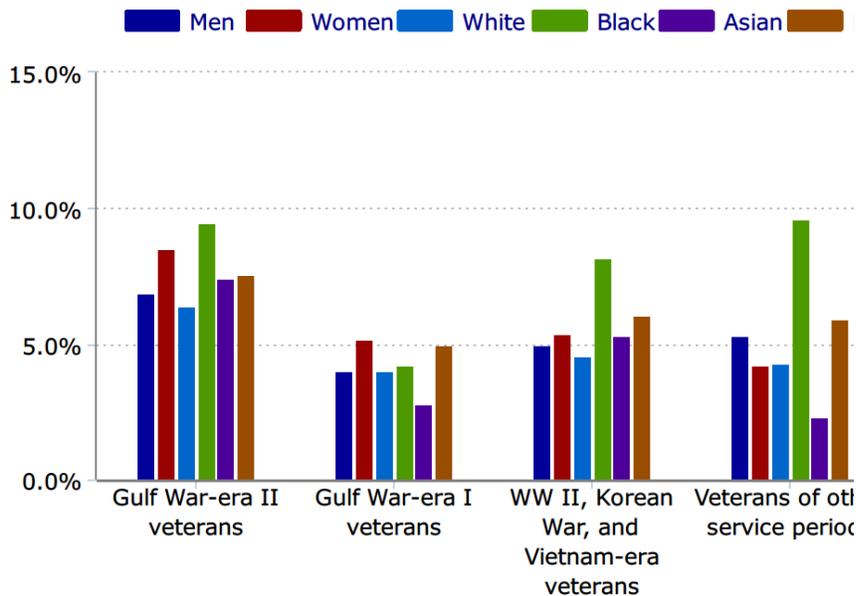
but not direct warfight roles. They should not continue to be penalized for exemplary service. The time is now; the technical change is simple; the personal reward and thanks of a grateful nation is priceless. We strongly encourage Congress to do the right thing and make this correction to the law on behalf of thousands of retirees who really are veterans."

Unemployment of the Guard and Reserve

Unemployment during the Gulf War steadily increased higher for veterans than nonveterans, especially those from the current war. Of that group, 30 percent of both Gulf War-era I and Gulf War-era II veterans were reported to be current or past members of the Reserve or National Guard.

"In 2014, 21.2 million men and women were veterans. Of these, 10.2 million veterans were employed, 573,000 were unemployed, and the rest, 10.5 million, were not in the labor force (neither employed nor seeking employment)." <http://www.bls.gov/opub/ted/2015/veteran-unemployment-decreases-in-2014.htm>

Unemployment rates of persons 18 years and over by veteran service, sex, race, and ethnicity, 2014 annual averages



Click legend items to change data display. Hover over chart to view data. Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

As of March 23, 2015

Since 2014 unemployment overall has decreased, in part because the government increased their efforts to hire more veterans in the federal government to reduce veteran homelessness. By the end of fiscal year 2014, the government was able to employ 516,075 veterans out of 1,990,033 employees. However, most agencies are below the average percentage of 25.9

percent once you exclude the Departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs (27.4% to 48.5%). The remaining agencies average only 13.8 percent

Total On-Board Employees — Veterans with Preference

All Employees	Veterans with Preference		%
Agriculture	95,917	10,519	11.0%
Commerce	45,380	4,633	10.2%
Education	4,195	369	8.8%
Energy	14,992	2,879	19.2%
HHS	84,588	5,714	6.8%
Homeland Security	189,341	43,736	23.1%
HUD	8,444	1,142	13.5%
Interior	69,955	10,203	14.6%
Justice	113,240	21,751	19.2%
Labor	15,940	3,093	19.4%
State	12,694	2,195	17.3%
Treasury	92,619	8,629	9.3%
AID	1,698	235	13.8%
EPA	15,852	1,068	6.7%
GSA	11,501	2,088	18.2%
NASA	17,691	1,555	8.8%
NSF	1,425	92	6.5%
OPM	4,977	1,025	20.6%
NRC	3,871	652	16.8%
SSA	64,684	8,181	12.6%
SBA	4,549	677	14.9%

<https://www.fedshirevets.gov/hire/hrp/reports/EmploymentOfVets-FY14.pdf>

Changing the language for federal preference would provide a pool of Guard and Reserve veterans for agencies to consider, thereby, increasing their veteran hires. In 2012, the Center for New American Security released a report, titled, *Employing Americans Veterans* that said, “Hiring veterans is good business, according to detailed and lengthy interviews with 87 individuals representing 69 companies. The companies reported 11 reasons they hire veterans, with an emphasis on veterans’ leadership and teamwork skills, character and discipline...” The reasons include:

- Leadership and teamwork skills. Veterans typically have led colleagues, accepted direction from others and operated as part of a small team.
- Character. Veterans are perceived as being trustworthy, dependable, drug-free and having a strong work ethic.
- Structure and discipline. Companies, especially those that emphasize safety, appreciate veterans’ experience following established procedures.

- Expertise. Companies value veterans' occupational skills, job-specific experiences and understanding of the military community.
http://www.cnas.org/files/documents/publications/CNAS_EmployingAmericasVeterans_HarrellBerglass.pdf

These and the other reasons discussed in the report should equally apply to why hiring a Guard or Reserve veteran makes sense for the federal government.

Not unlike her citizen-warrior comrades, Bonnie is a remarkable woman. Self-effacing and dedicated to the service of others, she asks nothing for herself. ROA is urging this reform for today's reservists now being shortchanged, and for the benefit of a nation that needs them serving the public as civil servants.

In 1994 Bonnie founded Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors after her husband, an Army officer, was killed in a military plane crash. TAPS supports those who have lost a loved one in military service, but provides expertise to all who need that kind of help. They are known for their unparalleled expertise in the care and recovery of survivors.

For her work with surviving families, President Obama awarded Bonnie the Presidential Medal of Freedom in November.

Maj. Bonnie Carroll ultimately retired after 32 years in both the Air National Guard and the Air Force Reserve.

But according to federal law, she's not a veteran for federal hiring benefits and did not get a 5-point preference that would have increased her chances to be hired earlier in her career.

It's time that changed for the men and women serving today.

CONCLUSION

The Reserve Officers Association, the Enlisted Association of the National Guard of the United States and the National Guard Association of the United States supports legislation that would extend federal preference to the deserving men and women of the Reserve Components.