FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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*** PRESS RELEASE ***

SENATOR MCCASKILL TELLS MILITARY SEXUAL ASSAULT SURVIVORS TO WAIT 5 MORE YEARS FOR AN INDEPENDENT AND IMPARTIAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

Protect Our Defenders Advisory Board Member and Tailhook whistleblower, Paula Coughlin asks, "How many more violent crimes will be included in Pentagon reports five years from now, because the Senator from Missouri wanted to protect the status quo?"

Washington DC - Senator Claire McCaskill (D-MO) continues to be one of the biggest roadblocks to the creation of a professional, independent and impartial military justice system. On Friday, the Senator from Missouri voiced her support for the status quo when she told The Nation that she wants to give widely condemned half measures five more years before considering common sense reforms that our top allies have already implemented, "If five years from now we're having fewer sexual assault convictions, if we have fewer reports of sexual assault that appear to be an anomaly in terms of the overall incidents coming down, I'll be first in line," said Sen. McCaskill.

Sen. McCaskill has set the bar ridiculously low. She in essence is saying that, if five years from now, this epidemic is worse than it is today she will support fundamental reform. Furthermore, Sen. McCaskill also said, "if everybody in the unit knows the commander has said 'this needs to go to court,' that gives you (the victim) a level of protection you will never have when everyone knows a bunch of outside lawyers have bought your bull.” Bull? She is not only attacking the competence and credibility of military prosecutors, her words seems to imply that a large percentage of the victims who report are lying.

Last month, Sen. McCaskill incorrectly alleged on MSNBC that the Pentagon's Unwanted Sexual Contact statistics includes "somebody looking at you sideways and saying something about how nice you look in a sweater." This is not true. [Read DoD definition of unwanted sexual contact].

"Senator McCaskill is fighting against common sense reforms and protecting the status quo and military leaders that have failed for decades to address the epidemic of military sexual assault. She has said that she will give military brass another five years before supporting an independent and impartial military justice system," said Nancy Parrish, President of Protect Our Defenders. "In the meantime, countless more victims will suffer, billions will be spent on
mental and medical services, our military will be weakened, and this national disgrace will only get worse. Sen. McCaskill is not giving enough weight to the pain and suffering that comes as collateral damage in the current military justice system. Victims need an impartial system they can trust, which starts by removing prosecution decisions from the chain of command."

The Pentagon estimates that last year alone, there were more than 26,000 instances of rape and other sexual crimes in the U.S. military. Only a tiny fraction of these perpetrators faced justice. Most troubling is that 90 percent of victims never come forward because they are afraid of retaliation or have seen what happens to those few who do report. Alarming, 60 percent of victims who reported said that they were retaliated against. Despite twenty years of purported zero tolerance by the Pentagon and ineffective "reforms" by Congress and military leaders, the crisis persists and grows worse every day that our elected leaders support the status quo and do not address the fundamental issues fueling the crisis: command bias and conflict of interest.

"How many more violent crimes will be included in Pentagon reports five years from now, because the Senator from Missouri wanted to protect the status quo? We know the root cause of this epidemic: command bias and conflict of interest. It would be ludicrous to allow the military leadership to continue to mishandle cases and blame victims for another five years," said Paula Coughlin, Protect Our Defenders Advisory Board Member and Tailhook whistleblower. "I have seen this broken dynamic of military justice continue since my case was dismissed by the convening authority almost twenty years ago. Sen. McCaskill's half measures offer victims almost nothing. Is that supposed to be acceptable to the American public? Patriotism is about protecting our troops. Those who serve our country should receive justice equivalent to that which civilians enjoy - military prosecutors not commanders should determine whether to prosecute cases. The Commander-in-Chief has said he wants action. This inaction is a dereliction of duty."

Over 50 percent of victims report the perpetrator is of higher rank and 25 percent of victims report the perpetrator is in their chain of command. The bipartisan Military Justice Improvement Act, which would create an independent and impartial justice system for military sexual assault cases and other serious crimes introduced by Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY), Sen. Susan Collins (R-ME) and Sen. Barbara Boxer (D-CA), currently has 41 senators supporting the legislation. Last week, Sen. Ted Cruz (R-TX) and Sen. Rand Paul (R-KY) joined a growing bi-artisan coalition of Senators supporting common sense reforms for our failed military justice system.

"We have spoken to hundreds of survivors and they all say the same thing: their Chain of Command shut down the complaint, didn't believe them, threatened them with collateral misconduct, or discharged them with errant medical diagnoses such as "personality disorder." Victims want a system they can trust, which will in turn increase reporting rates," said Parrish. "The experiences of our closest allies, who have independent and impartial justice systems support this. In Israel over a five-year period from 2006-2011, reporting increased 80%. Let's not forget however, it is the United States that is suffering from a sexual assault crisis of epidemic proportions. The numbers of sexual assaults in our military are rising and prosecutions are only occurring in a very small percentage of cases. We need an impartial and fair military justice and we need it now."
The Nation: Temperatures Rising Over Military Sexual Assaults
http://www.thenation.com/blog/175357/temperatures-rising-over-military-sexual-assaults#

Baltimore Sun: Military sexual assaults: reforms not dead yet
http://www.baltimoresun.com/news/opinion/editorial/bs-ed-assaults-20130718,0,2761826.story#ixzz2ZRB1uF3v

Protect Our Defenders Policy Paper: Nine Roadblocks to Justice
http://www.protectourdefenders.com/roadblocks-to-justice/

Politico: Rare bipartisan moment over military sexual assault
http://www.politico.com/story/2013/07/military-sex-assault-bipartisanship-94273.html#ixzz2ZFxOKHcW

Protect Our Defenders sets story straight: Dept. of Defense definition of "unwanted sexual contact" does not include sexual harassment

Politico: Kirsten Gillibrand's slow climb to 51 votes

Military Times: Survivor speaks out for sexual assault prevention

Washington Post: Vets reeling from military sexual assault describe gaps in accessing VA health care
http://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/congress/vets-reeling-from-military-sexual-assault-describe-gaps-in-accessing-va-health-care/2013/07/19/2a5d916a-f0b1-11e2-bc0d-556690a86be2_story.html

MSNBC: Military sexual assault survivors face broken VA treatment system

About Protect Our Defenders: Protect Our Defenders is a human rights organization. We seek to honor, support and give voice to the brave women and men in uniform who have been sexually assaulted while serving their country, and re-victimized by the military adjudication system - a system that often blames the victim and fails to prosecute the perpetrator. Learn more about Protect Our Defenders at www.protectourdefenders.com or on Facebook at http://facebook.com/ProtectOurDefenders or follow us on Twitter at https://twitter.com/ProtectRDfinders.

Protect Our Defenders partners with Attorney Susan Burke, Burke PLLC to advance lawsuits filed against the DoD and service academies for repeatedly ignoring rape, sexual assault and harassment, failing to prosecute perpetrators and retaliating against the victim.

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