

STATEMENT BY

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NATIONAL GUARD BUREAU J-1

BEFORE THE

HOUSE VETERANS AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

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ON

LOWERING THE RATE OF UNEMPLOYMENT

FOR THE NATIONAL GUARD

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THE HOUSE VETERANS AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

Opening Remarks

Chairman Stutzman, Ranking Member Braley, and distinguished members of the subcommittee; I am honored to appear before you today on behalf of the Chief of the National Guard Bureau, General Craig McKinley, to represent our 465,000 Army and Air National Guard Service Members. I would like to begin by expressing my sincere appreciation to the subcommittee for its tremendous support over the past several years, and for your concern with the well-being of the outstanding men and women serving in our nation's National Guard in 50 states, three territories, and the District of Columbia. Your work has ensured America's Citizen Soldiers and Airmen have the resources they need as they transition to civilian life.

National Guard Unemployment Information

One of the many challenges that we face today is unemployment for our returning Guardsmen. Based on the Department of Defense Civilian Employment Information database, we estimate that 20 percent of returning National Guard Soldiers and Airmen are unemployed. The rate of unemployed Gulf War-Era II Veterans remains much higher than the national non-veteran rate. Gulf War-Era II Veterans who have left military service in the past have an unemployment rate in December 2011 of 13.1 percent. (Ref. Current Population Survey (CPS) of the Bureau of Labor Statistics).

However, we believe more analysis is required to understand the actual unemployment rate, particularly for the 18-24 year old population. For example, we are finding a number of these Service Members were high school students before they deployed, so they do not have jobs waiting for them. Furthermore, there is a certain percentage returning from deployment that will choose to pursue higher education using their newly earned Montgomery GI Bill benefits, rather than enter the workforce.

National Guard Bureau Initiatives and Transition Assistance

The National Guard Bureau has been and remains deeply concerned with the employment status of our Soldiers and Airmen. They are our most important asset and their well-being and

retention are essential for the National Guard as an operational force. As early as 2004, the National Guard Bureau funded a unique resource, titled "Program Support Specialist", at each of the 54 State Joint Force Headquarters. This individual serves as the subject matter expert for the Adjutant General regarding local issues with employers of Air and Army National Guard members.

While initially focused on specific employer support issues and complaint resolution, the duties of the Program Support Specialist expanded to include employment facilitation. In addition to coordinating employment opportunity events and linking unemployed Guardsmen with available resources, Program Support Specialists are serving as case managers for unemployed Guardsmen by connecting them with local resources, the Department of Veterans Affairs, and the Department of Labor. Last year, Program Support Specialists participated in over 1,000 "Yellow Ribbon Reintegration" events nationwide – supporting units throughout the country returning from deployment by identifying employment opportunities and providing other requested assistance. We continue to develop metrics to measure the effectiveness of our program.

The Program Support Specialists also work closely with our Transition Assistance Advisors in the State Joint Force Headquarters to ensure our Guard members are registered with Veterans' Affairs (VA) and can access their VA benefits, to include vocational and job training. Both of these programs are essential when developing and establishing community-based program networks in support of Veterans, Service Members and Families.

The Army National Guard Directorate offers several national programs to assist the states with their local employment programs. The "Job Connection Education Program" (JCEP) is a web-based program that interfaces with Facebook and provides the ability for Guardsmen and their families to research, obtain, and retain civilian employment. The "Guard Apprentice Program Initiative", in partnership with the Department of Labor and the Department of Veterans' Affairs, continues to build relationships with employers and colleges to facilitate civilian apprenticeship and employment opportunities for National Guard and other Reserve Component members. "Drive the Guard" is a

collaborative effort with the Commercial Driver Training Foundation, Inc. which links Guardsmen with training and certification programs in their communities. Once completed, the Guardsman has the potential to begin a career in the truck driving industry.

State Initiatives & Support

The Adjutants General represented today will address programs they developed to assist returning Guardsmen in obtaining employment. I would like to provide two additional examples. With multiple brigade deployments over the past several years, the Texas National Guard has an extensive relationship within their university system whereby they identify students who are unemployed veterans. These students are matched up with members of the Texas chapters of the Society of Human Resource Management (SHRM) for possible employment opportunities. The SHRM network at the local level is a tremendous resource because in many cases, it is these local Human Resource managers who are influential in the hiring process. Another example is the State of Washington. Prior to their return from deployment, all members of their 81st Brigade Combat Team (Heavy) were canvassed in theater. Members who desired employment were identified to the Washington Employment Security Department, who in turn began to identify employment opportunities for those individuals before their return to the US. Additionally, representatives traveled to the demobilization site, Camp Atterbury, Indiana, to continue the employment process prior to the Guardsmen returning to Washington State. This pre-identification of unemployed Service Members galvanized support from the governor on down to the local community. The strength of the National Guard rests with community-based grassroots efforts, and citizens assisting citizens. State and community employment programs are essential to finding solutions at the local level.

Network Solution

From an automated network solution perspective, National Guard members and families receive on-line personnel support services, to include state-specific employment information through the Joint Services Support portal, at www.jointservicesupport.org. This capability will be expanded

in the near future to include an application encouraging Guardsmen and Reservists to initiate and update their Civilian Employment Information (CEI). This application will allow Adjutants General to better identify Service Members who are unemployed and desire employment. With initial testing beginning this spring, the enhancement will permit states to utilize real-time data to assist National Guardsmen in pursuit of employment opportunities.

Closing Remarks

Our National Guardsmen have proven themselves to be ready, reliable, and accessible here at home and overseas. Many of them have had multiple deployments away from their families and employers. The National Guard Bureau is working hard to offer programs and initiatives that will improve our unemployment rates, but there is more work to be done. Once again, I thank you for holding this hearing and I look forward to responding to your questions.