



MISSION: READINESS

MILITARY LEADERS FOR KIDS

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Virginia's Retired Military Brass Concerned: 75 Percent of Young Americans Unfit for Service

Va. retired military leaders, bipartisan legislators back early education to strengthen military, boost grad rates

**NOTE: FOOTAGE FROM EVENT WILL BE BROADCAST BY SATELLITE UPLINK AT 3:00 PM EST.
SEE END FOR DETAILS.**

RICHMOND, VA. (Sept. 1, 2009) – Eight retired admirals and generals from Virginia held a news conference today at the State Capitol to call for greater investments in early childhood education to ensure America's national security for the future.

Gen. Richard E. Hawley (USAF, Ret.), Vice Admiral James A. Zimble (USN, Ret.), Maj. Gen. Frank R. Faykes (USAF, Ret.), Maj. Gen. James A. Kelley (USA, Ret.), Maj. Gen. Carroll D. Childers (USA, Ret.), Brig. Gen. Clara L. Adams Ender (USA, Ret.), Brig. Gen. John W. Douglass, (USAF, Ret.) and Brig. Gen. Terry J. Tyler (USA, Ret.) spoke at the event. They were joined by Sen. Harry B. Blevins (R-Chesapeake) and Delegate Mamy E. BaCote (D-Hampton, Newport News).

The retired military leaders cited recent statistics from the Pentagon showing that 75 percent of young people ages 17 to 24 are unable to enlist in the military primarily because they fail to graduate high school, have a criminal record, or are physically unfit. They released a report "Ready, Willing and Unable to Serve," showing that providing more at-risk children with early education reduces crime and increases graduation rates, increasing the pool of candidates qualified for the U.S. military and Virginia National Guard should they choose to serve.

Currently in Virginia, nearly 30 percent of high school students fail to graduate on time or drop out entirely. In Virginia Beach, only 65 percent ninth graders graduate within four years. In Richmond, the on-time graduation rate is 47 percent, and in Norfolk, only 38 percent of students graduate on time.

"Imagine ten young people walking into a recruiter's office and seven of them getting turned away. We cannot allow today's dropout crisis to become a national security crisis. Starting with early education will make sure young people have a foundation that will prepare them for whatever path they choose, including the defense of our nation," Gen. Hawley said.

Long-term research studies show that children who benefit from early childhood education are significantly more likely to graduate from high school and avoid crime as adults. A study done by researchers at UNC-Chapel Hill found that at-risk kids who did not attend a high-quality early education program were 48 percent more likely to drop out of high school. The kids who did attend were significantly more likely to work in a high-skill occupation or pursue higher education.

(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.

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A similar study of a Michigan preschool program found that children who attended were 44 percent more likely to graduate from high school compared to similar kids who did not attend. By age 27, the kids who did not attend were five times more likely to be repeat law-breakers than those who did participate.

“The strength of our workforce and our military is directly linked to the success of today’s children and youth. Investing in early education will help more young people graduate from high school as responsible adults, with many career options including military service,” Adm. Zimble said.

The retired military leaders commended the bipartisan support for the Virginia Preschool Initiative (VPI), launched under Republican Gov. George Allen and expanded by his Democratic successors. VPI provides more than 13,000 4-year-olds with access to quality early education programs, but many young children in Virginia are still unable to attend high-quality early education programs because of a lack of funding.

The group of senior military veterans called on the major party candidates for Governor, state Sen. Creigh Deeds (D-Bath County) and former Attorney General Bob McDonnell (R-Virginia Beach), to continue Virginia’s progress by working to increase access to quality early education programs for 3- and 4- year olds. They also recommended that state officials implement a quality rating and improvement system, a promising practice designed to ensure Virginia is making long-term progress on boosting the quality of early care and education.

“We know from the research that getting kids an early start to learning makes a real impact on their chances to become successful citizens who contribute to their communities. With that knowledge, we cannot in good faith shortchange these investments in early education,” Gen. Faykes said.

At the federal level, Congress is now considering a new initiative, called the Early Learning Challenge Fund, to help states provide more at-risk kids with access to quality early learning programs. The proposal will provide grants to the states of \$1 billion a year for ten years to improve the quality of early childhood development programs and expand access to more at-risk kids. The generals called on Virginia’s Congressional delegation to work to pass legislation supporting the early learning proposal.

“Our national security for decades to come is dependent on our willingness to invest in today’s 3- and 4-year-olds. Virginia must commit to early education today for a secure economy and a strong military,” Gen. Kelley said.

Hawley, Zimble, Faykes, Kelley, Childers, Adams-Ender, Douglass and Tyler are members of a newly-formed organization called MISSION: READINESS led by more than 80 retired military leaders nationwide. The group supports policies to help young people get the right start in life so they are prepared for the workforce or military service, if they choose that path.

“Pursuing education was the key to my personal success and allowed me to advance my career in the military. I know how important educational opportunity has been in my life, and that’s why we need to make sure every at-risk child has access to early education,” Gen. Adams-Ender said.

Visit www.missionreadiness.org to read the report “Ready, Willing and Unable to Serve” and learn more about the organization’s members and activities.

SATELLITE UPLINK INFORMATION:

Date: Tuesday, September 1

Time: 3:00 – 3:15 pm EST

Coordinates: Galaxy 3C C-Band Analog, Transponder 21, Downlink Frequency: 4120 Horizontal

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