



**OFFICIAL STATEMENT OF
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**FOR THE
U.S. HOUSE AND SENATE
COMMITTEES ON ARMED SERVICES**

**ON
FY 2027 NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT PRIORITIES**

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The Reserve Organization of America (ROA) is a congressionally chartered military service organization, incorporated under Internal Revenue Service Code Section 501(c)(19). Its membership includes servicemembers of all ranks, veterans, and family members from across our nation’s eight uniformed services who were separated under honorable conditions. ROA is the only national military service organization dedicated solely and exclusively to supporting the Reserve Components.

Established in 1922 by General of the Armies John J. “Black Jack” Pershing during the significant post–World War I drawdown, ROA was founded to advocate for a strong national defense and to advance the creation of a trained corps of reserve officers capable of anchoring rapid military expansion in times of war. Under ROA’s congressional charter, granted in 1950, this purpose remains unchanged: to promote the development and execution of policies that ensure an adequate national defense. ROA fulfills this mandate by providing expertise on the organization, employment, and resourcing of America’s Reserve Components.

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DISCLOSURE OF FEDERAL GRANTS OR CONTRACTS

The Reserve Officers Association of the United States, now doing business as the Reserve Organization of America, has not received any grants, contracts, or subcontracts from the federal government in the past three years.

CURRICULUM VITAE

John B. Hashem is a retired United States Army major general with over 40 years of service in the Army Reserve, encompassing roles in infantry, psychological operations, civil affairs, and strategic planning. He currently serves as the Chief Executive Officer of the Reserve Organization of America, a position he assumed in September 2025, following his retirement from active service.

Hashem’s awards include the Distinguished Service Medal, Defense Superior Service Medal (with Oak Leaf Cluster), Legion of Merit, Bronze Star Medal (with Oak Leaf Cluster), Combat Infantryman Badge, Ranger Tab, Parachutist Badge, Air Assault Badge, Office of the Secretary of Defense Staff Badge, and the Army Staff Badge.

INTRODUCTION

Chairmen Rogers and Wicker, Ranking Members Smith and Reed, and distinguished members of the Committees on Armed Services, the Reserve Organization of America (ROA) thanks you for your leadership and sustained oversight in advancing the FY 2026 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA).

Your work delivered measurable gains for the Reserve Component (RC) during a legislative cycle marked by compressed timelines, unprecedented operational demands, and the longest government shutdown in American history.

ROA appreciates the Committees' actions to strengthen modernization and capacity across key RC platforms and mission areas. Extending the Army Tactical Wheeled Vehicle strategy provides essential continuity to address Reserve Component integration, interoperability, safety, maintenance, and readiness risks. Safeguarding the KC-135 Primary Mission Aircraft Inventory during the KC-46 transition and tying further KC-46 deliveries to corrective actions, ensures modernization advances without degrading Reserve tanker capability. Similarly, pacing F-15E retirements and preventing premature A-10 divestment preserve fighter training pipelines, operational experience, and deterrence while follow-on solutions are developed at installations such as Whiteman Air Force Base.

Your oversight of munitions and industrial surge capacity, including stricter reporting on minimum production rates and two-war readiness, strengthens the Department's ability to align stockpiles, timelines, and demand signals with operational plans.

The requirement for an Indo-Pacific mobilization readiness study, including RC integration and a civilian skills inventory, reflects a clear recognition that large-scale mobilization must be planned and exercised as a Total Force.

ROA also thanks the Committees for people-first measures that directly improve retention and readiness. Enhancements to the Transition Assistance Program (TAP) that provide RC flexibility support servicemembers and families who transition multiple times across a military and civilian career. Direction on RC Aviation Incentive Pay parity advances a longstanding effort to retain experienced aviators and stabilize training pipelines.

These outcomes reflect a consistent commitment to readiness, disciplined modernization, and responsible stewardship of the Total Force. On behalf of our members, ROA is grateful for your leadership and stands ready to support implementation as you develop the FY 2027 NDAA.

ROA's testimony this year focuses on additional actions the Committees can take to strengthen readiness across the Total Force, including during a government shutdown, and seeks to build on the strong momentum established by last year's comprehensive Act.

ROA was encouraged by the meaningful progress in C-130 modernization, which may, for the first time since FY 2023, be included in the forthcoming President's Budget Request. This progress includes securing more than \$1.4 billion for C-130 modernization in the FY 2026 Defense Appropriations Act for the Navy Reserve and Air National Guard, as well as your

inclusion of Section 145 in the FY 2026 NDAA, which extended the prohibition on reducing C-130 aircraft assigned to the ANG and required a report detailing optimal basing actions for fielding C-130J aircraft to recapitalize existing C-130Hs.

However, much more work remains. Both the Navy Reserve and the Air Force Reserve continue to face significant interoperability challenges driven by delayed recapitalization and persistent obsolescence risks. For FY27, ROA urges support for:

- At least eight C-130Js to continue the unfunded recapitalization of the Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve Command
- 100 million dollars for fleet-wide Diminishing Manufacturing Sources requirements resulting from U.S. Air Force funding shortfalls
- Six Navy Reserve KC-130Js to continue recapitalization of the C/KC-130T fleet
- Four LC-130J ski-equipped aircraft for the Air National Guard
- 25 to 30 million dollars to complete non-recurring engineering for the LC-130J
- Two KC-130Js to replace U.S. Marine Corps operational losses

Collectively, these actions would continue the unfunded recapitalization of the remaining 48 legacy ANG and AFRC C-130H aircraft, sustain recapitalization of the 30 aging Navy Reserve C-130T fleet logistics aircraft, and complete recapitalization of the nine New York ANG LC-130H arctic-capable aircraft.

