

MAJOR GENERAL RONALD YOUNG, DIRECTOR, MANPOWER AND PERSONNEL
NATIONAL GUARD BUREAU

FINAL
UNCLASSIFIED
STATEMENT BY
MAJOR GENERAL RONALD YOUNG,
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NATIONAL GUARD BUREAU
BEFORE THE
SENATE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AFFAIRS
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ON
EDUCATION BENEFITS FOR THE TOTAL MILITARY FORCE
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Chairman Akaka, Senator Craig and distinguished members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today. I greatly appreciate your commitment to veterans and current members of the Armed Services and am grateful for the chance to testify regarding educational assistance for the National Guard.

The Montgomery GI Bill- Selected Reserve (MGIB-SR) is instrumental in the National Guard's effort to recruit, train and retain highly professional members in its force structure. The MGIB-SR, leveraged with innovative force management tools such as the Guard Recruiter Assistance Program (G-RAP), plays a major role in recruiting and retaining quality soldiers and airmen. These programs have improved the National Guard's ability to recruit and retain highly qualified soldiers from all walks of the American landscape and furthered the Department's effort to develop professional soldiers through formal education. The National Guard's ability to meet its congressionally mandated end strength owes a great deal to these valuable programs.

Over the past decade, the National Guard has undergone a transformation from its traditional posture as a strategic reserve to a fully operational force. The National Guard of today is closely integrated with its active Army and Air Force counterparts. Whether under the slogan "One Army" or "Total Force," the National Guard effectively fulfills its contingency requirements on the global stage while

maintaining its vital duties here at home. It is important that Guardsmen's benefits be commensurate with their sacrifice and their contribution.

Currently, there are substantial differences between the education benefits offered to the National Guard and those available to the Active Components. For the most part, these differences reflect variations in the types of service performed and the life styles of active and reserve service members. Today, as the National Guard transitions to a fully operational element of the Armed Services, demands are being placed on Guardsmen more than ever before. This transition has

changed the nature of service in the National Guard, but it will not eliminate differences between active and reserve forces. As civilian soldiers, our military service coincides with ongoing civilian responsibilities, and we often have different educational needs.

In the following testimony, I will first summarize three key differences between Active and Reserve education benefits. I will then describe a few changes made to these benefits to make them more appropriate for Reservists who serve active duty in response to a war or national emergency.

Active and Reserve Benefits

The main difference between active and reserve educational benefits is a matter of timing philosophy. Education benefits for active duty service members is an entitlement earned through service and a modest financial contribution. It is used as a recruitment tool. Education benefit for National Guardsmen is a retention incentive. Because National Guard service is not traditionally full-time, and because Guardsmen have historically spent the vast majority of their service stateside, it has

been possible for us to use our education benefits while serving. Active Duty service members, by contrast, collect their benefit after separation. Thus, the Education assistance benefit is not just a recruitment tool for the National Guard; it serves double duty as a retention tool. Education benefits encourage Guardsmen to join, and continued service is rewarded with ongoing benefits. This retention incentive has been very successful for the National Guard, but we have begun to hear complaints from the field that the current operations tempo of deployments is less compatible with pursuing an education.

A second difference is that National Guardsmen do not buy in to their education benefits. Active duty members can choose to contribute 12 monthly deductions of \$100 each from their paychecks. Such a contribution is not required from Guardsmen.

The third major difference between active and reserve education benefits is the amount of assistance the service members receive. In the late 1990s, reservists received approximately 48 percent of the active duty rate. Since then, the active duty benefit has increased at a faster rate than reservists' benefits. Today, a full time reservist student receiving the basic benefit gets up to \$309 per month, just 29% of the \$1075 received by active component counterparts.

Changes to Reservists' Education Benefits

In light of the difficulty some Guardsmen now have balancing demanding deployment schedules with pursuing an education, two changes to education

benefits were recently made. National Guard soldiers and airmen who serve on active duty qualify for an extension to use benefits and a new benefit.

Basic educational benefits have been extended for such service members by the amount of time they served on active duty plus four months. If they decide to separate before their educational benefits have been used up, they may receive those benefits for that amount of time beyond their separation.

Second, a new benefit, the Reserve Educational Assistance Program (REAP) was created. Guardsmen who have been activated for 90 days or more receive increased benefits through REAP based on the length of their activation. Unlike regular benefits, the REAP benefit is directly tied to the Active Duty rate. Soldiers and Airmen who are activated for 90 days may receive 40% of benefit that active duty members are entitled to, Those who serve a year or more receive 60% of the active rate, and a National Guardsman who is activated for two or more years

of consecutive active duty service may receive 80% of the \$1075 that his active duty counterpart would receive. It should be noted that this law counts only consecutive time in active service, and does not take the now common multiple deployments into account.

The National Guard's primary objective is to ensure that the Department of Defense has the flexibility to continue to use educational benefits as effective recruiting and retention tools, and that those benefits are useful and commensurate with Guardsmen's contribution and sacrifice.

Thank you again for your attention to this important matter and for the opportunity to appear before this Committee. I look forward to your questions.