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Statement of
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My employment history since graduating with my master's degree in 2003 has been heavily influenced by my husband's military and civilian career. Up until the deployment I was progressing at a pace I was satisfied with and felt was on par with my peers. His deployment to Iraq, however, resulted in a gap in my employment history, and changed my future career course. Following is some background about my employment history leading up to my husband's deployment.

We both grew up and attended college in Washington, Senator Murray's state. After graduating on the same day, he from law school and I from a master's program, we relocated to Pennsylvania, Senator Specter's state, in July of 2003 where my husband served as a federal law clerk until February 2005. I was fortunate to keep my job with a Northwest based top 100 accounting and consulting firm, where I began as a communications intern during my master's program, by working from home in Pennsylvania despite the firm having no offices outside of Washington or Idaho. I had also given birth to our second son during that time, so the arrangement was ideal for our circumstances as young professionals with young children. Our family moved to Alexandria in February of 2005 when my husband accepted a full time position in Virginia, Senator Webb's state. The move forced my company to reevaluate our telecommuting agreement, and, while I pushed to keep working from home, they were not able to continue with this work arrangement, but they did contract with me for several projects as the new employee was trained. By this time I had tripled my starting hourly wage.

Within weeks of moving to Virginia rumblings of a deployment put a question mark on my employment future, since we had no idea how it would affect our family. He received orders and deployed on Mother's Day 2005 for three months of training in Indiana, and then was sent to Iraq where he served in a small town outside of Fallujah from late July 2005 until July 2006. Our sons were six and 18 months at the time.

I had begun a frantic search for employment before we moved to Virginia, right after I was informed I could no longer telecommute for my firm once I moved. The pressure to replace my income, and put to use my education, which had been funded primarily by a full scholarship I was awarded as junior in college, weighed heavily on my mind, but when my husband finally deployed I wasn't sure what to do. Despite my husband's eleven years of service as a reserve component soldier (he served as an enlisted Washington National Guard soldier for five years, then as an officer in the WNG prior to transferring to the Army reserves when we moved to Pennsylvania) I couldn't have imagined what the next 15 months would bring; an injury caused by an IED in the first weeks of him being in Iraq, and the anxiety on all of us.

Going back to civilian employment

When he returned home early August 2006 we both wanted as much time as a family as possible, so using his military leave and some of our own funds to float us without an income for a few days he was able to take several weeks off before returning to his civilian job.

I decided to seek part time employment when my husband returned home. I freelanced on a few projects while he was deployed, but only during the first half. After his two week leave in Jan of 2006, I was overwhelmed and sought counseling, so did not pursue any additional freelance opportunities. When he returned, I was eager to find ways to get my career back on track, but still could not to take my main focus off my family, which, for me, precluded me from seeking full time work. By this time it had been a year and a half since I had been employed. I volunteered as an FRG leader during the deployment and the responsibilities I had helped to explain my absence from the work force for prospective employers, but it would take another six months to find a position that could accommodate my family needs, which I believe is an important point.

When my husband returned, he was not the same, and our family was not the same. Like thousands of service members, he was dealing with post traumatic stress and also a traumatic brain injury, which affected all of us. He lives with chronic headaches, decreased hearing and eyesight, and traumatic memories, to name some of his symptoms. My two-year-old son was uncomfortable with his father for anything routine, such as bed times, having spent half his life separated from him, so it was a challenge for my husband to bond with our children again, and find his role in our lives since we had been independent of him for so long. Given these circumstances I felt a great responsibility to my family and wanted to balance our health with my career, so I think it took me much longer to find employment than had I been seeking traditional full time employment without the added concern for my family.

It was at times discouraging looking for work. I was not aware of resources for reserve or guard spouses seeking professional employment, besides a career fair on Ft. Belvoir, which I attended. I relied on Monster, Craigslist, and my own small network of friends. During the first half of his tour, when I was looking for work, I had several recruiters calling based on my Monster profile. When he returned home, I updated my profile with my FRG responsibilities and my award for public service. I received one call in six months. Was the dearth in interest because I now had a nearly two year gap in my paid employment history? I can't be sure, but it was frustrating to think that I, too, had served my country while my husband was deployed, and it was more difficult looking for work now, than before that service.