As the nation confronts the most demanding global security environment in decades, the RC remains indispensable to sustained operations, strategic depth, and surge capacity. Last year's actions by the Committees made a measurable difference, but continued progress is essential. Integrating the RC into modernization timelines, operational planning, and mobilization frameworks is not optional. It is a strategic requirement.

ROA stands ready to assist as you shape the FY 2027 NDAA. Questions regarding this statement may be directed to ROA's Director of Legislation and Military Policy, Matthew Schwartzman, at mschwartzman@roa.org.

CODIFY THE DUTY STATUS REFORM ACT

H.R. 6976, the Duty Status Reform Act, presents an opportunity to modernize the statutory framework governing Reserve and National Guard service. For too long, the RC have operated under a fragmented structure of more than thirty separate duty authorities—an arrangement that complicates activation, confuses commanders and servicemembers, and ultimately erodes the Department's ability to generate ready forces at the speed required by contemporary operational demands.

The existing construct forces planners and personnel managers to navigate a maze of outdated statutes, each tied to differing benefits, funding sources, restrictions, and administrative requirements. This fragmentation has contributed to longstanding inequities in pay and entitlements among servicemembers who may be performing the same mission under slightly

different authorities. H.R. 6976 addresses these challenges by consolidating existing authorities into a coherent, intuitive structure aligned with the needs of the modern Total Force.

Under the legislation, all RC duty is reorganized into four standardized categories:

- Category I Active Duty
- Category II Active Duty
- Category III Reserve Component Duty
- Category IV Remote Assignments

This construct establishes clear, predictable parameters for activation, duration, consent, and associated benefits, giving commanders a straightforward and repeatable framework for employing reserve forces and providing servicemembers a transparent understanding of their service conditions. It brings order to a system long marked by uncertainty and enables the Department to align manpower planning, funding, and operational requirements with greater consistency and precision, which is essential for generating ready forces in a resource constrained, high tempo environment.

The Act also enhances readiness by eliminating the administrative friction that has historically slowed mobilization timelines and degraded unit cohesion. Section 3 of the bill directs that when a servicemember transitions between orders with 24 hours or fewer between them, that service will be treated as continuous Federal service. Moreover, when a mission purpose or legal authority changes mid mission, the order will be amended in place rather than terminated and reissued.

Today, even brief administrative gaps between orders can interrupt TRICARE coverage, reset BAH, delay pay, disrupt leave accrual, and create unnecessary turbulence at critical phases of unit preparation and deployment. Such disruptions consume time and personnel resources, forcing commanders and staffs to focus on correcting paperwork rather than preparing forces. By eliminating these seams, the Act ensures that servicemembers remain fully mission focused and that commanders retain uninterrupted accountability and visibility of their personnel. This reform strengthens readiness by allowing units to move through training, deployment, and reintegration phases without unnecessary administrative pauses.

Readiness is also enhanced through improvements to the Department's ability to plan, budget, and report on the employment of reserve forces. The consolidation of dozens of legacy duty statuses into four categories transforms how the Department tracks and programs reserve manpower. Because each category maps to clearly defined purposes, the Department will be able to forecast costs more accurately, better align resources with mission sets, and reduce reprogramming actions driven solely by status specific funding nuances.

The Act also requires more transparent documentation of activations for emergencies, preplanned operational support, and cyber missions, giving Congress and the Department a clearer picture of how and when reserve forces are being used. This improved transparency strengthens strategic oversight, facilitates better long-term force design decisions, and reinforces the Department's stewardship of reserve manpower.

At the operational level, the Act provides a major advancement in the interoperability of Title 10 and Title 32 forces, particularly in domestic response and homeland defense missions. By updating the statutory definition of “contingency operation” to include the new duty categories—especially fulltime National Guard duty—the Act eliminates distinctions that previously forced states and the Department to toggle authorities to align benefits or access capabilities. This harmonization allows dual status commanders, state authorities, and federal planners to integrate Reserve and National Guard forces more effectively in disaster response, largescale emergencies, and emergent cyber incidents.

H.R. 6976 also modernizes Title 32 governance itself by clarifying training responsibilities, homeland defense authorities, administrative oversight, and programmatic support, including activities such as the Youth Challenge Program. These updates strengthen readiness by ensuring that state and federal roles are clearly defined and by aligning National Guard structures with the new duty construct. This delivers long sought parity between National Guard and Reserve forces while improving the Department’s ability to employ each component in accordance with its statutory mission.

From a personnel readiness standpoint, the Act’s alignment of benefits—while often described through the lens of fairness or parity—also produces direct readiness gains:

- Clear, predictable health care eligibility, including standardized early TRICARE access and transitional coverage, ensures that servicemembers are medically ready when activated and remain continuously covered through demobilization.
- Standardized GI Bill accrual rules support retention in key skill fields by reinforcing the Department’s ability to offer dependable incentives for continued service.
- The alignment of legal protections, small business relief, and reemployment rights reduces friction with civilian employers and families, which is essential to sustaining a ready and resilient reserve force.

Put differently, when servicemembers have confidence that their benefits follow their mission, they are more willing and able to serve when called.

The Act’s careful implementation strategy reflects the scale of this modernization effort. By providing a default ten-year phase in period—with the option to accelerate only upon joint certification of readiness by the Department of Defense (DoD), the Department of Homeland Security, and the Department of Veterans Affairs—the bill ensures that the Department can update personnel systems, funding structures, and administrative processes without disrupting accrued benefits or generating avoidable turbulence. This approach protects servicemembers while enabling the Department to execute the transition with the precision required.

