



Center for Military Readiness



Promoting high standards and sound priorities for our military men and women.

For Immediate Release

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Contact: Elaine Donnelly, CMR President

(734) 464-9430

Military and Civilian Leaders Sign Letter Pressing for Oversight on Women in Direct Ground Combat

Nearly 100 distinguished retired military and civilian organization leaders have co-signed a letter expressing concerns about the lack of congressional oversight of administration efforts to order female military personnel into combat arms units such as the infantry.

Signers of the **Military Culture Coalition** letter include a former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, high-ranking former leaders of the **Marine Corps, Army, Navy, and Air Force**, decorated land combat veterans, and influential leaders of civilian organizations that support sound policies in our military.

Identical letters were addressed to the Chairmen of the Senate and House Armed Services Committees, **Sen. John McCain (R-AZ)** and **Rep. “Mac” Thornberry (R-TX)**:

Military/Civilian Letter to Chairman John McCain Re: Women in Direct Ground Combat

The following comments may be attributed to **Elaine Donnelly**, President of the **Center for Military Readiness**, who expressed disappointment in the House Armed Services Committee May 29 session marking up the House version of the **National Defense Authorization Act for 2016 (NDAA)**:

“**Rep. Loretta Sanchez** initially moved to abolish a long-standing law requiring the **Department of Defense** to notify Congress of policy changes regarding women in direct ground combat. The law requires formal notice at least **30 continuous legislative days** in advance, when both houses are in session.

“If the case for women in direct ground combat has been made – and research so far shows that it hasn’t – high-handed measures to preclude congressional oversight would not be necessary.”

“Rep. Sanchez showed poor judgment in misconstruing the notification law as a “waiting period.” She fails to understand that the notification law is about **congressional oversight**, not women in the military. The notification law also requires an analysis of the impact of proposed policy changes on **Selective Service** obligations. This provision exists because legal experts have predicted that if women become eligible for direct ground combat units, federal courts likely would order civilian women to register for Selective Service on the same basis as men.

“Decisions such as this, affecting all military communities and civilians as well, should be made by accountable members of Congress, not the courts.”

“Controversy ensued when **Rep. Ryan Zinke (R-MT)**, a former Navy SEAL whose daughter is a Navy diver, and **Rep. Steve Russell (R-OK)**, a veteran of infantry combat, challenged the Sanchez amendment. Proclaiming that ‘*There is a role and mission for everyone*’ in the armed forces, Zinke expressed concerns about the physical demands in direct ground combat units such as the **infantry** and **Special Operations Forces**. Missions of these units, which go beyond the experience of being “*in harm’s way*” in a war zone, involve *deliberate offensive action to seek out and destroy the enemy*.

“Rep. Russell cited reports predicting disproportionate injuries that women would suffer if they are required to carry the same burdens as men. Russell cited a recent [report from the British Ministry of Defence](#), analyzed by the Center for Military Readiness in February, which noted that even unusually strong women, called the “**physical elites**,” still are subject to debilitating injuries at rates far greater than men.

“A substitute amendment was crafted for Sanchez that reduced the notification period to only **30 calendar days**. With a weak voice-vote, the House committee approved the substitute, thereby surrendering policy-making authority of the legislative branch on a matter of paramount importance.

“This irresponsible action opens the door for unfettered administration action while Congress is out of town. Signers of the **Military Culture Coalition** letter have asked House members to reconsider the ill-advised bill language, and senators to non-concur with it in conference committee.

“Planned administrative policy changes, due to go into effect in January 2016, would affect every military community, especially the combat arms. We don’t know what military leaders will recommend or exceptions to policy that they may request, but respect for both women in the military requires diligent oversight, to include an objective review of research findings produced so far.

“Nothing has occurred to date that justifies ordering women into the combat arms.”

The co-signed letters were conveyed to the Chairmen and members of the Committee on Wednesday, together with the accompanying 2-page Fact Sheet linked below:

[Military/Civilian Letter to Chairman “Mac” Thornberry](#)
[Re: Women in Direct Ground Combat](#)

[2015 Interim Fact Sheet -- Women in Direct Ground Combat \(DGC\)](#)

To arrange an interview on this subject, contact Elaine Donnelly, 734/464-9430. More information is available on the CMR website, www.cmrlink.org. The Center for Military Readiness is an independent public policy organization that researches and reports on military/social issues.

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