

June 21, 2017

The Honorable Thomas J. Rooney
2160 Rayburn House Office Building
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Rooney:

Thank you for making your legislative assistant and Marine veteran, Ethan Abner, available to visit June 20 with me regarding some key issues affecting the Guard and Reserve.

The first thing I noticed on entering your domain was your 1st Cav items – we both served in the First Team (at different periods) and it was a great feeling to have a Stetson prominently displayed overhead!

Let me begin by saying ROA supports H.R. 506, “Preventing Crimes Against Veterans Act of 2017” for Title 18 to make defrauding veterans of their benefits a federal crime.

The backlogs for care at VA make it difficult for veterans to receive their benefits in a timely fashion, creating frustration and the opportunity for fraud.

Those who commit fraud often claim they can guarantee veterans quicker access to their benefits, while charging them fees for nonexistent services. H.R. 506 recognizes the serious nature of this crime and facilitates prosecution at the federal level. Additionally, elevating veteran fraud to a federal crime guarantees better consistency in prosecution. The federal government provides veteran benefits and thus fraud against veterans is fraud against Americans and their federal government.

During our meeting, we also discussed H.R. 1384, *The Reserve Component Benefit Parity Act* and federal hiring preferences for RC servicemembers.

H.R. 1384 corrects much of the certainly unintended inequities created when the 12304a and 12304b mobilization authorities were passed, lacking corresponding benefits. ROA believes now is a good time to correct things. We’re sure you agree that members of the Guard and Reserve should have equity with their active duty comrades – especially when they support operational missions.

For example: a National Guard staff sergeant who serves 90 days of *qualifying service* would get 40 percent of in-state tuition under the Post-9/11 GI Bill. If that soldier performs active duty under Title 10 U.S.C. Sections 12304a, 12304b, or 12301(h) he or she does not earn GI Bill benefits; ROA advocates for these three duty statuses to be added to the qualifying service list.

Qualifying service: Serve at least 90 days in a period of qualifying active duty on or after Sep 11, 2001. Qualifying active duty service is currently defined as:

- Service in any active component.
- Title 10 U.S.C., Sections 672(d), 688, 12301(a), 12301(d), 12301(g), 12302, 12304.

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- Title 32 AGR.
- Title 32 U.S.C., Section 502(f), in which orders state “In Support of Operation Noble Eagle” between 11 Sep 01 – 31 May 02.
- Serve in a qualifying duty status for more than 30 days and separate due to a service-connected disability or injury.

In advocating for a strong Reserve force, whether it be for equipment or benefits, ROA does not take an approach that is unreasonable, unfeasible, or unaffordable “pie in the sky.”

We also discussed an ROA initiative, reform of law granting veteran status for federal hiring preference. Members of the Guard and Reserve must now attain 180 or more consecutive days on active duty (IDT isn’t counted) to earn this preference. A member of the Guard or Reserve can go an entire career without doing so (indeed, TAPs founder and Presidential Medal of Freedom recipient Bonnie Carroll retired with a combined 32 years in the Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve; because she didn’t get 180 consecutive days, Bonnie does not qualify for federal hiring preference).

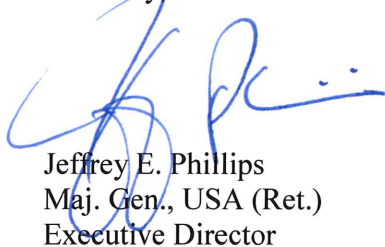
To solve the problem at *virtually no cost to the taxpayer*, ROA proposes granting veteran status for federal hiring preference for servicemembers who complete 180 *cumulative* days instead of 180 *consecutive* days. This would reflect the nature of RC service in the operational role – chunks of periods of less than six months.

This one-word change would help members of the Guard and Reserve (and veterans) get federal job interviews – *and it would help the nation*: with a graying federal workforce, we need to attract into civil service terrific young men and women!

ROA appreciates your own service in the Army; we look forward to working with you and your team as we ensure our nation has a strong and ready Reserve force.

ROA has a membership of 50,000 and is the only national military association that exclusively supports all the uniformed reserve components of the United States. Thank you for your efforts on Reserve Component issues, and your support of our veterans. ROA would also like to reiterate our thanks and appreciation for Ethan and his willingness to engage on our legislative priorities. If you have any questions or issues you would like to discuss, please have your staff call Susan Lukas, ROA’s legislative director, at 202-646-7713 or e-mail at slukas@roa.org.

Sincerely,



Jeffrey E. Phillips
Maj. Gen., USA (Ret.)
Executive Director



FIRST
Team!