For these reasons, among others, inclusion of the Duty Status Reform Act in the FY 2027 NDAA is essential. This legislation truly represents a once in a generation update to the legal foundation governing our RC.

RESOURCE RESERVE COMPONENT INTEGRATION AND TOTAL FORCE READINESS AT A LEVEL NOT LESS THAN 5 PERCENT OF GDP

America's military readiness relies on sustained, predictable, and adequately resourced funding. ROA urges the Committee to support a FY 2027 defense authorization set at no less than 5 percent of the U.S. Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

A defense budget at 5 percent of GDP provides the foundation required to meet current operational demands and to integrate the RC at the scale envisioned in joint warfighting concepts. This level of investment enables nuclear modernization, reinforces air and missile defense, and supports munitions production at credible depth. Most importantly, it strengthens Total Force readiness.

The RC executes a significant share of essential missions in logistics, cyber, medical support, engineering, and aviation sustainment. These missions require predictable resources, aligned modernization, and training that reflects the operational tempo the nation now places on its reservists. The RC also supports domestic missions of national importance, including sustained operations at the southern border under U.S. Northern Command through Joint Task Force–Southern Border, as well as civil support in the National Capital Region.

These missions carry serious risk. West Virginia National Guard soldier U.S. Army Specialist Sarah Beckstrom was killed, and Air Force Staff Sgt. Andrew Wolfe, also of West Virginia, was critically wounded in the 2025 ambush near the White House. RC units have also absorbed combat losses overseas, including six Army Reserve Soldiers from the 103rd Sustainment Command who were killed when an Iranian drone struck a U.S. tactical operations center at Port Shuaiba, Kuwait, on March 1, 2026.

A 5 percent commitment allows the Department to expand large scale joint training and institutionalize recurring mobilization exercises. The Section 383 event directed in last year's NDAA represented the first comprehensive mobilization rehearsal since NIFTY NUGGET. These exercises validate force generation timelines, test theater reception and distribution concepts, and ensure that RC units remain fully integrated into combatant command planning and execution.

Adequate resourcing ensures that equipment, mission systems, aviation sustainment infrastructure, and training capabilities remain aligned with operational plans. Returning targeted equipment investments to historical marks, including the levels funded in FY 2020 for the National Guard and Reserve Equipment Account (NGREA) would strengthen interoperability across the Total Force.

Preliminary analysis suggests that the Administration's expected request of roughly 1.5 trillion dollars for national defense would represent approximately 4.7 percent of projected 2026 GDP. This is meaningful progress, but it remains below the level required to sustain readiness while supporting ongoing operations. High intensity engagements, including Operation Epic Fury, highlight this concern. Initial estimates placed the cost of the first 100 hours at 3.7 billion dollars, or nearly 900 million dollars per day. Much of that cost was unbudgeted. Cumulative expenditures across the broader theater since late 2023 have reached the tens of billions,

including munitions replacement, missile defense interceptors, attrition recovery, and infrastructure repair.

The Committee should plan for near term supplemental appropriations or establish dedicated contingency funding lines to protect core modernization accounts. The early phases of OEFU show how rapidly unbudgeted costs can accumulate in high intensity operations. Without separate appropriations, the Department will be forced to divert procurement and readiness funding to support immediate operational requirements. This would recreate a cycle that diminishes modernization and increases long term strategic risk.

A full 5 percent base budget, paired with timely supplemental funding for active operations, provides a credible path to maintain readiness, preserve momentum, and sustain the nation's warfighting advantage.

Allied trends reinforce the need for sustained investment. NATO's decision to pursue a 5 percent spending framework by 2035 reflects a shared recognition of the global threat environment and the requirement to rebuild industrial capacity and munitions stockpiles. Meeting this benchmark at home strengthens U.S. leadership, enhances combined readiness, and ensures RC units receive equipment and capabilities on timelines aligned with active component fielding.

Leading by example will strengthen U.S. military posture, reinforce allied confidence, and communicate clear resolve to competitors. In recent years, U.S. defense spending has remained in the mid 3 percent range of GDP. Closing the gap to 5 percent should be regarded as a strategic floor appropriate to a world in which the United States must simultaneously deter a nuclear armed Russia in Europe, maintain escalation dominance during active operations in the Middle East, and counter the accelerating modernization of the People's Republic of China. China's sustained advances in naval capacity, long range precision strike, space systems, and counter space capabilities are intended to complicate U.S. power projection in the Indo Pacific.

A 5 percent base commitment, supported by timely supplemental appropriations, protects modernization, preserves readiness, and strengthens the Department's capacity to conduct recurring mobilization exercises, integrate Reserve Component units into operational planning, and maintain the nation's warfighting advantage.

ENSURE CONTINUED RC PAY AND TRAINING DURING A GOVERNMENT SHUTDOWN

ROA supports S.3168, the Shutdown Fairness Act, and urges its inclusion in the FY 2027 NDAA to ensure uninterrupted pay for servicemembers during a lapse in appropriations by authorizing such sums as necessary to compensate covered personnel, including RC members performing active service or inactive duty training (IDT).

However, S.3168 does not address the broader challenges the RC faces during a shutdown. When appropriations lapse, any activity not designated as excepted must cease, which results in the suspension of routine IDT, many annual training events, and most professional military

education (PME). When drills are cancelled, training does not occur and the associated compensation is not earned, which directly affects household finances and unit readiness.

Although S.3168 provides pay when duty is performed, it does not designate routine training, PME, or the support functions required to execute IDT, annual training (AT), active duty for training (ADT), and PME as excepted activities. It also does not provide the obligation authority for orders, travel, civilian and contractor support, or schoolhouse operations. Without this authority, scheduled training halts, qualification timelines slip, PME is delayed, and units experience avoidable readiness loss.

