

Military Culture Coalition

The Honorable Howard P. McKeon
Chairman, House Armed Services Committee
2120 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

April 1, 2013

Dear Chairman McKeon,

The undersigned individual leaders and organizations are very concerned about unprecedented policy changes announced at the Pentagon on January 24, 2013.

Showing little regard for the national security consequences, the Obama Administration acted unilaterally to involuntarily assign military women into "tip of the spear" direct ground combat units that attack the enemy in war.

Unless Congress asserts its authority in this matter, the administration's reckless move to impose unprecedented social burdens on our military will succeed without challenge. Combat training standards will be compromised, the effectiveness of sustained ground combat operations reduced, violence against women increased, and both servicemen and women put at greater risk.

In addition, according to legal experts, a change in female military personnel's eligibility for direct ground combat likely would result in federal court decisions favoring litigation challenging young women's exemption from Selective Service and a possible future draft. In *Rostker v. Goldberg* (1981), the Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of male-only Selective Service registration primarily because women were not eligible for direct ground combat. A decision to change this policy should be made by Congress, not the federal courts.

We appreciate your leadership in defending the armed forces against severe budget cuts that could vitiate readiness, and we know it has been difficult. Still, we are writing to ask that you lead the House Armed Services Committee in taking urgent action to remedy this threat to military women, whose voices have not been heard.

Public statements by administration leaders seem to have pre-determined the expected mid-May reports to Congress. And the administration's pretense of implementing women-in-combat plans incrementally, between now and January, 2016, effectively excludes Congress and the American people from the decision-making process.

Military leaders obey orders; they are not free to dissent from ill-advised policies already made. Under recommendations of the Pentagon-endorsed Military Leadership Diversity Commission report, long before decisions are "final" in 2016, military officers will be promoted or selected for high-rank only if they support gender-based "diversity" in direct ground combat. (See 2011 MLDC Report, Executive Summary, pp. xvii and xviii and p. 18.)

This is why Congress, which has the constitutional authority to make policy for the military, needs to intervene. We hope you will see this as a critical situation meriting diligent oversight and immediate action to get it right.

There is only a short time to act before the administration makes irreversible decisions that impose heavy burdens on courageous women, many of them single mothers, who want to serve their country but do not want to be treated like men in the violence of direct ground combat.

In our opinion it is not fair to use women as involuntary subjects in a social experiment testing a controversial twentieth-century social science theory — that men and women are physical equals and interchangeable in all roles. Thirty years of studies and reports in the U.S. and the United Kingdom have provided abundant empirical evidence to the contrary.

There is more to this issue, however, than physical strength. In recent years all branches of the service have experienced alarming increases in sexual assaults and misconduct that weakens morale and team cohesion.

Before these problems are extended irreversibly to the combat arms, Congress must intervene. There is a great need for careful oversight to restore sound priorities and to strengthen the All-Volunteer Force instead of weakening it.

Political factions and ideologues who want to use our military women in a high-risk social experiment should be required to meet a high burden of proof: How will this proposed change in policy *improve* military readiness? The case for women in direct ground combat simply has not been made.

We believe that the only way to show true respect and support for both women and men in our military, and to preserve tough training standards and sound policy regarding Selective Service, is to codify women's long-standing direct ground combat exemptions with a reality-based approach that combines recent lessons learned with classic principles constituting sound policy for women in the military. This should be done before unwise administrative policy changes effectively preclude congressional action and cause needless disruption in women's careers.

Following that, we hope you will schedule extensive hearings inviting independent witnesses and experts to take a fresh, reality-based look at this issue from more than one perspective. This would be the best way to show respect for military women and men who have served with courage that has made the nation proud.

Since military men and women are not free to engage in this debate, we look forward to working with you to give this issue the objective, principled oversight it deserves.

Sincerely,

The Undersigned (Organization titles for identification only)

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