

**Statement of
Senator John W. Warner (ret.)
Before the House Armed Services Committee
October 12, 2011**

I am deeply privileged to accept the Committee's invitation to testify in this very important series of hearings regarding the future of our nation's defense posture.

I am joined today by two highly valued colleagues Duncan Hunter and Ike Skelton. It's interesting to note that each of us had a very long period of service on our respective Armed Services Committees and each served, at various times, as a Chairman and as a Ranking Member. Likewise, we alternated over many years being the Chair of the House – Senate Conference Committees and never failed in getting an authorization bill – on behalf of the men and women of the armed forces – to be signed into law by a sequence of Presidents.

Working with our Committee colleagues during our tenure, we strengthened the foundation of laws that today supports our nation's defense posture and provides for the needs of our brave uniformed personnel and their families.

Today, the citizens of our nation rank members of the armed forces at the very top of public esteem.

That leads me to the first of several points I will offer today.

The concept of an all-volunteer force had its origins during the period – 1969 to 1974 – when I was privileged to serve as Undersecretary, then Secretary of the U.S. Navy. A very serious, costly war was in progress to preserve freedom for the people of South Vietnam. There was substantial controversy among elements of our population; and, month by month, the controversy became more intense. I well remember appearing to testify, time and time again, before the Committees of Congress.

This history you know well but out of this cauldron emerged the law, regarded by many, upon passage, a big “gamble” which Congress thrust onto the military.

As you know well, the concept has worked exceptionally well; indeed well beyond any expectations.

The challenge facing Congress today, is not just to preserve what we have, but make it even stronger.

I say most respectfully, every action the Committee takes must keep that challenge in mind.

My next concerns are the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and how rogue elements, and persons participating in violent extremism, can interact to threaten our way of life and that of other nations.

As you make your programs and other budget decisions, place emphasis on how we can increase and support new ideas in the fields of intelligence and surveillance. In these areas spend wisely; and, accept a level of risk with new innovations. Our military will always do their best, at whatever sacrifice; but every citizen must help in their own way.

As you look to future programs I urge your support for innovations to come in the unmanned systems. About a decade, or more, ago I introduced legislation directing each of the services to place greater emphasis on such programs, with specific benchmarks and dates for each service to meet. There was strong opposition from all Department of Defense; but, with the strong support of the two House leaders sitting with me today the language survived in Conference and became law. Within but a few years thereafter each of the Services needed no inducement to move out way ahead of the benchmarks with the many systems operational today. Now it's an international race and we must stay well ahead.

As I closed out my 30 years in the Senate I worked again with the bipartisan team to write a new G.I. Bill. Again, the Authorizing Committees did it; and, wherever I go service persons step forward to thank us for including as beneficiaries families as alternates for the educational benefits earned by the uniformed member.

May I share a personal story? I was privileged to speak just months ago at the Navy Post Graduate School at Monterey, California. As guests were filing past me to say good-bye a proud husband and wife stopped to say we are soon to be blessed with our first child, whereupon her hands dropped, and she said “you made it possible for this child to have my husband’s G.I. Bill.” Having advanced my career largely because of the old G.I. Bill, I shall always remember this young happy family.

All of us who have had the good fortune to serve in Congress must remain ever mindful of the needs and hopes of others.

I thank you for this opportunity.