For these reasons, ROA respectfully urges the Committees to incorporate these additional provisions into the FY 2027 NDAA. Doing so will preserve pay continuity during a funding lapse, designate scheduled RC training and PME as excepted activities for readiness, authorize the orders, travel, and support necessary to execute that training, and establish a narrowly tailored compensation or funded reschedule option when drills are cancelled solely due to a shutdown.

This comprehensive approach will protect RC readiness, prevent avoidable training and PME delays, and uphold the Department's responsibility to the force and their families.

PRESERVE DEDICATED MEDEVAC CAPABILITY WITHIN THE ARMY RESERVE

ROA urges the Committee to include S.1951, the Retaining Essential Support for Combat and Unified Evacuation (RESCUE) Act of 2025, in the FY 2027 NDAA.

The bill preserves the Army's dedicated aeromedical evacuation capability within the Medical Service Corps and clarifies roles across the enterprise. Under the legislation, Army aviation remains responsible for organizing, training, and equipping aircraft, while the Army medical department retains medical command and control, patient care responsibilities, and clinical standards during evacuation operations. The bill reaffirms the Medical Service Corps as the primary joint provider for intra-theater MEDEVAC, codifying a structure that is essential to combat power, casualty survival, and joint readiness.

This action is timely considering the Army Transformation Initiative (ATI). Following the April 30, 2025, direction to streamline force structure and divest legacy systems, the Army began realigning aviation and medical enterprises and reviewing aircraft allocations and headquarters constructs that influence MEDEVAC doctrine, personnel, and fleet mix. Early implementation steps related to headquarters rationalization and platform divestments carry direct implications for intra-theater evacuation capacity and medical command and control.

Proposals to reduce or restructure MEDEVAC helicopter allocations, including within the RC, underscore the risk of extended evacuation timelines and increased patient vulnerability if changes proceed without validated concepts for distributed operations and prolonged care. These near-term actions demonstrate the need for statutory guardrails to preserve a dedicated, medically governed MEDEVAC enterprise.

ROA supported Section 112 of last year's NDAA authorizing multiyear procurement of the UH60 Black Hawk. This authority provides a stable mechanism to sustain and modernize the Army's primary MEDEVAC platform, which is proven, widely fielded, and supported across Active and Reserve formations, while positioning the Army to transition efficiently to next generation MEDEVAC aircraft as they mature.

IndoPacific (INDOPACOM) operating conditions further reinforce the requirement for a dedicated MEDEVAC capability. Large Scale Combat Operations (LSCO) are expected to generate casualties at rates that rapidly degrade combat power; as wounded personnel accumulate, units lose tempo, mobility, and cohesion. Dedicated MEDEVAC is therefore central to preserving and regenerating combat effectiveness. Doctrine and operational experience make clear that MEDEVAC and CASEVAC are not interchangeable. MEDEVAC provides protected movement with clinically supervised en route care under medical authority. CASEVAC does not.

Substituting general purpose aviation for MEDEVAC diminishes specialized medical training, weakens medical command relationships, and reduces survivability in high threat environments. In INDOPACOM, vast distances, contested airspace, and episodic air superiority demand clinically governed MEDEVAC capable of exploiting narrow access windows, integrating with maritime evacuation pathways, and sustaining prolonged en route care when timelines to Role 2 or Role 3 extend. The Army's HH60M fleet, equipped with a medical interior, mission systems, oxygen generation capability, and reconfigurable litter capacity, provides the Joint Force's most mature intra-theater evacuation capability to meet these demands.

The RESCUE Act provides essential guardrails as the ATI progresses. By requiring the Army to maintain a dedicated MEDEVAC capability, including personnel, training, doctrine, and aircraft configured specifically for medical evacuation, and by anchoring medical command and control and clinical standards within the medical department, the bill prevents incremental degradation of the MEDEVAC enterprise through ad hoc restructuring or asset shifts without comprehensive, risk-based assessment.

The legislation also aligns MEDEVAC governance with operational planning assumptions, contingency requirements, support to civil authorities, Chemical, Biological, Radiological, and Nuclear (CBRN) response, humanitarian assistance, and installation emergency medical response, ensuring the capability remains scaled to support Combatant Commanders across the full spectrum of missions.

DELIVER RC DENTAL READINESS

DoD has long maintained that readiness begins with the servicemember. This is especially evident in the dental readiness of the RC. For nearly two decades, internal reporting and external reviews have shown that inadequate dental readiness is a major driver of non-deployability, slows mobilization flow, and generates avoidable costs when units arrive at pre-deployment medical processing sites with high numbers of members in Dental Class 3.

During the surge period of the mid 2000s, the RC reported that only 26 percent of members were fully medically ready. Readiness improved to 47 percent by early FY 2010, but dental readiness consistently lagged other individual medical readiness elements and remained a primary reason for holds and rework at mobilization. Many units continued to fall short of the DoD goal of 95 percent in Dental Class 1 or 2.

The scale of dental burden in deployed forces is well documented. Reviews of U.S. military data across multiple theaters show annual dental emergency (DE) rates ranging from 26 to 324 per 1,000 personnel, with an average of approximately 152 per 1,000. In hostile environments since 2000, the average DE rate has been approximately 118 per 1,000.

This body of evidence also estimates that about 12 percent of all casualties requiring care in hostile environments involve dental or oral maxillofacial (OMF) conditions. Dental issues consistently rank among the most common reasons for medical evacuation, often accounting for 2 to 16 percent of evacuations depending on the theater and time. These are costly and largely preventable conditions.