And yet, the pull to be home with my family, to take care of them, was strong enough to make me question if going back to work was even the right move. I had conflicting emotions - take care of them from home, or get back into the work force so that I can eventually get a high paying job in case my husband's employment was affected by what he suffered in Iraq. (He was still in the disability process at that time and we did not know what kind of compensation he would receive for his injury.) It may sound paranoid, but given the recent discoveries about even mild TEI and the delayed onset of symptoms particularly when coupled with PTSD, it was a real and frightening thought at the time, and it still crosses my mind that who knows what or how TBI symptoms could affect his longevity as an attorney. I want to be prepared to care for my family no matter what the future holds.

I believe reserve spouses must also be proactive and take advantage of the opportunities that are presented during a deployment. I became involved in military life to an extent I never had before, which resulted in my finding employment with NMFA. I do believe I am behind my civilian peers due to the deployment - an effect that my husband has protection from under Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act - I make half the hourly rate from my last

contracting opportunity with my previous firm, and I am in a field that I was not trained for, so I am in a sense losing career building time in my primary field of education and experience. However, I also am offered benefits that I did not have as a contractor, such as paid leave, holidays, a retirement plan and health care benefits. And I'm in a place I feel secure in if my husband was deployed again.

Future employment as a reserve family

We have a much clearer understanding of what it means to be a reserve family in today's military. Not only can we expect the two weeks of yearly training to take work off for, we know another deployment is a real possibility and we must consider how it affects our civilian jobs. For me it means needing a flexible and a supportive employer who will understand if I need time off for my husband or my children or even a leave of absence. It also means having back up daycare arrangements.

Child care

I am experiencing now what life would be like if he deployed. My husband is currently away for 17 days to attend a military course and I have relied on the generosity of my friends (also military spouses) to care for my children when my husband normally would.

A deployment today would increase my daycare costs by about \$200/month since my husband currently has a flex schedule, which allows him to be home with our children one day a week. (During a deployment, that's about what I spent sending my husband food since he lived outside of a FOB and did not have regular access to meals other than MREs, morale items, and paying for shipping.) I rely on him

for this so that I can work more hours that day without having to pay for an additional day of daycare for our three year old, or before and after school care for my third grader. If I did have to pay for an additional day, the total cost of daycare would eat up more than 60 percent of my paycheck.

While I do qualify for military child care when my husband is on active duty orders for more than 72 hours, this would not completely eliminate the challenges. First, I still would have to pay for it. Second, I know from experience using the part time care on post during the deployment that you must plan at least one month in advance to get an hourly care slot, not to mention having to go through the process of re-registering them, and hours are limited from 8am until 4pm. This would conflict with my work schedule. Third, there is no transportation from a civilian school to before and after care on post for my third grader.

If he were deployed again, I would have to either alter my work schedule or lose pay, and paying for additional child care would make the net financial profit of working hardly worth it.

Future deployments

Since returning, my husband has been contacted twice for another deployment. We assume that he cannot be ordered to deploy again since he just finished a 15-month tour less than one year ago, but the lack of clarity on the deployment rules for Guard and Reserve service members puts us in a precarious position wondering how long he can stay in the service, considering the interruptions it causes to our primary livelihood. I know nothing is sure, but some guidance or an attempt to follow a standard, such as limiting deployments to 18 consecutive months in five years, would at least help us to understand what we are facing if we remain a reserve family. No one has been able to answer that question for me.

Job interruptions caused by lengthy deployments can have significant consequences for reserve families. One reserve spouse who ran her own business told me that after her reserve spouse's

second deployment in four years, with a total of two years away; she was compelled to close her business. The risk of future deployments was too great for her. She wrote to me saying: "First, it is a lot of work to run a business, but on your own it is even more. This is not double the work... it is exponential. The farm, the house, the business, it is exhausting both physically and emotionally.

