

TESTIMONY OF
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NEW HAMPSHIRE ARMY NATIONAL GUARD
BEFORE THE
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee: My name is SSG Mark Bright and I am a member of the NH Hampshire Army National Guard. Thank you for the time and opportunity to speak about my unit redeployment process. When information started to come down the chain of command about our return date, we were all very happy, to say the least. We started many briefings before leaving Iraq, such as medical screening, combat stress briefings, general benefits, etc. Shortly after completion of the briefings in theater, we were informed we would be going through 4-7 days of the same type briefings at Ft Dix. As a Squad Leader, I watched my soldiers grow upset and angry over the prospect of waiting longer to see their families. I was afraid we would be there doing repetitive and redundant training. I am glad to say I was wrong!

I have been deployed three times in my career. My first deployment was during Desert Shield/Desert Storm. While we trained for our mission very hard and aggressively, there was very little emphasis at that time on our families or the hardships that might face us upon our return. I spent nine months in country on that tour. After flying home, we had a ceremony and were released immediately to resume our lives and pick up where we left off. I saw that for way too many of my peers, picking up where they left off was

almost impossible. Family situations had changed while they were gone. There were new babies and broken homes. There were soldiers who were angry and didn't know why. They would jump at a loud noise. They would feel sick and not report it.

My second deployment to the Sinai desert as an observer, not on a combat tour, lasted six months. Upon our return, the reception was not much different—there was a ceremony, then we were released to our families. This time, over the next few duty days there were some briefings. Some of them were the mandatory briefings soldiers receive every year, such as SAEDA, safety etc.

After arriving at Ft Dix from Iraq, I could see immediately this was going to be different and that we would be getting a lot more information. The days were not extremely long and there was time for the soldiers to decompress. The spouses were well informed and were going through briefings of their own in New Hampshire. We attended briefings that really applied to our lives and our families. Reintegration briefings focused on teaching soldiers, who had been in an extremely fast-paced, dangerous and uncertain environment, that life at home would be different. They briefed us that we would more than likely not be able to pick up right where we left off. There were some issues at Ft Dix, in my opinion, that could have gone better, but overall, it was a well put together operation. The NHNG was there by our side the whole time. They supported us administratively and did whatever it took to help.

Upon our return to New Hampshire, the state put together its own program. I have found in my military career that it's the small things that fall through the cracks that cause the most damage. This process eliminated almost all of this. They brought in representatives from the VA informing us of all the benefits available to us. Counseling

was made available for all soldiers and their families. There was good medical care and follow-ups were offered. State employment agencies were brought in to help soldiers find employment if needed. They even helped soldiers find places to live. Compared to the other deployments I have been on, this return has, by far, been the best. Genuine care has been showed to the soldiers, their families and their employers. Thank you very much for your time, and please feel free to ask any questions you may have.