Evacuations for dental conditions carry significant cost and readiness impacts. Civilian benchmarks place the median cost of air evacuation near 40,000 dollars. Military movement from certain locations in AFRICOM to Role 4 care has been estimated at 17,000 to 265,000 dollars per case, excluding lost duty days, backfill, and security requirements. In counterinsurgency operations, limited access to dental support has resulted in up to ten days of soldier unavailability per emergency, which is unacceptable for low density military occupational specialties and small teams.

Given these realities, eliminating the principal barrier to routine dental readiness in the drilling force, which is out of pocket cost, is a prudent and cost-effective action. DoD analyses of Reserve individual medical readiness identify expense and access as the main reasons members defer dental care until mobilization, which forces urgent correction at the most expensive point in the force generation process and compresses collective training timelines.

In RC medical readiness trends, laboratories, immunizations, and periodic health assessments have steadily improved, while dental compliance has lagged, driving rework at mobilization and extending time in medical hold. The FY 2023 NDAA Section 707 study provides key context for policy decisions. It identified approximately 1.75 million covered lives among the Selected Reserve and their dependents, including about 789,000 members and 981,000 dependents. At any given time, approximately 58 percent are already in a TRICARE status, while 42 percent are outside TRICARE, including about 7 percent who are uninsured.

Take up of TRICARE Reserve Select among eligible drilling reservists is approximately 28 percent, but dental enrollment is far lower. Only about 7 percent of Selected Reserve members purchase the TRICARE Dental Program when not activated, leaving more than 90 percent to finance required dental readiness on their own.

Section 707 cost modeling found that making TRICARE Dental premium free for Selected Reserve members would increase DoD outlays by approximately 83 million dollars annually.

Extending active-duty equivalent premiums to dependents would increase costs by approximately 136 million dollars annually under best estimate assumptions. Both totals represent a small fraction of the approximately 50-billion-dollar Defense Health Program (DHP).

The analysis also noted that improved access to covered dental care should yield modest but meaningful reductions in Reserve Health Readiness Program expenditures by reducing urgent corrective care. While broader health benefit expansions would require attention to network capacity, the dental only change is a low impact addition to the system.

An annual investment of approximately 83 million dollars to eliminate the primary barrier to dental readiness compares favorably to the recurring costs of urgent dental treatment at pre-deployment processing sites, delayed onward movement, lost training opportunities, and evacuation expenses that routinely reach five or six figures per case.

This change also aligns financial responsibility with a clear deployability requirement. Members are required to report in Dental Class 1 or 2, and the force must be ready to meet deployment timelines. Providing premium free TRICARE Dental to the Selected Reserve converts an episodic, high cost, lastminute correction into routine, low-cost preventive care. It reduces failure rates at pre-deployment medical processing sites and lowers the probability that deployed units will lose personnel to preventable dental emergencies, which historically have occurred at rates exceeding 100 per 1,000 personnel per year in hostile environments.

Given the documented burden of dental emergencies, their significant share of evacuations, and the modest cost required to close this readiness gap, a premium free TRICARE Dental benefit for the Selected Reserve is a low-cost, high return reform that strengthens readiness, reduces avoidable expenditures, and improves the Department's ability to field forces on time and at lower overall cost.

In each of the last three fiscal years, the House has included provisions to provide premium free or reduced cost TRICARE Dental coverage for Selected Reserve members. By contrast, the Senate has not. ROA urges the Senate Committee on Armed Services to break this precedent and include the Dental Care for Our Troops Act in the FY 2027 NDAA.

RENTAL CAR REIMBURSEMENTS

ROA urges the Committee to include H.R. 7593, the Reserve Forces Travel Fairness Act, in the FY 2027 NDAA. This bill provides a targeted correction to Title 37 U.S.C. § 452 by authorizing reimbursement of necessary rental vehicle costs for the full drill or muster period and for one adjacent travel day when a member must travel 150 miles or more from their permanent residence.

This change aligns the Joint Travel Regulations (JTR) with the practical travel timelines required for safe and timely reporting, without expanding any other entitlements. The Department has already acknowledged the challenges associated with long-distance IDT travel and has adjusted

certain reimbursement caps to mitigate out-of-pocket costs for members operating outside normal commuting distance. These steps, while helpful, do not resolve the specific gap at issue, which is unreimbursed rental vehicle costs for the immediately adjacent travel day required to safely reach and return from the duty location.

ROA recently conducted a survey of RC members, and the feedback highlighted consistent concerns regarding how current JTR provisions affect drill-related travel:

- “The Joint Travel Regulations’ rental car limits during UTAs are shortsighted and unclear. Most members only learn of the restriction after submitting a voucher. Not authorizing rental cars for the entire UTA makes the benefit far less useful and forces unnecessary logistical workarounds.”
- “Limiting rental car reimbursement to travel days only undermines readiness. Members need transportation throughout the UTA to move between lodging, work centers, dining facilities, and authorized duty locations. Covering the full UTA would reduce financial strain, ensure parity between local commuters and those traveling long distances, and better support mission execution. This is not a perk—it is a matter of fairness, readiness, and morale.”
- “The current IDT travel structure covers airport to base travel on arrival and departure days but leaves a major gap during the UTA itself. Members still need transportation between lodging and duty locations, yet the system can force them to return and re-rent vehicles mid-UTA. At locations without on base lodging, this creates real logistical and financial friction.”
- “For those serving overseas in IMA billets, the cost of taxis or shuttles from the airport to the duty location can exceed the cost of a rental car for the entire drill period. Because IDT policy doesn’t authorize a rental car, either the member pays out of pocket, or the government spends more than it would if a car were authorized.”
- “Members commuting several hundred miles per UTA report significant wear on personal vehicles with minimal reimbursement. Some have driven nearly 10,000 miles over two years for drills and received reimbursements that did not cover even the fuel cost. A rental vehicle—at a predictable cost—would better support long duty days and reduce personal expense.”
- “Younger members face additional barriers. Many are too young to rent a vehicle under commercial policies, requiring parents or others to pay out of pocket with no reimbursement. Fully funding IDT travel—including rental cars—would reduce inequity and eliminate avoidable personal costs.”
- “Extended UTAs, sometimes lasting up to six days, require predictable and reliable transportation, especially when dining facilities are closed. Reimbursing a rental car for the full duration of the UTA—not just the travel days—would significantly improve access to food, transportation, and duty locations, directly supporting readiness and retention.”
- “With base transportation services being reduced or eliminated in many locations, members often must choose between paying hundreds of dollars out of pocket for a rental car or relying on the goodwill of colleagues for rides. Neither option is sustainable, and neither reflects how we should treat members fulfilling their Reserve commitments.”

