

STATEMENT BY

**MAJOR GENERAL RONALD G. YOUNG
DIRECTOR, NATIONAL GUARD BUREAU JOINT STAFF**

BEFORE THE

**COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AFFAIRS
UNITES STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

SUBCOMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

FIRST SESSION, 109TH CONGRESS

**ON TRANSITION ASSISTANCE AND THE NEW
HAMPSHIRE INITIATIVE**

SEPTEMBER 19, 2005

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Chairman Boozman, distinguished members of the Committee. My name is Ronald Young, Director, Joint Staff, National Guard Bureau. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today.

Today, we have 330,000 Army and 107,000 Air National Guard members of the National Guard serving our Country, States and Territories. During 2004 117,000 Reserve Component members were mobilized that met the minimum 180 days of active duty for full eligibility of benefits under the Transition Assistance Program.

Transition Assistance is a critically important component in our efforts to take care of Service members. We appreciate the opportunity to meet with you and review these programs. The information received during these briefings and the opportunity to enroll in these vital programs has long lasting effects on our men and women in the National Guard, their families and their communities. The effectiveness of Transition Assistance also holds significant implications for the long term health of our organization as a whole. The interest and concern by the President, Congress, Department of Defense and Senior Leaders within the Armed Forces for our men and women returning from difficult missions is reflected in these benefits and the timeliness of there receipt is critical to each member and their family.

Guard and Reserve personnel are entitled to participation in the Transition Assistance Program when they were mobilized The Transition Assistance Program was primarily focused on the transition of Active Component Service members to civilian life, but since more and more guard and reserve members have been mobilized of late, it has re-focused it objectives. It is very beneficial

to have these briefings, as some benefits require that the member apply before he or she leaves mobilized active duty status.

The need to spend effective time and limited resources in a comprehensive and efficient manner to determine the needs of service members during the course of their transition is critical. These types of programs are critical to ensuring our members and their families participate and help them determine the best next steps as they move back in to civilian life. As you are aware, there are really four components to TAP: the pre-separation counseling presented by the services; the VA benefits briefing; the Department of Labor's employment workshops; and the Disabled Transition Assistance Program (DTAP). The National Guard supports the initiatives planned or currently underway to improve the effectiveness of the Transition Assistance Program.

We face several leadership challenges as we execute the Transition Assistance Program for Guard members. While originally designed for the transition of Active Duty members to civilian life the program has evolved as more reserve and guard members are mobilized. There is an understandable interest both on the part of the Services and the members in demobilizing as quickly as possible in order that they may be returned to their families. As military leaders, we must work to educate our members about the availability and value of the Transition Assistance Program, which is currently administered at mobilization stations.

Transition Assistance Program managers must effectively educate National Guard members since the DoD compensation system depends, in part, on the use of benefits to leverage post-mobilization retention. As a result, the Guard leadership must ensure that our members fully understand that several important benefits are contingent upon continued service following demobilization.

The Transition Assistance Program briefings provide members with the opportunity to reintegrate with their families and avail themselves of all that Transition Assistance has to offer. In addition, the local Family Support Centers of the National Guard have arrayed a number of community based organizations and volunteer service organizations that create a significant synergy with the Transition Assistance Program. These organizations can compliment the VA, DOD and DOL programs.

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has counselors that disseminate Veterans Affairs benefit information to members during the Transitional Assistance Briefings. It is especially important with regard to those members who have incurred disabilities during the course of their active duty. Of course VA works with disabled members while on active duty to help them apply for benefits that relate to disabilities incurred on active duty. Presently, the Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve (ESGR) benefits are included as a part of the Transition Assistance Program at the various demobilization stations.

Several pilot programs are currently underway to improve the administration of the Transition Assistance Program and the Disabled Transition Assistance Program. Of particular note are VA and DoD efforts to deliver Veterans benefits briefings during weekend drill periods following demobilization -- greatly enhancing the effectiveness of this program. The Department of Labor's employment assistance pilot programs in Minnesota, Oregon, and Michigan are exploring several means by which employment assistance can be provided to Guard members.

As noted earlier, while enhanced Service-member participation in the Transition Assistance Program is important for a host of reasons, it is also of critical importance to the National Guard from an organizational perspective. Retention of Guard members following mobilization is a critical component of the overall

Guard strength management equation. Transition Assistance is a critical part of this effort, because the current compensation strategy bases many incentives upon continuing service member participation. For example, participation in TRICARE Reserve Select, which provides one year of TRICARE coverage for every 90 days of mobilized service, is available to members who choose to remain in a Selected Reserve status. Similarly, the Reserve Education Assistance Program, which provides up to 80% of the benefits enjoyed under the existing Active Duty Montgomery GI Bill, is available to service members who choose to remain in the Ready Reserve.

Taking care of National Guard members must remain a high priority. Leveraging the benefits available to National Guard members and their families through enhanced administration of the Transition Assistance Program represents a key component in our commitment to the welfare of returning veterans and their families.

Working with the members of this Committee, I believe that the National Guard, working hand in hand with the leadership in the Departments of Defense, Labor and Veteran's Affairs, as well as state and local agencies, can continue to dramatically enhance National Guard members' quality of life and our personnel retention.

Thank you.