**WASHINGTON, DC –** Congressman Joe Courtney today released the following statement after *Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta announced that the Pentagon would lift the ban on women serving in combat:*

“Today is an historic day for our military, American women and our country as a whole. Throughout our history—from Molly Pitcher in the Revolutionary War forward—women have answered the call to serve.

“In the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, although the rule banning women from combat roles remained in place, our female soldiers often found themselves on the front lines right next to their male counterparts. They served with distinction and valor, proving that the ban was outdated and unnecessary. Just this past week, I visited the USS Harry S Truman 100 miles off the coast of Virginia, where they engaged in exercises to prepare for a long deployment to the Middle East. There I saw firsthand the complete integration of women sailors and officers performing every task that makes an aircraft carrier succeed.

“In eastern Connecticut, women officers are already earning their Dolphins and are well on their way to integrating Ohio class submarines. Soon, neither gender, nor race, nor sexual orientation will prevent someone who is willing and capable of serving from serving. That’s the way it should be.”

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