These experiences highlight a consistent reality: current JTR provisions do not reflect how reservists really travel to meet their obligations, nor do they support safe, predictable, and mission-focused execution of drill weekends. H.R. 7593 provides correction.

TRANSITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM REFORM

ROA thanks the Committees for their support of two recently codified Transition Assistance Program (TAP) provisions affecting the RC. Section 571 of the FY 2025 NDAA amended Title 10 U.S.C. § 1142 to require the establishment of a distinct, individualized counseling pathway tailored specifically for RC members. Section 571(c) of the FY 2026 NDAA further amended § 1142 to authorize, under specified conditions, an opportunity for RC members to waive their TAP requirements.

ROA recently engaged the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Manpower and Reserve Affairs to request an update on the Department's implementation of these statutory mandates and will continue to monitor progress closely. While ROA is encouraged by the direction these provisions represent, additional reforms remain necessary to ensure TAP fully meets the needs of RC members and their families.

ROA continues to pursue changes to TAP eligibility criteria, the establishment of a dedicated RC curriculum under Title 10 U.S.C. § 1144, full integration of reserve spouses into TAP delivery, and the designation of a senior DoD official responsible for military to civilian transition.

1) Amend TAP's eligibility requirements

Current law requires 180 continuous days of active duty to trigger TAP access. This standard excludes many reservists, whose service is more likely accumulated across multiple shorter orders. Time spent on inactive duty for training and active duty for training is also not counted toward eligibility. ROA received direct feedback from a retired Master Sergeant who described retiring without structured transition assistance, explaining that without formal TAP instruction, they did not know what questions to ask or what benefits were available.

Allowing Reserve Component members to participate in TAP after accumulating 180 total days of active service—including IDT and ADT—would ensure equitable access to transition resources.

2) Establish a dedicated Reserve Component curriculum

Many reservists report that TAP, as currently delivered, does not adequately address RC needs. This reflects the structure of the TAP curriculum, which was built for active-duty separations. One Marine Corps Reservist described seeking Reserve focused guidance from TAP instructors and receiving only “a blank stare.” ROA has received similar feedback from other RC members, who consistently report that TAP does not reflect their transition realities or provide relevant, actionable information tailored to Reserve service.

For these reasons, ROA urges adoption of a statutory requirement for a Reserve Component TAP curriculum. Draft legislative text is as follows:

SECTION [X]. TAILORED TRANSITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM CURRICULUM FOR RESERVE COMPONENT MEMBERS.

(a) Amendment to Title 10.— Section 1144(f) of title 10, United States Code, is redesignated as paragraph (1), and the following new paragraph is added:

“(2)(A) The Secretary of Defense, in coordination with the Secretary of Veterans Affairs and the Secretary of Labor, shall develop and implement a tailored curriculum within the Transition Assistance Program (TAP) specifically for members of the reserve components.

(B) The curriculum required under subparagraph (A) shall address the unique service, employment, and benefit conditions applicable to members of the reserve components and shall include, at a minimum:

(i) guidance on accessing Department of Veterans Affairs and Department of Defense benefits available to reserve component members;

(ii) information on civilian employment protections, reemployment rights under the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act (USERRA), and managing concurrent military and civilian careers;

(iii) retirement planning for nonregular (Reserve Component) retirement systems, including eligibility criteria and timelines;

(iv) health care coverage options such as TRICARE Reserve Select, TRICARE Retired Reserve, transitional coverage post-activation, and benefit considerations for gray area retirees;

(v) reintegration and family readiness resources specific to reserve component service.

(C) The curriculum shall be reviewed not less frequently than once every two years and updated as necessary in accordance with subsection (c).

(D) In this paragraph, the term ‘reserve components’ has the meaning given in section 101(c) of this title.

(E) Not later than 30 days after each update to the curriculum under subparagraph (C), the Secretary of Defense, in coordination with the Secretary of Veterans Affairs and the Secretary of Labor, shall—

(i) provide a briefing on the changes to the Committees on Armed Services and the Committees on Veterans’ Affairs of the House of Representatives and the Senate;

(ii) provide a briefing to representatives of recognized veteran service organizations and military service organizations;

(iii) submit a copy of the revised curriculum to the Committees on Armed Services and the Committees on Veterans’ Affairs of the House of Representatives and the Senate; and

(iv) publish the updated curriculum in a publicly available location accessible online.”

(b) Clerical Amendment. —The heading for subsection (f) of such section is amended by inserting “; tailored curriculum for reserve component members” after “Department of Labor.”

