

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

**House Committee on Veterans' Affairs**

**July 17, 2017**

Dear Chairman Roe, Ranking Member Walz, and other distinguished members of the House 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 the Harry W. Colmery Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2017 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 a key provision this legislation seeks to correct, which has plagued the soldiers and airmen of the National Guard since 2012. I would like to express my deepest gratitude to this Committee for its bipartisan efforts in proposing a resolution to ensure Post-9/11 G.I. Bill eligibility for members of the National Guard when deployed under 10 U.S.C. §12304b status. 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.

### **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.

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 moving forward.

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.

I also want to reiterate the linkage between the 12304b benefit inequity and the readiness of our Guard and Reserve Component soldiers and airmen. If the next 15 years in utilization of the Guard and Reserve look anything like the past 15 years, the likelihood is that these soldiers and airmen and the members of the other services are going to be incredibly busy in virtually every corner of the globe. Unless people dig into the intricacies of all the benefits that they are not being afforded under this status, they may not understand that it turns into a readiness issue. As these soldiers and airmen come out of one mobilization, as they are going through the reintegration process, they are actually preparing and becoming ready for the next mobilization. This is an issue that the country needs to pay closer attention to because the readiness of those forces are intrinsically tied to the benefits that they are not currently receiving under 12304b orders.

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.

While the Harry W. Colmery Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2017 does not correct every facet of benefit disparity for Guardsmen and Reservists deployed under 12304b orders, we are extremely grateful that this legislation includes full eligibility for the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill for those who have served under 12304b, 12304a and 12301h orders. Furthermore,

NGAUS appreciates the inclusion of a provision to provide full Post-9/11 G.I. Bill eligibility to Purple Heart Recipients. I would also like to endorse the provision in the proposed legislation that would increase eligibility for those who have served less than 36 months on active duty service by eliminating the 40% tier and bumping these individuals up to the 50% tier while making the current 50% tier equal to 60%. This will have a positive impact for thousands of our members and greatly improve their educational opportunities.

**Conclusion:**

I thank you all again for allowing NGAUS to submit written testimony to this Committee and for your introduction of the Harry W. Colmery Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2017. We urge your colleagues in the House to pass this crucial legislation that will correct numerous benefit inequities and provide increased educational opportunities for our citizen-soldiers. 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.