**STATEMENT BY**

**MAJOR GENERAL TERRY M. HASTON**

**THE ADJUTANT GENERAL-TENNESSEE**

**BEFORE THE**

**HOUSE VETERANS AFFAIRS COMMITTEE**

**SUBCOMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC OPPPORTUNITY**

**SECOND SESSION, 113TH CONGRESS**

**ON**

**LOWERING THE RATE OF UNEMPLOYMENT FOR THE NATIONAL GUARD AND RESERVE - ARE WE MAKING PROGRESS?**

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**Opening Remarks**

Chairman Flores, Ranking Member Takano, and distinguished members of the subcommittee; I am honored to appear before you today on behalf of the more than 14,000 men and women serving in the Tennessee Army and Air National Guard.

I would like to begin by expressing my sincere appreciation for the outstanding support of this Subcommittee.

The Tennessee National Guard has deployed more than 27,000 brave Soldiers and Airmen both at home and abroad since September 11, 2001. Although our deployments have decreased over the past year, we still have warriors returning to situations where they are un-employed or under employed.

**Tennessee National Guard Unemployment Statistics**

For generations the men and women of the Volunteer State have answered the call of this nation without hesitation or reservation. Most return home after defending this great nation and resume the civilian lifestyle they left. They renew their relationships with family and friends and re-integrate into their civilian workplace. The pressing issue we are talking about today is our concern for the well-being of our Soldiers and Airmen who may be facing unemployment in the civilian sector.

When I testified in front of this committee in February of 2012, Tennessee reported about 20-25 percent of our National Guard strength was either unemployed or under employed, with about 3.5 percent of those identified as full-time students. One year later, that rate has dropped to 15%, with about 4% identified as fulltime students. This compares to an 8.7 percent unemployment rate for Tennessee in 2012 to a current rate of 7.6% as a whole. We have committed to multiple programs and strategies to provide the very best opportunities in helping them gain employment.

**Tennessee National Guard Initiatives and Transition Assistance**

The Tennessee National Guard understands the value in collaborative efforts and knows the benefit of a long term employee. Our support programs are focused on providing careers, not merely jobs, and we are working diligently to assist these patriots in finding that career. We continue to work with the Tennessee Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Department of Veteran’s Affairs, and our Military Department’s Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve Program to conduct Employment Assistance Workshops about once each month. These are 3-day events providing one-on-one career counseling to address issues such as writing an effective resume and how to make a positive impression during an interview. At the conclusion of each event major employers including Nissan, FEDEX, Eastman Chemical, Hospital Corporation of America, AT&T and a multitude of small local businesses being available to interview prospective employees. Since August of 2010, 31 workshops have been conducted with 24 hiring events.

Also, in Tennessee, the Military Department, working in concert with the Department of Safety and the 108th General Assembly, has changed the regulations to allow Soldiers who are military truck drivers to obtain their CDL with only a written test and not having to demonstrate their driving skills, shortening their path to civilian employment.

**JCEP**

In July of 2012, the National Guard Bureau’s Job Connection Education Program (JCEP) was introduced as a pilot program in Tennessee with a goal of 50 veterans hired by the one year mark. To date, only 7 months later, the program has placed in community businesses 503 veterans, with another 379 in the pipeline prepared for an opportunity.

**Paychecks for Patriots**

Also in October of 2012, the Tennessee National Guard again joined with the Tennessee Department of Labor, Tennessee Department of Veterans Affairs and Dollar General Corporation to launch “Paychecks for Patriots”. This landmark initiative brought together 90 major employers, with immediate employment opportunities, assisting 2,400 military veterans and spouses seeking employment. By December, more than 50 previously unemployed participants found work through this ongoing program.

**National Guard Joining Community Forces Initiative**

In adopting the National Guard Joining Community Forces Initiative, the Tennessee Army National Guard has coupled with community businesses and global corporations to create an Inter-Service Family Assistance Committee, with 19 federal, state, and local organizations reaching out to help veterans and their families. In an uncertain time for our nation and our military, the consolidated efforts of these programs is the right path to ensure maximum benefits and opportunities for employment for our veterans.

Also a Joining Communities Forces initiative, the National Guard Military and Family Readiness Program, our J9, works in concert with the Governor’s Council on Veterans Affairs, to support the Community Partnership Program that assesses employment opportunities for veterans through local organizations like Operation Stand Down Nashville, Humana Military, Centerstone Behavioral health groups, and educators like Lipscomb University.

Hopefully, through these many efforts the Tennessee National Guard is defeating the perceived stigma of hiring veterans that could hinder their employment. We are working diligently to present our highly skilled service members to employers, offering them a motivated, disciplined, drug-free asset with the training and potential for leadership within their company.

These programs, along with the US Department of Labor’s Education Workshops in support of the VOW Act, our Yellow Ribbon hiring fairs, and our outstanding relationship with the Tennessee Department of Labor are all positive steps in reducing the number of unemployed Guard members in Tennessee. The bottom line is that through the collaborative efforts of all these programs, we are seeing positive results. We still have a long way to go, and it is imperative that we are able to maintain and continue these programs that are making a difference in the lives of our Soldiers and Airmen.

**Closing Remarks**

I’ve often heard it said that these National Guard Soldiers and Airmen are the best America has to offer. These men and women are willing to put their lives on hold, and without hesitation . . . without reservation, walk away from family, community, and their civilian occupation to defend and protect this great nation. We owe them no less than our very best efforts.

To effectively combat this problem, we had to know the enemy. We had to look beyond the reported numbers that may, in fact, demonstrate a "false positive". In our efforts to understand the magnitude of the problem, we constantly strive to determine an accurate number of Guard members who are actively seeking employment.

To take it one step further, we also have to determine if their deployment caused them to be unemployed, or were they unemployed before deployment. In Tennessee, we continually encourage unit commanders and leadership to identify these individuals in order to assist them however we can. We must know what the true “unemployment enemy” is before we can engage it. In Tennessee, we are working diligently to identify and successfully engage that enemy.

Thank you for allowing me to address this subcommittee, and I stand ready to answer any questions you may have.