

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

**House Committee on Veterans' Affairs
Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity**

October 23, 2019

Chairman Levin, Ranking Member Bilirakis and other distinguished members of the Subcommittee:

Introduction:

On behalf of the almost 45,000 members of the National Guard Association of the United States and the nearly 450,000 soldiers and airmen of the National Guard, we greatly 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 three specific issues impacting Guardsmen that fall under the jurisdiction of this Committee. These issues are: expanding TRICARE to cover all servicemembers in all statuses, streamlining record keeping of service across the Total Force, and highlighting legislative initiatives that support our employers as readiness requirements and operational tempo continue to increase.

Strengthening Service Member Civilian Employment

As the National Guard remains an integral part of our nation's defense, both at home and abroad, increased training and readiness requirements combined with more frequent deployments

has strained the traditional citizen-soldier construct, placing stressors on both the Guardsmen and their employers.

While I cannot anticipate future operational demands, what is clearly true is that the era of “one weekend a month and two weeks a year” is over. Our members are serving in uniform more days throughout the year and often completing military tasks on civilian time, all while undertaking additional military administrative and training duties due to insufficient levels of full-time support personnel. As we continue to increase operational demands on our soldiers and airmen, their employers are feeling the effects of their extended absence. In the wake of this new reality, we ask that the Committee supports continued efforts to assist Reserve Component service members and their employers.

One major effort I would like to discuss with the committee today to alleviate some of these pressures is the idea of providing zero-cost TRICARE health coverage to the National Guard and Reserve. While this is not an effort that will be concluded this year, I believe very strongly that the time is now to discuss if an Operational Reserve is better served through ensuring guaranteed medical coverage in lieu of the current disjointed system of third party health contractors and Periodic Health Assessments.

The benefits of zero-cost TRICARE coverage extend beyond medical readiness and well-being for reserve component military families. TRICARE, one of our top retention policies, will help us keep a manned and ready force. In addition to building medical readiness today, providing preventive care throughout our service members’ careers will likely reduce medical expenditures when they transition from drilling Guardsman to Veteran. Further, this will become a significant employer benefit when a CEO or hiring manager knows that this service member won’t require health insurance coverage. As we ask more and more of our National Guard and Reserve units in

peacetime training, I worry that companies will start to choose equally qualified non-military candidates over our service members simply because they are concerned that the Soldier or Airman will be away too often. We must find a way to better incentivize these companies.

Unemployment and underemployment also continues to be a concern for our members. We ask for your continued support in passing critical legislation creating pathways to steady employment for Guardsmen. We support Congressman Ryan and Palazzo's legislation, **H.R. 801**, the Reserve Component Employer Incentive, Compensation, and Relief Act of 2019, which grants tax credits to employers who employ members of the National Guard and Reserve. Legislation like this is critical to incentivize National Guard employment as we continue to demand more training time of our citizen soldiers.

Improving Data Management

A significant concern across the Total Force is easing burdensome bureaucracy which limits the ability for our service members to transfer among the different components. Creating hurdles to the Continuum of Service is a detriment to those currently serving and creates a significant hurdle in retaining service members as individual frustration builds.

One major concern is with the Certificate of Active Service, the DD-214. Currently, only Active Duty service over 90 days is captured on this critical document of final service. If a Guardsman serves but never goes on Active Duty, they currently don't receive a DD-214 which is generally seen as the gold standard of record of military service. Additionally, any active service less than 90 days, which is quite common, will never be captured in the cumulative data on the record. This current practice places the record keeping burden on the Veteran as they have to maintain years of documents rather than having a cumulative document similar to their Active

Duty counterparts. Streamlining this process will benefit the service member as well as the VA as it will reduce confusion over what is a valid document. NGAUS firmly believes that there needs to be one Total Force record of military service, which includes Reserve Component duty.

Conclusion:

I thank you all again for allowing NGAUS to testify before the Committees today. The work done here is critical to the well-being of our service members and the success of our National Guard. I look forward to continuing our work together and sincerely appreciate the steadfast leadership from the members and their staffers 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.