

# Washington

NEWS FROM THE CAPITAL

## Redefining the reserves

Senate bill would expand mobilization authority as part of operational role

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Pentagon leaders are pushing Congress for a change in law to make it easier to involuntarily mobilize reserve-component troops, part of a long-term plan to ramp up the operational roles of part-time personnel.

The proposal, part of the pending Senate version of the 2012 defense authorization bill, would allow the service secretaries to involuntarily mobilize National Guard and Reserve troops, an authority now limited

to the president.

It also would allow the service secretaries to mobilize Selected Reserve and Individual Ready Reserve troops for any reason, not just major contingencies with specific names, such as Operation New Dawn. Such callups would be limited to 365 days.

The plan has sparked no major opposition from lawmakers.

Deploying reservists and their civilian skills may be an effective way to deter terrorist groups and insurgencies from gaining a



Oklahoma National Guardsmen board a DC-10 in June for a deployment to Afghanistan. Pending legislation could see reservists being involuntarily called up and deployed anywhere, any time.

MANNY GAMALLOT/TULSA WORLD VIA THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

foothold in volatile parts of the world, said Army Lt. Gen. Jack Stultz, chief of the Army Reserve.

Army Reserve soldiers already are conducting medical and engineering missions in Colombia, Cambodia, El Salvador, Kenya and Uganda, Stultz said, but such missions now are limited to their 29 allocated annual training days.

"If I can use the reserves for a longer period for unnamed [operations], then maybe I'd like to develop an engagement strategy to do more engineering support,

to do more medical support for these countries," Stultz said.

The move would institutionalize the role reserves forces have assumed during the past decade, shifting from a rarely-used Cold War backup force to an operational force with a routine, and potentially unique, role in the broader military mission.

Pentagon officials say many reservists are eager to maintain that expanded role.

"We have become dependent on the [reserve components] in these

Wars," Stultz said. "We need to figure out how to use them. They want to be utilized. They signed up to do something."

The Senate bill notes that lawmakers expect the services to be mindful of dwell time when selecting units and personnel for duty under this authority, "and to continue to rely on volunteers" as much as possible.

Larry Madison, legislative director of the Retired Enlisted Association, said the current policy of mobilizing reservists one out of every six years is already a commitment that not all employers and family members support. If reservists feel their military service is further damaging their civilian careers, recruiting and retention will suffer, he said.

The future role of the reserves is under intense debate within DoD. Former Defense Secretary Robert Gates this year approved a broad plan that calls for expanded mobilization authority as well as the creation of a new type of reservist who would serve far more than traditional reservists but not as much as active-duty troops. □

Staff writer Michelle Tan contributed to this story.

## Plans to give vets jobs are gaining steam

By Rick Maze  
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The veterans' employment plan announced Aug. 5 by President Obama and two competing plans pending in Congress have enough similarities to give hope that a comprehensive jobs package could take effect this fall.

But jobs might not immediately follow for the estimated 1 million unemployed veterans, including about 250,000 Afghanistan- and Iraq-era veterans, seeking work in a tough economy.

Rep. Jeff Miller, R-Fla., the House Veterans' Affairs Committee chairman and sponsor of his own comprehensive jobs bill that should pass his committee Sept. 8, has set a goal of reducing the 8.6 percent jobless rate for veterans to no more than 5 percent within two years. That would require finding jobs for 444,000 veterans by the end of 2013, an ambitious pledge that even Obama didn't make.

The president instead spoke of a more modest goal: getting 100,000 veterans and their spouses trained and hired by the end of 2013. This is the same number of people Miller expects to be trained through one of his ideas, a Labor Department training program that would prepare vets for jobs in one of 10 as-yet-undesignated skills in high demand.

Obama's plan, the Hiring Heroes Act sponsored by Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee chairwoman Patty Murray, D-Wash., and Miller's Veterans Opportunity to Work Act have similarities and a key difference.

Similarities include improving military and veterans transition programs so that separating troops have a better picture of available jobs and what they need to do to qualify, and in providing improved skill training to those with military-learned skills that don't readily qualify them for a civilian job.

The White House and Congress also agree on getting the private sector more heavily involved.

The big difference: Obama's plan includes the use of employer tax credits to encourage hiring, which many lawmakers — including Miller — have endorsed but lies outside the jurisdiction of the veterans' committees.

The similarities in the approaches are strong enough to set the stage for approval this fall of legislation that takes a multipronged approach to veterans' employment that could produce results, although not necessarily quickly, and coordinated efforts to get the federal government and private sector more involved in training and hiring veterans.

Obama announced that several businesses already had agreed to train and hire veterans and family members. Miller has a roundtable planned for this fall in which up to 50 businesses are expected to

## BOARDROOM HELP

Private-sector companies have pledged to help reduce veterans' unemployment as part of a White House initiative. What some are doing:

- Humana, a Louisville, Ky.-based health benefits company, will announce details later this year to hire up to 1,000 qualified military veterans or spouses and will contribute \$1 million to a program to help disabled vets

- become entrepreneurs. It also has promised to offer discounts to veterans at Humana-owned urgent care facilities.
- Siemens Corp., involved in electronics, engineering, energy and health care, has promised to hire 450 veterans by the end of the year. [www.usa.siemens.com/careers](http://www.usa.siemens.com/careers).
- Honeywell, a technology company, has a goal of hiring

500 veterans by the end of this year for openings in its aerospace, transportation, automation and specialty material businesses. [www.honeywell.jobs](http://www.honeywell.jobs)

- Microsoft promises to provide 10,000 technology training and certification packages over the next two years that could lead to jobs. The company will work with the Labor Department to provide intermediate and advanced level training, mostly through e-learning.

share tips about how to locate and hire veterans, and Murray also has been meeting with private-sector groups.

Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America also has representatives working closely with private businesses, such as Matt Colvin, a former Air Force staff sergeant who served two tours in Afghanistan.

"We have about 50 companies in partnerships a year, although not all of them at the same time," Colvin said. "A lot of businesses ...

want to help, and we just have to figure out a way to channel it."

Obama also spoke of a "reverse boot camp" at the end of military service to give veterans more help in finding and qualifying for jobs.

He also has ordered the Pentagon and Veterans Affairs Department to lead a federal task force that will put more emphasis on training, education and credentialing so service members can put their military experience to better use in civilian life. □