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American Legion calls on Congress to study women in combat exclusions

WASHINGTON (Jan. 24, 2013) -- The leader of the nation's largest wartime veterans' service organization has reacted cautiously to today's announcement that the U.S. military plans to expand combat roles for women in the military.

"Women in the military are performing magnificently in Afghanistan and in U.S. military units throughout the world," American Legion National Commander James E. Koutz said. "Women comprise nearly 15 percent of our active forces and we simply would not be able to accomplish our missions without them. That said, we do not believe that the administration should precipitously change long-existing policies without careful review and oversight from Congress."

Delegates to The American Legion National Convention last August passed a resolution that called on all branches of the military services to maintain the current physical and mental requirements and qualifications for acceptance into military service that has "created the best and most respected military in the world..." It further called on all military personnel, regardless of gender or age to be held to a single standard based on their MOS and that the elimination of the combat exclusion clause for women come only after congressional approval.

The most important aspect to consider in changing existing policy, Koutz said, is if it enhances the military's war -fighting capability. "Political or career considerations should not enter into the equation," he said. "The bottom line is: 'Will it make us a more capable fighting force?'"

Membership in The American Legion has been open to women who are serving or have served during wartime periods since the organization's founding in 1919. Women Legionnaires were eligible to vote for their national commander before they could vote for the president of the United States.

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