



‘Just Reservists’: The Enemy Is Us

Twenty years ago, I was selected to be the Reserve Affairs Chief of a command. My assignment was to “integrate Reservists into the Total Force.” I wasn’t quite sure what that meant or how to accomplish it, but off I went: recruiting top-notch individuals, developing training courses, creating and deploying specialized response teams, and assigning Reservists to key positions in Active Duty offices. Overall, Reservists were not only being utilized more effectively, they were looked upon as an integral part of the team.

Then I attended an awards ceremony for the outstanding Active Duty and Reserve members of the year. I was bothered that there were two separate awards, but was horrified when the Reservist’s trophy was half the size of his Active counterpart’s. After pointing out the discrepancy to higher authority, I received a letter stating “it should never have happened” and the “Total Force concept” was supported by the command. I wondered then how long it would take to move from “concept” (something formed in the mind) to reality, and what would change mindsets and perceptions.

I was reminded of that award ceremony recently as several documents crossed my desk. These addressed issues affecting both Active and Reserve Component members, but only outlined recommendations for improving the situation for Active Duty personnel. Once again, I was assured the discrepancies weren’t intentional. I believe that; but, sadly, it shows that Reservists are often times still an afterthought rather than an automatic part of the initial dialogue.

One more story. I overheard a conversation recently between two wives of men serving in Iraq. One invited the other to join a book club and suggested getting the book they were reading at the base library. I cringed when the other asked if she were authorized to use the base library because her husband was “just a Reservist.”

REA advocates on your behalf in quality-of-life areas and also exists to “enhance the image of enlisted Reservists to promote greater recognition of the professional skill and performance demanded by their positions.” But advocacy starts at home. Before we can change the mindset of others, the term “just Reservists” must be banned from your own vocabulary.

Legislative Call for Action

Below is a short list of bills that have been introduced in the 110th Congress. Contact your representatives and urge them to co-sponsor bills you want to see passed into law. A bill will languish in committee unless constituents show interest, i.e. YOU! Help your representatives help you. For complete information on a bill, go to <http://thomas.loc.gov>.

Family:

S.902—Provide support and assistance for Guard and Reserve families undergoing deployment, and for other purposes. Introduced March 15 by Sen. Tom Harkin (D-Iowa). Ten co-sponsors.

H.R.1086—Amend IRS Code to exclude from gross income the earned income of a spouse of a member of the Armed Forces of the United States serving in a combat zone. Introduced Feb. 15 by Rep. Scott Garrett (R-N.J.). Six co-sponsors.

H.R.1541—Provide support and assistance for families of members of the National Guard and Reserve who are undergoing deployment, and for other purposes. Introduced March 15 by Rep. Bruce Braley (D-Iowa). Two co-sponsors.

Health Care:

S.383—Extend the period of eligibility for health care for combat service in the Persian Gulf War or future hostilities from two years to five years after discharge or release. Introduced Jan. 24 by Sen. Daniel Akaka (D-Hawaii). One co-sponsor.

S.604—Limit increases in certain health-care costs. Introduced Feb. 15 by Sen. Frank Lautenberg (D-N.J.). Five co-sponsors.

H.R.1110—Amend IRS Code to allow federal civilian and military retirees to pay health insurance premiums on a pre-tax basis and to allow a deduction for Tricare supplemental premiums. Introduced Feb. 16 by Rep. Tom Davis (R-Va.). Eighty co-sponsors.

Education:

S644, HR530, HR567, HR1102, HR1211, HR1330, HR1346, HR1641. See page 20 for a summary of these education bills, which will be featured in more detail in THE OFFICER next month. ▀