



MISSION: READINESS MILITARY LEADERS FOR KIDS

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CONTACTS:

Mike Kiernan, O: (202) 464-7016, C: 202-412-7579, E-Mail: mkiernan@missionreadiness.org

Ted Eismeier, O: 202-464-5350, C: 315-335-9222, E-Mail: teismeier@missionreadiness.org

9 Million Young Adults Are Too Overweight To Join the Military, New Report Shows

*Retired Admirals and Generals, Senator Lugar and Agriculture Secretary Vilsack
Issue Warning: Childhood Obesity Endangers National Security, Urge Congress to Pass New
Legislation To Get Junk Food Out of Schools*

Washington, D.C. (April 20, 2010) -- More than 9 million young adults – 27 percent of all Americans age 17 to 24 – are too overweight to join the military, according to a new report released by MISSION: READINESS, a non-profit group of more than 130 retired admirals, generals and other senior military leaders.

Declaring that escalating rates of child obesity pose a serious threat to national security, retired military leaders joined Sen. Richard Lugar (R-IN) and U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack today in support of new child nutrition legislation to help reduce the obesity epidemic and expand the pool of healthy young adults available for military service.

Representing MISSION: READINESS at the event were Lieutenant General Norman R. Seip, US Air Force (Ret.), Brigadier General Clara L. Adams-Ender, US Army (Ret.), Rear Admiral James A. Barnett, Jr., US Navy (Ret.) and Amy Dawson Taggart, National Director of MISSION: READINESS.

While noting other major factors that can keep young adults from joining the military – such as lacking a high school diploma or having a serious criminal record – the report, called *Too Fat to Fight*, said that weight problems have become the leading medical reason why recruits are rejected for service. The retired generals and admiral pointed to the report's analysis of data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) showing a dramatic increase in obesity among young adults across the country since 1995. In the last decade, the number of states with 40 percent or more of young adults considered to be overweight has risen from one state to 39 states.

“We believe that the child obesity issue is so serious it has become a threat to our national security,” said Lt. Gen. Seip. “Mission: Readiness supports efforts by Senator Richard Lugar and Agriculture Secretary Vilsack to get new legislation on the books that would help reduce child obesity.”

Secretary Vilsack, Senator Lugar and the retired military leaders noted additional research showing that up to 40 percent of children's daily calorie intake occurs at school and that 80 percent of children who were overweight between the ages of 10 to 15 were obese by age 25. They said that improving school nutrition is therefore a crucial area for reducing or preventing child obesity.

(more)

MISSION: READINESS is the nonprofit, bi-partisan organization of senior retired military leaders ensuring continued American security and prosperity into the 21st century by calling for smart investments in the next generation of American children.

1212 New York Avenue NW, Suite 300
Washington, DC 20005
202.464.5224
MissionReadiness.org

The retired military leaders called on Congress to enact a robust child nutrition bill that would:

- Get the junk food and remaining high-calorie beverages out of the nation's schools
- Support the administration's proposal of an increase of \$1 billion per year for ten years for child nutrition programs that would improve nutrition standards, upgrade the quality of meals served in schools and enable more children to have access to these programs, and
- Help develop new school-based strategies, based on research, that help parents and children adopt healthier life-long eating and exercise habits.

"This report reminds us that the argument for military preparedness that helped create our child nutrition programs still applies today and it underscores the importance of tackling this critical issue by passing a bold reauthorization of the Child Nutrition Act," said Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack. "The health of our nation – our economy, our national security, and our communities – depends on the health of our children and now is the time to act boldly to give them the healthy start in life that they need and deserve."

Despite the high number of young adults with weight problems, the retired military leaders noted that all services of the military currently are meeting their recruitment goals, due in part to the poor economy that is encouraging more young people to enlist.

"While we are meeting our recruitment targets today, those of us who have served in command roles are worried about the trends we see," Rear Admiral Barnett said. "Our national security in the year 2030 is absolutely dependent on reversing the alarming rates of child obesity. When over a quarter of young adults are too fat to fight, we need to take notice. We urge Congress to take action on child nutrition this year."

Amy Dawson Taggart, national director of MISSION: READINESS, noted that military concerns about the health and fitness of children are not new. "In 1946, Congress passed the National School Lunch Act as a matter of national security," she said. "Back then young people were undernourished, and now they are poorly nourished. Too many kids are carrying too many pounds, and improving school nutrition is an important place to start. This isn't about looking good in a uniform, it's about being healthy and fit to do the work of the nation."

Brigadier General Adams-Ender said that national security concerns about obesity and lack of physical fitness today are very similar to concerns about poor nutrition following World War II. "Both demand action from Congress," she said.

"Retired admirals and generals stood up in the past to make it clear that America is only as healthy as our nation's children. Childhood obesity is now undermining our national security, and we need to start turning it around today," Brig. Gen. Adams-Ender said. "For the sake of our national security, we call on Congress to pass a strong child nutrition bill this year."

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MISSION: READINESS is a national non-profit group of more than 130 retired admirals, generals and other military leaders, including two former Chairmen of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Hugh Shelton (Ret.) and General John Shalikashvili (Ret.). The group supports policies to help young children get the right start so they are prepared to succeed in life.

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