In addition to these reforms, ROA strongly supports establishing a senior DoD official responsible for synchronizing all transition related functions across the Military Departments and interagency partners. While the Department has codified a governance framework for TAP, the current instruction illustrates why transition has not been elevated in practice.

DoDI 1332.35 assigns primary oversight to the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Manpower and Reserve Affairs under USD(P&R) and disperses execution across multiple Deputy Assistant Secretaries, directors, and the Military Departments, with TAP policy run through the Defense Personnel and Family Support Center and its Transition to Veterans Program Office. In effect, responsibility is fragmented among numerous offices that each hold pieces of the portfolio rather than a single accountable leader with department level authority to set priorities, control resources, and drive outcomes across the Total Force.

This structural diffusion helps explain persistent execution gaps that reflect commanders' operational imperatives. GAO's analysis of recent TAP data shows that, even though more than 90 percent of transitioning servicemembers enter the counseling pathways, 70 percent do not begin TAP at least one year before separation as required, indicating that unit schedules and mission timelines routinely push TAP late in the lifecycle.

Further, among members assessed as needing the highest level of assistance, nearly one quarter did not attend the required 2day track, a shortfall consistent with local leaders prioritizing near term mission requirements over classroom availability and TAP sequencing. These are not isolated anomalies; they are systemic patterns in the Department's own data that point to TAP's lower operational priority at the point of execution.

Section 915 of last year's Senate NDAA directed the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness to designate a senior transition official. However, ROA believes that the scope, complexity, and interagency nature of transition policy justify a Senate confirmed Under Secretary of Defense for Transition.

Elevating this position would unify transition policies, standardize performance measures, ensure parity between active and reserve transition support, and improve coordination with the Departments of Veterans Affairs, Labor, and Education.

ROA therefore provides the following draft legislative proposal for consideration:

SEC. ____ . UNDER SECRETARY OF DEFENSE FOR TRANSITION.

(a) Establishment. — Chapter 4 of title 10, United States Code, is amended by inserting after section 134a the following new section:

“§ 134b. Under Secretary of Defense for Transition

“(a) Establishment. — There is an Under Secretary of Defense for Transition, who shall be appointed from civilian life by the President, by and with the advice and consent of the Senate.

“(b) Principal advisor.— The Under Secretary shall be the principal advisor to the Secretary of Defense on all matters relating to the transition of members of the armed forces—including members of the reserve components—and their families, from active duty or reserve service into civilian life, between active and reserve service, or from civilian life into military service. This includes ensuring that transition policies and programs address the holistic needs of servicemembers and their families.

“(c) Duties. — The Under Secretary shall—

- 1. oversee the development and implementation of policies and programs to prepare members of the armed forces, including members of the reserve components, and their families, for transition to civilian life, to service in the reserve components, between active and reserve service, or from civilian life into military service;*
- 2. coordinate with the Department of Veterans Affairs, Department of Labor, Department of Education, and other Federal agencies on matters relating to transition assistance, benefits, employment, education, childcare, spousal employment, family health care, and other services supporting military families;*
- 3. oversee the Transition Assistance Program and other related initiatives for both active duty and reserve component members, ensuring such programs also address the needs of military families;*
- 4. ensure that programs and services are effective, efficient, and consistent across the military departments, and that they address the unique requirements of reserve component members and their families;*
- 5. collect and analyze data to measure the effectiveness of transition programs, including family focused outcomes, and report such data annually to the congressional defense and veterans’ committees;*
- 6. identify and implement best practices in transition assistance, including those developed within the reserve components and through family readiness programs; and*
- 7. carry out any other duties assigned by the Secretary of Defense relating to the successful transition of servicemembers and their families.*

“(d) Precedence. —The Under Secretary shall take precedence in the Department of Defense after the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness.

“(e) Office. —The Under Secretary shall be a part of the Office of the Secretary of Defense.”

(b) Clerical Amendment. —The table of sections at the beginning of chapter 4 of title 10, United States Code, is amended by inserting after the item relating to section 134a the following new item: “134b. Under Secretary of Defense for Transition.”

Finally, ROA believes reserve spouses must be fully integrated into the transition process. Reserve families operate under conditions distinct from those of the active component, including intermittent activations, variable benefits eligibility, and geographically dispersed duty locations. Ensuring spouses have access to TAP programming and benefit navigation resources is essential to sustaining family readiness and improving long term outcomes.

PASS THE MAJOR RICHARD STAR ACT

ROA urges the Committee to include H.R.2102/S.1032, the Major Richard Star Act, in the FY 2027 NDAA. The legislation authorizes concurrent receipt for combat disabled, medically retired servicemembers with fewer than 20 years of service.

ROA was disappointed to see objections to unanimous consent on this measure and to hear concurrent receipt described as a “double dip.” That characterization is inconsistent with law and longstanding congressional practice. Military retired pay is earned through years of honorable service. VA disability compensation is provided for injuries or illnesses incurred in that service. These benefits serve distinct purposes, are established under separate statutory authorities, and are not duplicative.

Congress has previously affirmed this distinction by creating Concurrent Retirement and Disability Pay (CRDP) and refining Combat Related Special Compensation (CRSC), targeted remedies that recognized the offset as inequitable for defined groups of retirees. The Major Richard Star Act applies the same logic to the remaining cohort of combat disabled Chapter 61 retirees.

STABILIZE FUNDING FOR THE TRISERVICE NURSING RESEARCH PROGRAM

The TriService Nursing Research Program (TSNRP) is the only DoD program that enables nurses of the Armed Forces to conduct military focused health research.