Secondly the financial risk involved. A small business is always tenuous. I have a few employees and although they are all contractors, I try to keep myself and them employed to their fullest potential. The loss of a large contract, the bankruptcy of a large client, or worse yet another geopolitical disaster such as 9/11 could wipe out my company in a day. This would have a large impact on my finances while my spouse is overseas.

And finally, since my husband's return in August, my thoughts have been overwhelmed with worries that he will be called back again. And this time, it will be longer than the last. I need a more stable, less risky environment.

It is hard to find an employer who believes that I want to give up successful entrepreneurship for a return to the corporate life. But I tell them this is now a way of life for the military spouse."

The service member

While I have the opportunity, I would like to offer some insight into the service member's transition to civilian employment after a deployment. We are more profoundly affected by his or her return to civilian employment if they are the primary breadwinners.

Each service member's experience is different, but there are common challenges to returning to civilian employment - if they even have something to return to. I believe a large part of this issue revolves around ensuring service members, and their families understand the Uniformed Services Employment and

Reemployment Rights Act and how it applies to public and private employers and ensuring employers adhere to these protections without causing undue burden or pressure on the service member. In addition, I believe certain changes should be made, or at least more clearly articulated within USERRA regarding the employment rights of our nation's citizen warriors. I admit I do not understand the law myself. But, I can offer our family's experience to highlight some difficulties and successes.

I have found the general understanding of employment rights for reserve service members to be limited to: 1) a guarantee that you will have a position to return to, or one comparable to the position you left when you deployed, 2) any pay increases, or promotions you were entitled to before you deployed should remain on schedule. I believe the rule should be simple - you should not be penalized in any way because you served your country when called to active duty. Our service members put their lives on the line, spend years away from their spouses and children, sometimes only to return to a boss pressuring you to return to work, dragging feet to give deserved, earned benefits, or nothing to return to at all. We must also continue to recognize employers who exemplify support to guard and reserve service members and their families.

The transition back and forth from civilian to military to civilian again can be consuming because of everything else that is going on. Our family's primary concern was securing a pay increase that we were sure he would have earned had he not been deployed. We had hoped the pay raise would be a natural part of his return to work but that did not occur and so my husband began the due diligence to receive the raise he deserved. After writing letters and progressing up the appropriate chain, seven months later he received the raise, and pay dated back to the date of the raise. Though we disagreed with the date of the pay raise, we felt it was best to not push our

luck and considered the matter resolved. Other issues we faced when he returned to work were: reconciling whether or not he acquired leave while he was deployed (he did not), how to make up for matching contributions to our retirement plan (this process is not clear), and achieving the next scheduled pay raise. While we are grateful to have received his raise, but that seven-month wait heaped stress upon my husband who was already dealing with other challenges from the deployment.

Overall, I believe our family was fortunate that my husband was a federal employee during his deployment. His profession as an attorney and chosen field of practice offered certain protections that we felt confident would be fulfilled, or to see enforced in the case that they were not. Though only weeks into his new position before he received orders to deploy (incidentally, he was at Air Assault school for two weeks after beginning his new position when he heard of the deployment orders), where he came from an 18-month long federal law clerkship, his supervisors were incredibly supportive. His benefits specialist was patient to explain any questions I had during his deployment regarding issues such as health care benefits, which were paid for by the federal government as primary health care coverage, military leave pay and life insurance.

Mr. Chairman and distinguished members of the Committee, I thank you for your interest in how Reserve component service members and their military families transition back to civilian employment after returning from war. We are proud of our service, but I ask that we not bear additional costs as we balance our civilian life with our military commitments. More emphasis placed on resources for job placement after returning from deployment, better communication and enforcement of reserve and guard employment rights, and continued support from outstanding employers will help sustain citizen warriors and their families, and our nation's security for the long term.