

**STATEMENT OF  
REPRESENTATIVE IKE SKELTON  
BEFORE THE  
COMMISSION ON THE NATIONAL GUARD AND RESERVES**

**March 8, 2006**

Mr. Chairman, members of the Commission, thank you for the opportunity to share my thoughts as you undertake the overview responsibilities as members of this timely and important Commission.

As you are well aware, the Ronald W. Reagan National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2005 established the Commission on the National Guard and Reserves. The intent of the Commission is to study the roles and missions of the National Guard and Reserve, as well as the compensation and benefits, including health care, that are provided to members of the Reserve components.

This monumental task cannot be understated, the National Guard and Reserves have undergone a fundamental transformation that few Americans truly understand or appreciate. The reserve components are no longer a strategic operational force waiting for the Russians to come through the Fulda Gap or a reserve force for the "big" war, neither are they an operational force in reserves.

The fact of the matter is that over the past decade the reserve components have become an integral and vital operational reserve force, and the active duty components would not be able to successfully carry out their mission requirements without them.

As of February 1, 2006, there were 127,819 National Guard and Reserve personnel who were mobilized and deployed in operations around the world. Put in a different perspective, during fiscal year 2002, the reserve components provided 42 million days of support to the active component, this compares with 68.3 million days of support during 2005.

One of the duties of the Commission is to examine the current roles and mission of the reserve components and identify appropriate potential future roles and missions. This is a significant task because the transformation of the Guard and Reserve occurred over time without much significant public debate on the new role that the reserve components have been asked to fill.

While the reserve components have done an extraordinary job in meeting these new mission requirements, there has been limited review on the long-term impact this change has had on the reserve components to adequately man the force in an all-volunteer environment, particularly during a long-sustained conflict. While this issue also resonates with active duty personnel, this concern is particularly acute among our citizen-soldiers who have a complex environment in which they must successfully navigate in order to serve their nation.

In response to the Global War on Terror, thousands of National Guardsmen and reservists have been called to duty for up to two years. And, we are beginning to see an impact on recruitment in nearly all of the reserve components. For example, all of the reserve components, except the Marine Corps Reserves, ended last year below their authorized end strength. In addition, except for the Marine Corps and Air Force Reserves, the rest of the reserve components failed to achieve their recruiting goals for 2005.

This is not to say that I opposed the changing role of the reserve components as an operational reserve force. I do and I believe that they are doing an admirable job. But, there is a fine balance that must be found to ensure that the current or even potentially higher operational tempo of the reserve components is sustainable in the long term. The question the Commission needs to answer is where is that balance? Can there be greater utilization of the Guard and Reserves in meeting the national security needs of the country, while sustaining the all-volunteer citizen-soldiers? Can the Guard and Reserve meet those mission requirements over time by providing the training and equipment

necessary for the operational reserves to carry out their mission, and will there need to be changes to their benefits to reflect their changing status?

As the Commission considers these vitally important questions, I hope that the Commissioners will also take the opportunity to look at the strategic value of employer support. Today, thousands of employers have stepped forward to support their citizen-soldier employees who have been called to active duty. Unfortunately, that is not the case for all reserve components personnel who have been mobilized. There needs to be a systematic review of whether the programs and policies to encourage employer support for Guard and Reserve personnel are appropriate and adequate, and whether there needs to be further support for employers or additional protections for Guardsmen and reservists, including those who may be self-employed.

I understand the Commission is planning to review the capabilities, operational support, organization and structure, training and readiness of the reserve components in addition to the roles and missions, these are important areas that need to be studied. However, I would ask that the Commission not only study whether the Department of Defense and individual service plans for future organization and structure of the Guard and Reserves are adequate, but whether such plans were developed in a holistic manner. Utilization of the reserve components should not just be made on whether the active components believe it is more cost-effective to have the reserves shoulder the burden, if the reserve components are to be a truly integrated operational force than there should be a comprehensive review of the entire spectrum of service requirements when determining appropriate roles and missions for the Guard and Reserves.

The other important responsibility that the Commission has been charged with is the study of compensation and benefits for reserve component members. As the roles and missions of the Guard and Reserves have changed over the years, there has been greater demand to increase the compensation benefits for the Guard and Reserve to more appropriately reflect their greater contribution to our nation's defense. This will be a challenging task, as there have been many changes to the compensation programs and

policies over the past several years and to a certain extent we determining to what level these changes have had on the recruitment and retention of the reserves forces.

However, there still remain many more compensation proposals to further enhance the benefits for the Guard and Reserves. For example, there has been an effort to reduce the retirement age for the reserve components, and to tie the reductions to greater mobilization. There are also calls to provide health care and dental coverage on the same basis to reservists that are provided to active duty personnel. And, one of the more interesting proposals that have been raised is to eliminate the 1/30<sup>th</sup> rule in compensating reserve members. While these are just a sample of the myriad of issues that have been brought before the House Armed Services Committee for consideration, I am sure that they will also come before this Commission.

While some of you are well versed on the complexity of the military compensation system, for some it will be a new and interesting challenge. As a former Chairman of the Military Personnel Subcommittee, I can tell you this, once you have mastered the intricacies and details of the personnel system, you will find this the most rewarding part of the Commissions' responsibility. But, a note of warning, the military personnel system is complex and complicated. Often time, while it may seem that a simple change could resolve a major problem, too often the end result is even greater challenges. As you will come to find out, one small change in the system can have enormous ramifications in their second and third order effects on the system. So I urge the Commission to consider these impacts as well, as you sort through the compensation program. Perhaps, given this challenge it may make more sense to overhaul the entire system, but once again, I caution the Commission to consider the overall impact and perception on the force.

I appreciate the opportunity to share my thoughts with you. As members of this Commission you have been charged with a substantial responsibility, and I stand ready to you in your endeavor.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.