

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

**Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs**

**House Committee on Veterans' Affairs**

**Joint Hearing on Legislative Presentations**

**March 8, 2022**

Chairman Tester, Ranking Member Moran, Chairman Takano, Ranking Member Bost and other distinguished members of the Senate and House Committees:

**Introduction:**

On behalf of the almost 45,000 members of the National Guard Association of the United States (NGAUS) 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. Thank you for the support you have provided to ensure accountability and improve our nation's services to veterans and their families.

Over the past several years, the combined efforts of your two committees have produced critical advances that have improved the lives of our National Guardsmen and women and I would like to personally thank each and every one of you for that hard work. From increased USERRA protections to VA home loan eligibility for National Guard Title 32 service, we continue to make progress on multiple fronts towards true parity between the Active and Reserve components.

Today I would like to focus on three specific issues impacting Guardsmen that fall under the jurisdiction of this Committee: The benefits of increased access to medical coverage, ensuring

benefit parity for Guardsmen, and further strengthening the Total Force by finally creating a singular document of military service to replace the active-duty only DD-214.

### **Increased Access to Medical Coverage**

I would like to discuss with the committee today providing zero-cost TRICARE health coverage to the National Guard and Reserve. While this is not an effort that I expect 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. This year, NGAUS will advocate for conducting a study at the Department of Defense into what the cost of such a change in policy would be.

The benefits of zero-cost TRICARE coverage extend beyond medical readiness and well-being for reserve component military families. TRICARE, as 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 Servicemembers' careers will likely reduce medical expenditures when they transition from drilling Guardsman to Veteran. This will also become a significant employer benefit when a CEO or hiring manager knows a Servicemember will not 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 Servicemembers 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.

I ask for each of your support on **H.R. 3512 – Healthcare for Our Troops Act**. This groundbreaking bill will re-create how we provide preventive health care to the National Guard

and I am convinced that it will not only provide better health results to our Servicemembers but will prove cost advantageous in the long run.

### **Duty Status Reform and Benefit Parity**

One of the primary legislative goals of NGAUS is to address the benefit disparity for Guardsmen under federal activation authorities. For the past several years, I have addressed this Committee and asked for your assistance in correcting numerous benefits not afforded to the thousands of Guard and Reserve Servicemembers deploying under 10 U.S.C. §12304b status. With the passage of the Forever G.I. Bill and the Fiscal Year 2018 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), Guardsmen and Reservists are now eligible for nearly all of the same benefits as their active duty counterparts, including tuition assistance, transitional healthcare access, and Post-9/11 G.I. Bill benefits. While this Committee and its members have been instrumental in closing the benefit gap for our members, there is still work to be done.

Of major concern for the National Guard is creating full parity for Guard service in relation to earning the Post 9-11 G.I. Bill. Guardsmen currently serve in a variety of statuses and missions that do not accrue the same G.I. Bill benefits as their active duty counterparts, and it is past time that this disparity is corrected. Unlike our Active Component peers, a day in the National Guard or Reserve does not always equal one day of service: regular weekend training days and annual training do not count toward benefits.

Federal deployments abroad have decreased making it much more difficult for Reserve Component Servicemembers to earn federal benefits, including the G.I. Bill, despite frequent rotations for missions at home and regularly scheduled training. Examples of this distortion in eligibility have been particularly acute in the past several years of increased domestic mobilization.

Much of the COVID response, responses to civil disturbance, and disaster relief have not granted G.I. Bill eligibility.

Fortunately, Congress is making great progress in rectifying these issues. **H.R. 1836 - Guard and Reserve GI Bill Parity Act**, which passed the House of Representatives on January 12<sup>th</sup>, 2022, with a strong bipartisan vote, is a fantastic step towards true benefit parity. This bill aims to eliminate most of the confusion over which types of duty allow members of the Guard and Reserve to qualify for federal education benefits. **H.R. 1836** allows all days in service, including weekend drills, annual training and specific state active duties such as 502(f), to count toward the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill.

Additionally, we thank you for the continued bipartisan efforts on the Senate version of National Guard GI Bill parity, **S.2644 – the Guard, Reserve, and Active Duty Department of Veterans Affairs Educational Assistance Parity (GRAD) Act**. We are confident that a compromise bill can be accomplished and are excited for the benefit this will offer to our Servicemembers.

The Guard and Reserve G.I. Bill Parity Act and GRAD Act have come during an unprecedented time for the National Guard and Reserve Component. In the last 20 months the National Guard and Reserves have activated more than 200,000 Servicemembers for domestic missions to provide pandemic relief, combat wildfires, secure the U.S.-Mexico border, and protect the U.S. Capitol after January 6th. Many of these missions are ongoing, with no clear end in sight.

### **Comprehensive Statement of Military Service**

Lastly, I would like to discuss the need for a singular record of military service across all components and all services. If the Department of Defense truly wants to achieve its long-stated goal of the “total force” then a cumulative document recording all military service, active duty

and reserve component is critical. The fact that the Active Duty, Guard, and Reserves all have different documents to describe military service is both unnecessary and cumbersome.

Under the current construct, a Guard or Reserve Servicemember will only receive a DD-214 if they are on over 90 days of active duty orders. This is a particular issue as the DD-214 is generally considered the gold standard of military documentation. Even with equivalent documents such as the National Guard NGB-22, it has proven impossible to ensure all agencies - both federal and state - always understand the different documents. Consistently we see issues where benefits are denied either from the Department of Veterans' Affairs or state agencies because they require a DD-214, which many National Guard Servicemembers may not have.

We are fully supportive of **S.1291 - Record of Military Service for Members of the Armed Forces Act of 2021**, and thank both Senators Tester and Moran for your support and being original co-sponsors. This bill will provide a comprehensive statement of service, include all time served, and issue the document at appropriate intervals throughout a Servicemember's career. It is critical to our Servicemembers and veterans that their service is properly documented and this bill will provide that.

**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 Servicemembers and the success of our National Guard. I look forward to continuing our work together and sincerely appreciate the steadfast leadership from Members and their staff 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.