

Chairman Voinovich and Chairwoman Davis,

It is a pleasure and an honor to be here today representing the nearly 80,00 members of the Reserve Officers Association of the United States. ROA was founded in 1922 and chartered by Congress in 1950. We are charged by our charter to "support and promote the development and execution of a military policy for the United States that will provide adequate national security."

Today, nearly 220,000 members of the Reserve Armed Forces have been mobilized in support of Operation Iraq Freedom. Since September 11, 2001, more than a quarter-million citizen-soldiers, sailors, Marines, and airmen have been called to active duty and have left their homes, families, and communities in response to emerging contingencies. By the General Accounting Office's estimate, during Operation Desert Shield/Desert Storm, 41 percent of the activated reservists lost money when their civilian paycheck was compared to their military salary (including the tax advantages of various benefits and allowances). Applying this percentage to today's activated population suggests that nearly 90,000 troops, a hefty slice of our Total Force assets in Operation Iraqi Freedom are being wounded financially before they even see the enemy they came to fight. The situation is bad and it can only get worse when you consider that Iraq will very likely take several years to be rebuilt, that the Reserve components will probably be supervising at least some project, and that if recent history is any guide, such occasions will continue.

If we are serious about the societal benefits of the Total Force policy and the popular support it brings to any military undertaking, we need to reinforce it in every way possible. We cannot allow the compensation aspects of the system to drift so far off center that fully a third or more of its Reserve component members become economically dysfunctional merely by putting on their uniforms. Bankruptcy is not an effective recruiting or retention tool. With all of the other more immediate (and less tractable) issues mobilized reservists must face, we should do all we can to eliminate or ameliorate financial insecurity caused by post-mobilization compensation dysfunction.

S 593, The Reservists Pay Security Act of 2003, is a significant step toward resolving this issue for a significant portion of the reservists who have been mobilized to support Operation Iraqi Freedom. The bill would entitle any employee of the federal government who takes leave without pay in order to perform service as a member of the uniformed services or as a member of the National Guard to receive civilian pay in the amount, which when taken together with his military pay, would be no less than the basic pay he would then be receiving if no interruption in his civilian employment had occurred. Simply put, the bill would ensure that at least financially, no harm would be done to a mobilized federal employee.

There are approximately 120,000 federal employees who serve as members of the Reserve components; a significant number of these, between 12,000 and 13,000, are currently mobilized. As we noted above, there will be more reservists and Guardsmen activated over time in this contingency operation, and this will not be the last contingency operation. More importantly,

however, this bill is an opportunity for the federal government to lead the way and to set the example for other employers of members of the Guard and reserves. There are already many employers, city, state, and private, who pay all or some part of the difference between their employees' civilian salaries and their military compensation. The Reserve Officers Association has for some years now maintained a list of employers who "do the right thing," by their employees who are Guardsmen and reservists. The list is available on our web site (www.roa.org). I recommend it to your attention. It makes interesting reading.

If we are to encourage employers to help protect their employees' financial wellbeing when they are serving their country, the federal government must lead the way and set the example. If the federal government does not do the right thing, what kind of a message does it send to those employers whose connection is more tenuous? The federal government, whose actions in this regard can only be legislated, must lead by example and encourage the private sector to do what cannot and ought not to be legislated. There is more to this issue than federal mobilized employees and their families, but we must start here, now, at home as it were. This provision is a first step in demonstrating in a practical and meaningful way that the contributions of our citizen-soldiers, sailors, Marines, and airman are fully recognized and appreciated by the nation.

Finally, it is worthwhile recalling why this legislation is so important to the nation at this time. We have entered a new and dangerous era, in which the demands of being a citizen-soldier are growing with each contingency. The key to our ability to respond to these contingencies is the availability of a trained and ready Reserve component force. When we put the financial wellbeing of our citizen-soldiers, sailors, Marines, and airmen and their families at risk routinely, we put the Reserve components at risk, and with them the Total Force. It is a fool's bargain -- penny-wise and pound-foolish.

There are many elements of a wartime mobilization that we cannot control or mitigate; undeserved financial hardship is one that we can control and obviate to a greater or lesser degree. Passage of S 593, The Reservists Pay Security Act of 2003, is an ideal beginning to the process.