

**TESTIMONY OF THE  
NATIONAL GUARD ASSOCIATION OF THE UNITED STATES**

**Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs**

**June 15, 2017**

Dear Chairman Isakson, Ranking Member Tester, and other distinguished members of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee:

**Introduction:**

On behalf of the almost 45,000 members of the National Guard Association of the United States and the nearly 500,000 soldiers and airmen of the National Guard, we deeply appreciate this opportunity to share with you our thoughts on today's hearing topics for the record. We also thank you for the tireless oversight you have provided to ensure accountability and improve our nation's services to veterans and their families.

In my testimony, I would like to focus on an issue that continues to plague the soldiers and airmen of the National Guard, which falls under the jurisdiction of this Committee. We urge this Committee to correct the benefit disparity for members of the National Guard when deployed under 10 U.S.C. §12304b status. My goal today is to highlight this particular issue, as well as provide endorsements for numerous legislative proposals also under consideration by this Committee.

**Duty Status Reform and Benefit Parity:**

Since our inception in 1878, ensuring benefit eligibility and equity for the men and women of the National Guard has been one of NGAUS' primary functions. I would be remiss if I did not point out that historically, benefits for servicemembers, most notably through the 1944 G.I. Bill,

were not constructed nor viewed as entitlements. Rather, the G.I. Bill and related legislative efforts were solely focused on reintegrating the men and women of the armed forces following the horrors of World War II and helping them to become successful, contributing members of American society.

It is in this same light that we remain discouraged that there has been no resolution with the numerous benefits currently not attributed to Guard and Reserve Servicemembers deploying under 10 U.S.C. §12304b status. Since establishing the 12304b authority in 2012 to give Combatant Commanders greater authority to utilize the Reserve Component, thousands of our members have been deployed on operations to support the Multinational Force Observers mission in the Sinai, Egypt, NATO's Operation Joint Guardian in Kosovo, and most recently the European Reassurance Initiative countering Russian aggression in Eastern Europe. The Guard and Reserve forces have provided a cost-effective means of meeting the needs of Combatant Commanders and have provided important experience and expertise. We are also aware of the Department of Defense's continued utilization of this authority as evidenced by proposed increases in Guard and Reserve deployments under 12304b.

However, when the 12304b authority was established, it failed to make important changes to 5 U.S.C., 37 U.S.C., 38 U.S.C. and 10 U.S.C. As such, health, education, leave, pay, and retirement benefits equal with active component troops serving the same functions have been denied to Guard and Reserve Component soldiers serving under the 12304b authority. While our constituency wants to serve in any capacity, we believe that they should be afforded benefits such as: tuition assistance, early retirement credit, transitional healthcare access, and Post-9/11 G.I. Bill benefits currently not funded under 12304b status.

As you know, the National Defense Authorization Act of 2016 requires the Department of Defense to consolidate the thirty-two statutory authorities by which members of the reserve component may be ordered to perform duty. While we appreciate the Department's ongoing efforts, NGAUS remains deeply concerned that the implementation of duty status reform will take numerous years and prevent thousands of additional Guardsmen and Reservists from receiving the same benefits as their active duty counterparts.

To that end, we ask that you support the immediate passage of Ranking Member Tester's bill, S. 473, the Educational Development for Troops and Veterans Act, introduced in February 2017 with Senators Franken, Van Hollen, Hassan, and Klobuchar. This commonsense bill would ensure that all deployed reserve-component members would receive Post-9/11 G.I. Bill benefits equal to those enjoyed by active component members. It would also protect them from lost wages while deployed and allow Guardsmen to defer their federal student loan payments prior to deployments. Furthermore, S. 473 would establish a grant program to build, maintain, and improve college veteran education centers to help student veterans maximize their benefits, receive academic aid, and connect with their peers on campus. This is not just a benefit-parity issue. It is a question of fairness. Passing this bill will not only help ensure the men and women of the National Guard accrue Post-9/11 G.I. Bill benefits in the same manner as their active duty counterparts but will further support the soldiers who protect our nation.

**Additional Supported Legislation:**

NGAUS strongly supports **S. 410**, the Shawna Hill Post 9/11 Education Transferability Act introduced by Senator Crapo and Senator Risch. Named after Shawna Hill, a teenager from Idaho who was tragically killed in an automobile accident in 2012, S. 410 would amend 38 U.S.C. to

allow reassignment of veterans' education benefits in cases where the designated beneficiary passes away.

