

**TESTIMONY OF  
CAPTAIN JASON M. DESOTO  
COMMANDER, A BATTERY, 2<sup>ND</sup> BATTALION,  
142<sup>ND</sup> FIRES BRIGADE  
ARKANSAS ARMY NATIONAL GUARD  
BEFORE THE  
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AFFAIRS  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC OPORTUNITY  
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
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Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee,

Thank you in advance for the opportunity to speak with you today. My name is CPT Jason M. DeSoto. I am currently the commander of Alpha Battery, 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 142<sup>nd</sup> Fires Brigade located in Van Buren, AR. Since my mobilization for Operation Iraqi Freedom II in October of 2003, I have remained in a full time military capacity in the Arkansas Army National Guard. During OIF II, I was assigned as the Fire Support Officer for Bravo Company, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 153<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Regiment, 39<sup>th</sup> Brigade, Combat Team, Arkansas Army National Guard. My battalion was attached to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade Combat Team, 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division serving in Baghdad, Iraq. We were responsible for zone 14W in the Karadah District of Baghdad where we remained for 12 months. My responsibilities included coordination with local leaders of the Neighborhood and District Advisory Councils, supervising the rebuilding projects in our Area of Operations, Information Operations as well as conducting routine patrols and raids in our sector.

Approximately one month prior to our redeployment back to the United States, me and all the members of my unit began receiving briefings and health assessments to identify both the physical and mental health needs of our soldiers before we returned home. When we arrived at Fort Sill, Oklahoma in March of 2005, we received more thorough health assessments and also received counseling sessions that were designed to

assist us and help ease our reintegration with our families. We also received contact information in case we desired additional assistance after returning home.

In Fort Sill we were briefed on the benefits available to us to include VA, dental, education and help in finding jobs. The demobilization process took approximately 2 weeks and the adjustment to being back home is still ongoing one year later even as my unit prepares to deploy in support of OIF. At this time I am not currently receiving any type of assistance that was briefed to me during the redeployment. However, I have scheduled an appointment and plan to enroll at the VA in the near future in case of any medical conditions that may arise as a result of the deployment.

In my opinion, the Transition Assistance program is greatly needed and may need some adjustments and, in some cases, expansion. The briefings delivered to my unit were done so professionally and were informative. However, my suggestion would be that the briefings are initiated at an earlier period of the deployment. One of the problems most often encountered while receiving briefings and counseling at Fort Sill, Oklahoma, was that family members of soldiers would be waiting outside for the soldier to be released. In my opinion, this causes soldiers to answer questions prematurely and without much thought. If the briefings were started at an earlier time this would allow soldiers more time to become familiar with the program and give them an opportunity to develop any questions or concerns they or their families may have regarding their benefits or seeking additional assistance.

In closing, I want to again express my appreciation to the Chairman and the Subcommittee for the opportunity to speak with you today and would be happy to answer any questions that you may have. Thank you.