

Co-Chairs of the National Guard and Reserve Caucus say we must not balance the budget on the backs of our Veterans

Washington, D.C. – Today, Reps. Tim Walz (D-MN) and Duncan Hunter (R-CA), Co-Chairs of the National Guard and Reserve Caucus, sent a joint bipartisan letter to Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta calling on the Department of Defense to restore troops Post Deployment/Mobilization Respite Absence (PDMRA) benefits to levels that were promised to them prior to their deployment. These benefits will give them time to seek out good paying jobs when they return home. On October 1, 2011, the Department of Defense released new guidance that significantly reduced the PDMRA benefits that were promised prior to deployment.

[Rep. Walz also spoke out](#) about the issue on the House floor this week.

The cut to the PDMRA program, which is designed to give deployed troops time with family and to seek employment in their communities after returning home, negatively affects many courageous warriors who are still serving overseas.

“We have a moral responsibility to do all we can to take care of our brave service members when they get home. Our troops were promised time to spend with their families and seek employment when they returned from war. It isn’t right that this promise was broken while many were still overseas protecting our freedom,” said Walz, a 24 year veteran of the Army National Guard.

“Our troops have already sacrificed enough. We must not balance the budget on the backs of those who keep us safe. The Department of Defense needs to reverse course on this policy change and give our brave men and women what they have earned.”

Hunter, a Marine combat veteran of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan added, **“American troops take an oath and commit themselves to faithfully serving the country. As part of their service, they endure long absences from home and face extraordinary danger. All they expect in return is for the federal government to uphold its promises—including the amount of time they get to spend with their families following a deployment. Our military men and women deserve to know that they will continue receiving the benefits to which they are entitled.”**

Background:

The PDMRA program was designed to allow guard and reservists, who have been deployed at least 12 out of the last 72 months, a way to accrue additional time off to readjust to civilian life and find employment when they returned from war.

The program specifically targets troops who have had their deployment extended or who have been deployed multiple times. It allows time for healthy reintegration back into their communities.

The Minnesota “Red Bulls” are uniquely affected by this policy change and were deployed for 22 straight months in 2007. They spent 16 of those months in combat, which is the longest combat tour of any military unit in Operation Iraqi Freedom. They were then redeployed last summer to Kuwait and will return home in the coming months. They stand to lose up to 27 days of reintegration time due to the Department of Defense change in policy.

Walz is a co-sponsor of H.R. 4045, legislation introduced by fellow Minnesota Rep. John Kline, which would provide a fix for the problem.

Walz, recognized as a national champion for veterans, previously [fought on behalf of Minnesota soldiers for PDMRA benefits](#)

. In February 2010, Walz worked with both the Pentagon and the White House to ensure 2,500 Minnesota Guardsmen—and 23,000 nationwide—received the PDMRA “bonus pay” they had earned. This payment had been delayed for three years before Walz’s involvement.

Congressman Walz, who joined the Guard at age 17, is a 24 year veteran of the Army National Guard and is the highest ranking enlisted soldier to ever serve in Congress.

Congressman Hunter served three combat tours overseas with the U.S. Marine Corps. Still a Marine Reservist, he was promoted to the rank of Captain in 2006. Upon his election, Hunter became the first Marine combat veteran of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan elected to Congress.

[Walz calls on Department of Defense to reverse course on the House Floor](#)

WALZ AND HUNTER LETTER TO SECRETARY PANETTA

March 28, 2012

The Honorable Leon Panetta

Secretary

The Pentagon

U.S. Department of Defense

Washington, D.C. 20301

Dear Secretary Panetta,

We are writing in regards to the new Post-Deployment/Mobilization Respite Absence (PDMRA) policy as set forth in Department of Defense Instruction (DoDI) 1327.06. On September 30, 2011, while many members of the National Guard and Reserve component were mobilized and deployed, the Pentagon released new guidance that significantly reduces the PDMRA benefits promised. In fact, some members of the Guard and Reserve stand to lose more than 27 days under this new policy.

Since September 11, 2001, members of the National Guard and Reserve component have been uniquely affected by long deployments, leaving their families and careers to answer their nation's call. When the brave men and women who serve our nation in uniform leave to deploy overseas, they not only leave behind their family and friends, but frequently their jobs and livelihoods as well. As two prior service members who have led troops through a deployment, we understand that PDMRA plays a vital role in helping Guard and Reserve members' transition back into their civilian lives.

PDMRA does more than just improve performance and increase motivation of each service member; or boosts morale for members and their families. PDMRA also gives returning service members a chance to find meaningful employment. Many members of the National Guard and Reserve do not return home from a deployment to a job, as evidenced by record high veteran unemployment rates. We encourage the Department of Defense to continue to provide a healthy and successful reintegration for Guardsmen and Reservists – a benefit they have rightly earned.

As Co-Chairs of the National Guard and Reserve Caucus we ask you to review DODI 1327.06. Furthermore, we encourage you to “grandfather” in the military members who were deployed prior to the September 30, 2011 change in policy. These men and women were counting on PDMRA time to help them reintegrate into society, seek employment, and make up for lost time with their families.

Sincerely,

Representative Tim Walz

Representative Duncan Hunter

Co-Chair

Co-Chair

National Guard and Reserve Caucus
Caucus

National Guard and Reserve