Broadly speaking, this includes optimizing the operational performance of servicemembers, identifying patterns of illness, stress, and injury that are unique to the military, understanding occupational and environmental hazards that affect health and readiness, and performing intervention studies to improve beneficiary outcomes and deliver high quality care in a cost-effective manner.

Since its founding, TSNRP has been a valuable investment, with more than 500 cumulative research projects producing many select discoveries and improved care outcomes. TSNRP select discoveries and outcomes to improve care include:

- Home-based and field therapy with electrical stimulation devices to relieve knee and back pain, helping service members maintain individual readiness.
- CoQ10 supplements to decrease brain cell injury, potentially mitigating traumatic brain injury.
- Powdered clotting agents to stop hemorrhage in wounded service members, saving lives after severe blood loss from injury on the battlefield.
- TSNRP research assisted families in coping with deployment(s), addressed gaps in care for active-duty women, ameliorated long-term effects of post-traumatic stress disorder on family caregivers, improved the quality of life for burn survivors, lowered rates for errors and other adverse events in hospitals, and enhanced patient safety.

These outcomes reflect not only clinical value but strategic value, particularly as the Department prepares for operations in contested theaters such as INDOPACOM, where distance, dispersion, and adversary anti access and area denial capabilities will challenge traditional medical support models.

Future conflict may require small, distributed teams to provide prolonged care with limited evacuation timelines, which in turn demands the ability to forward deploy medical assets, enhance battlefield survivability, and enable force regeneration.

This operational reality underscores the need for innovative, nurse driven solutions such as remote physiologic monitoring, portable resuscitation systems, far forward stabilization techniques, and medical technologies that can be employed by nurses and medics at the tactical edge.

TSNRP is one of the few DoD mechanisms positioned to drive such innovation because it focuses on the practitioners most likely to deliver care in these environments and understands the operational constraints under which they will be asked to perform. However, despite the proven return on investment, TSNRP does not have its own line item in the budget.

TSNRP is currently supported either through congressionally directed funding or by DoD using operations and maintenance funding. This construct provides the pentagon with the ability to “pull” money from TSNRP to meet other needs, which curtails innovation throughout the Military Health System and degrades the sustainability of the program.

ROA believes the funding construct for TSNRP must be modernized to provide predictable and sufficient funding and effectively facilitate the line-item request. To accomplish this, ROA urges Congress to place TSNRP in its own line item in the budget and provide \$6 million for FY 2027.

SECURE A FOLLOW-ON MISSION FOR THE 442ND FIGHTER WING, WHITEMAN AIR FORCE BASE

ROA thanks the Committees for including Section 147(c) in the FY 2026 NDAA. By directing the Department of the Air Force to identify follow on missions for units affected by A10 divestment, the Committee has taken a critical step to prevent the loss of combat credible experience in the RC and to align force structure decisions with operational demand, talent retention, and long-term readiness rather than premature divestment.

In direct support of the Committee’s intent, ROA has requested information from the Secretary of the Air Force on planning efforts and has urged identification of a viable, enduring flying mission for the 442nd Fighter Wing at Whiteman Air Force Base. The Wing’s record spans more than 70 years of service, from its World War II lineage to Desert Storm and repeated post 9/11 deployments, including taskings initially aligned to Operation Inherent Resolve and subsequently redirected to Afghanistan, where the Wing provided decisive close air support.

ROA remains committed to working with the Department to help define and shape an appropriate follow-on mission that preserves the experience and lethality of these combat proven Airmen.

If the Department's report under Section 147(c) does not identify a suitable follow-on mission, ROA strongly urges the Committee to continue prohibiting A 10 divestment for affected Reserve units. The consequences of retiring the aircraft without an immediately assigned replacement mission are severe, particularly considering the Air Force's ongoing pilot shortfall and the limited throughput available to season new aviators.

Retaining experienced Reserve pilots is both an operational imperative and a cost avoidance measure. Producing a new fighter pilot from accession through undergraduate training and Formal Training Unit qualification requires multiple years and significant investment per aviator, followed by additional time and resources to achieve mission ready and instructor proficiency. Preserving experienced pilots in units like the 442nd maintains immediate combat capability, reduces strain on training infrastructure, avoids replacement training costs, and sustains instructor capacity that is essential for force regeneration at scale.

For these reasons, ROA urges the Committee to ensure that affected Reserve units receive timely follow-on missions and, absent such assignments, to continue the prohibition on A 10 divestment. This approach protects combat credible experience, strengthens retention, mitigates pilot production risk, reduces avoidable costs, and preserves readiness during a period of elevated operational demand.

ROA also commends the Committees for acting to overcome the persistent pilot shortage and to incentivize retention through Section 613 of the previous NDAA, which strengthened aviation incentive pay authorities. That action directly supports the Department's ability to retain experienced aviators, stabilize manning, and reduce the cost and time required to replace lost expertise with newly trained aircrew. It complements Section 147(c) by helping to keep seasoned pilots in the cockpit while follow on missions are identified and assigned.

CONCLUSION

Thank you again for your continued leadership and oversight. The actions recommended in this statement are targeted, executable measures that protect combat credible experience, align resources with operational demand, and strengthen deterrence across the Total Force.

Incorporating these provisions into the FY 2027 NDAA will sustain responsible modernization, preserve pay and training continuity during fiscal disruptions, safeguard medically governed MEDEVAC capacity, accelerate RC integration in planning and mobilization, and close longstanding readiness gaps in areas such as dental care access and travel policy for drilling reservists.

ROA stands ready to support the Committees and the Department to ensure disciplined and timely implementation. Questions regarding this statement may be directed to ROA's Director of Legislation and Military Policy, Matthew Schwartzman, at mschwartzman@roa.org.