

Assistant Secretary of Defense (Reserve Affairs), Thomas Hall
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MERIDIAN—Assistant Secretary of Defense for Reserve Affairs Thomas Hall paid a visit to Naval Reserve Center Meridian on April 24th. The retired two star admiral used the opportunity to address the future of the reserve community, and to entertain questions and concerns from the reservists themselves.

Secretary Hall told NRC Meridian that an effort to rebalance Reserve and Guard forces was underway. “You’ve participated in the largest mobilization effort since World War Two, but we don’t need to mobilize entire units like we’ve done in the past. We need individuals with certain skills...” Hall said, emphasizing the increased need to address security concerns. “We need more military police and civil affairs.”

Hall said to expect reserve and guard force size to stay where it is and to expect to see more civilians providing services that military bases provide. He said that the Pentagon is currently looking at ways to make hiring of reservists more attractive to civilian employers. “We spoke with an executive at Home Depot who said he liked hiring reservists...’They’re honest, they have a work ethic, they’re drug free and you’ve taught them to be leaders.’” Hall said the problem is with small businesses that may only have a handful of employees and would be hard hit by a reservist’s mobilization. “So how do we address that? Congress is considering tax breaks for small businesses so that they could hire temp workers until the reservists demobilize.”

Hall said that the reserve community needs to do a better job of handling pay problems and said to expect a new pay system that would integrate active and reserve services some time next year. He also said that Congress is working on equalizing benefits provided to mobilized reservists, to make them more equal with their active duty counterparts. Examples included retirement, educational allowances, reenlistment bonuses, and medical services.

As Assistant Secretary for Reserve Affairs, Hall is responsible for more than 1.2 million Reserve and National Guard members. He is a former director of the Naval Reserve Association and retired from active duty with more than 34 years of service.