

Major General Timothy Lowenberg, Adjutant General, Washington State Military Department

STATEMENT OF MAJOR GENERAL TIM LOWENBERG:

Good morning. For the record, I am Major General Tim Lowenberg, Adjutant General of the State of Washington. I would like to preface my remarks by thanking Senator Murray for her tireless support of our Guard members and their families before, during and following their activation for federal military service. Thank you, Senator, for standing with and supporting your National Guard as we have repeatedly mobilized and deployed our communities' sons and daughters, fathers and mothers (and in some cases grandfathers and grandmothers) at home and abroad in support of Operation Noble Eagle, Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom. From Afghanistan to Iraq to countries throughout the Horn of Africa; from Cuba to South America, to the jungles of the Philippines and to South Korea ? in the past three (3) years, we have mobilized and deployed more than four (4) times the number of Washington National Guard soldiers and airmen as were activated for the Korean War and the Vietnam Conflict combined.

The attacks of September 11, 2001 and the ensuing Global War on Terrorism have triggered a paradigm shift for our military ? one that has transformed our nation's Guard and Reserve forces from a strategic reserve to a fully combat ready and combat-tasked operational reserve.

In answering our country's call, the Washington National Guard has greatly expanded our traditional roles and missions and we have responded in creative and thoughtful ways to the new soldier-care and airmen-care issues and to the unprecedented stresses our operations tempo is putting on our families. In many respects, I believe we have initiated national best practices in our state. By leaning forward so aggressively, however, we're both in a position to better appreciate the scope of unmet needs and to recognize the amount of work and systems corrections that still need to be made to sustain a combat ready force and combat-ready National Guard families.

Our major focus has been on ensuring our returning service members ? America's new generation of combat veterans -- can quickly and smoothly integrate back into their family lives, employment and civilian career tracks and community activities. We have formed an impressive, formal coalition of federal and state veterans agencies, social service and employment agencies, and veterans and other non-profit service organizations to support these new American heroes. And we believe strongly that the collective commitment and support of these coalition members is one of the most important long term solutions for reintegrating service members and addressing their individual and family needs - now and throughout the remainder of their service careers.

These and other solutions are within our capacity to conceive, develop and execute, but many other solutions can only be created by refinements in federal policy and, in some cases, by decisive Congressional action. I would like to call the Committee's attention to three (3) such problem areas. All three revolve around the fact that programs, laws, policies and regulations formulated in the Cold War often no longer support an operational reserve force or the tempo of deployments we have maintained since 9/11/01.

First, we need to review the overall Transition Assistance Program (TAP). Second, we need to find more innovative and effective means of communicating with our veterans community. And, third, we need to make fundamental adjustments in the legal constructs and administrative programs that support our service members before, during and after their deployments for federal military service.

The Transition Assistance Program (TAP) is a nationally coordinated effort designed to assist military men and women in transitioning to civilian life. It focuses on employment and job training. (Public Law PL 101-510, sections 1142, 1143, Title X, U.S.C.; DOD Directive 1332.35 and DOD Instruction 1332.36; Sec of Def Policy Memorandum 30 April 2002; DOD/DVA and DOL MOU; AR 600-8-101).

Although it arguably met the needs of a strategic reserve force in which the bulk of the load was carried by the active duty services, we now need a revised and updated Transition Assistance (TAP) model that is specifically tailored for the needs of today's National Guardsmen and reservists as they transition from extended service in overseas combat and stabilization missions. The revised model should include interpersonal and life-skills training, readjustment counseling, and VA briefings and workshops that are presented before the member's active duty tour ends, as well as training sessions and workshops that continue for up to one year after the veteran's release from active duty. A broad cross-section of civilians (e.g., dependents and family representatives), Veterans Administration officials and military professionals should be charged with reviewing and updating today's dated reintegration programs.

Second, we need to find innovative ways of educating our veterans about the many federal and state benefits to which they are entitled, as well as the growing number of services provided by private, non-profit public service organizations. States, for example, should be encouraged to form veterans outreach committees that recruit and capitalize upon the creative talents of the private-sector marketing and advertising industry. Private sector companies are, by and large, eager to assist military service members. They simply need encouragement and some positive direction in channeling their energies and expertise. Such assistance can obviously be outsourced and contracted, but that option bleeds money from already under-resourced veterans services. We're in the early stages of shaping such an initiative in our state. I look forward to briefing you in the not-too-distant future on our success.

Finally, many of our Cold-War era laws and regulations are simply no longer sufficient to meet the needs of today's operational Guard and Reserve forces. Many of these statutes, separate and unequal pay and benefits regulations, and other bright-line distinctions between career active duty personnel and career National Guard and Reserve personnel no longer fit today's high operations tempo, combat ready reserve forces. Changes in these arcane and outdated systems would go a long way toward recruiting and retaining the 21st Century Guard and Reserve force and substantially enhance the reintegration of these veterans and their families following each recurring period of federal military service. I refer, of course, to the separate and unequal systems of pay, our members' severely restricted access to medical and dental care and other vestiges of the Cold-War era.

With each cycle of domestic base realignments and closures, active duty forces are also becoming confined to a shrinking number of CONUS operating sites, while Guardsmen and

Reserve soldiers, airmen, sailors, Marines and Coast Guardsmen remain scattered throughout the depth and breadth of America, thereby further isolating Guardsmen and reservists from active duty service centers, Tri-Care providers and other sources of traditional support for veterans.

As we rush headlong into the 21st Century -- as we answer the call of destiny in responding to the scourge of transnational terrorism -- time is not our ally. We must do everything necessary to support and sustain a combat ready, operational Guard and reserve force now. We must therefore make these adjustments now. Our veterans and their families require and deserve nothing less.

Thank you for your kind attention and for your personal commitment and dedication to America's veterans. On their behalf, I thank you for your sacrifice and service and for your bold statement of support in conducting this field hearing. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.