**S. 798**, the Yellow Ribbon Improvement Act of 2017, introduced by Senator Cassidy, Senator Tillis and Senator Brown, would expand eligibility for the Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) Yellow Ribbon Program to recipients of the Marine Gunnery Sergeant John David Fry scholarship. The Yellow Ribbon Program is an extremely vital program for members of the National Guard by helping students avoid out-of-pocket tuition and fees for education programs that cost more than the G.I. Bill's allowance. S. 798 would allow eligibility for the Yellow Ribbon Program for surviving spouses and the children of servicemembers who have died in the line of duty.

NGAUS also supports **S. 882**, which would add Purple Heart recipients to the list of eligible veterans who can access full Post-9/11 G.I. Bill benefits. The legislation, introduced by Senators Rounds, Manchin, Warren, and Kaine, would also make Purple Heart recipients eligible for participation in the Yellow Ribbon Program. Currently, only veterans who served on active duty for 36 months are eligible for Post-9/11 G.I. Bill benefits, which disqualifies hundreds of Guardsmen who have been awarded the Purple Heart.

Similarly, we appreciate the recent introduction of **S. 1209**, introduced by Senators Graham, Cotton, Blumenthal and Markey, that would increase the monthly pension given to Medal of Honor recipients. S. 1209 would increase those pensions from \$1,303.51 a month to \$3,000 for the 72 living Medal of Honor recipients.

**S. 1218** would benefit members of the National Guard by requiring federal agencies to have full-time advocates for veterans' employment. The Empowering Federal Employment for Veterans Act, introduced by Senators Sullivan, Heitkamp, and Harris, would connect veterans with

federal jobs that match their skills, as well as promote career development. With an unacceptably high rate of unemployed veterans, NGAUS appreciates the introduction of this legislation to ensure servicemembers are able to build and maintain a sustainable future when transitioning out of military service.

**S. 1277**, introduced by Senators Boozman, Heller, Risch and Capito, would expand the VA's Accelerated Learning pilot program that covers the costs for non-traditional technology education programs. The Veterans Employment Through Technology Education Courses would allow the soldiers and airmen of the National Guard to learn valuable 21<sup>st</sup> century workforce skills including computer coding and programming as a VA educational benefit. We applaud the introduction of this legislation to help provide IT training that is typically not covered under the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill.

**Conclusion:**

I thank you all again for allowing NGAUS to testify before this Committee today. I truly appreciate your consideration of the aforementioned legislation under this Committee's jurisdiction. I look forward to continuing our work together and cannot thank you enough for your steadfast leadership in advocating for the men and women of the National Guard.

## **Biography of BG (Ret) Roy Robinson:**

Retired Brig. Gen. Roy Robinson succeeded retired Maj. Gen. Gus Hargett as president of the National Guard Association of United States on March 13, 2017.

General Robinson serves as chief executive officer of NGAUS. He is responsible for the association's day-to-day operations in Washington, D.C., and a staff of 28 employees. He also oversees the National Guard Educational Foundation, which maintains the National Guard Memorial Museum, and the NGAUS Insurance Trust.

His principal duties include providing the Guard with unified representation before Congress and a variety of other functions to support a nationwide membership of nearly 45,000 current and former Army and Air National Guard officers.

He came to NGAUS after serving eight years as executive director of the National Guard Association of Mississippi, the nation's largest state Guard association with more than 2,500 members. He simultaneously served as NGAUS vice chairman-Army from 2014 to 2016.

General Robinson has more than 33 years in uniform, much of it while holding a series of full-time sales and marketing positions in the private sector, all of it in the Mississippi Army National Guard. He spent time in every duty status available in the National Guard: Traditional part time, as a state employee, federal technician and in the active Guard and Reserve.

He began his career in 1983 as an enlisted soldier, earning his commission as second lieutenant through the ROTC program at the University of Southern Mississippi in 1985. He retired in 2016 as assistant adjutant general of Mississippi-Army.

Among his military career highlights is commanding the 150th Engineer Battalion (Combat), 155th Armored Brigade Combat Team, during combat operations in Iraq in 2005. He earlier commanded Camp McCain Training Site in Grenada, Mississippi, for 18 months.

In addition to a bachelor's degree in speech communication from Southern Mississippi, General Robinson holds a master's in business administration from Jackson State University. He also completed a U.S. Army War College fellowship in logistics and acquisition at the Center for Strategic Analysis at the University of Texas.

The general holds several military decorations, including the Bronze Star, the Legion of Merit, the Meritorious Service Medal (with four Bronze Oak Leaf clusters), the Combat Action Badge and several Mississippi National Guard awards.

He is married to the former Susan Roth. They have three children and three grandchildren.