



**The Alaska Army National Guard:
A “Tremendous Shortfall”**

**A Report of the Veterans For America National Guard
Program**

October 15, 2008

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“...There is [a] tremendous shortfall between benefits earned and current access for our rural Soldiers.”

Brigadier General Thomas Katkus, Commander, Alaska Army National Guard, prepared statement before the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs, “Health Care for Alaska Native Veterans from Kuwait and Iraq and Other Native Veterans Living in Alaska Native Villages,” Anchorage, Alaska, November 30, 2007

ABOUT VFA

Building upon the legacy of the Nobel Peace Prize-winning Vietnam Veterans of America Foundation (VVAFA), Veterans for America (VFA) unites the current generation of servicemembers and veterans with veterans from previous wars to address the needs of our men and women in uniform—both active-duty and Guard/Reserve—and their families. VFA's mission is to ensure that the voices of those who have sacrificed immeasurably on behalf our country in recent years are heard and that support commensurate with their sacrifice is provided. For more information, please visit: www.veteransforamerica.org.

Introduction

Across the country during the post- September 11, 2001 period, incredible, largely unrecognized sacrifices have been made by members of the United States National Guard. These citizen Soldiers (and citizen Airmen and citizen Airwomen) have shouldered much of the burden in both Iraq and Afghanistan, and elsewhere in the Global War on Terrorism, as well as in other ongoing U.S. military operations. The state of Alaska is no exception.

More than a year ago, as a result of submissions to the online Veterans for America (VFA) Wounded Warrior Registry, VFA became quite concerned regarding the post-deployment needs of members of the Alaska National Guard, as well as members of the active-duty military and reservists based in Alaska. As a result of these requests for assistance, VFA dispatched a Servicemember Liaison to Alaska in September 2007. VFA's initial findings indicated that there were considerable shortfalls in the number of mental health professionals to assist servicemembers post-combat. Last month, VFA followed up on this initial visit when a three-person team spent more than a week in Alaska focused solely on assessing the needs of members of the Alaska National Guard, especially the Army National Guard, given VFA's traditional focus on assessing the needs of members of U.S. ground forces¹ from both the Active Component and the Reserve Component.²

On behalf of the brave men and women of the Alaska National Guard, VFA proudly presents its final report on steps that should be taken to dramatically improve post-deployment support for members of the Alaska National Guard and their family members. In addition, this report details steps that should be taken to ensure that members of the Alaska National Guard – and their families -- are better prepared before they are deployed again, if necessary.

VFA looks forward to working with leaders in Alaska and Washington, DC, as well as the rank and file of the Alaska National Guard and other interested and qualified parties in Alaska, to ensure that this laudable goal is met.

Overall VFA Findings Regarding Needs of Alaska Army National Guard

The VFA National Guard Program has found that the post-deployment challenges facing the Alaska National Guard are more daunting and widespread than any other that VFA has encountered during its nationwide analysis of needs of members of the National Guard and their families. The dedication, enthusiasm, and pride of Alaska National Guard members—and their service to their state and country—is remarkable. In addition, there is a struggling but relentless support system for Guard members and their families from the Alaska National Guard-led Family Support Programs, the Alaska Veterans Centers, local Veterans Service Organizations (VSOs), municipalities, social service providers, and leaders of community-based efforts. Nevertheless, **VFA’s findings indicate that the post-deployment needs of Alaska National Guard members and their families are inadequately understood and, hence, poorly addressed.**

During VFA’s recent on-the-ground assessment of the needs of the Alaska National Guard, the VFA team visited Anchorage, Wasilla, Fairbanks, and the Kenai Peninsula, as well as the Hub Community of Bethel in rural western Alaska, and Kwethluk, a Native Alaskan village twelve miles upriver from Bethel. VFA appreciates the support of the National Guard leadership in ensuring that considerable access was granted so that various facets of the National Guard system throughout the state could be examined. This initial level of cooperation and openness was very encouraging.

In conjunction with VFA’s field visits to Alaska, VFA’s research team has conducted hundreds of hours of research, and placed dozens of calls and e-mails, reaching out to and soliciting feedback from parties knowledgeable regarding the needs of the Alaska National Guard. Finally, VFA has received additional unsolicited information from interested and concerned parties throughout Alaska.

VFA has found that the Alaska National Guard has an inadequate understanding of the full range of post-combat issues facing those Guard members who have served abroad in recent years, as well as their family members who have been left to deal with the toll of unexpected – at times, repeated – deployments. Unfortunately, this does not make Alaska unique, though, given the challenges facing returning members of the National Guard, this situation does increase the urgency of assessing these needs thoroughly and quickly.

The Alaska National Guard, which was originally designed primarily as a defense force against threats to Alaska, was deployed without the programs and systems in place to adequately care for post-deployment needs. This is not a shortcoming of those people and organizations mentioned above who toil to provide for the needs of the Alaska National Guard, but a recognition of the historically unique situation that the United States is facing: an overreliance on our National Guard that **the Commission on the National Guard and Reserves concluded in its report to Congress and the Secretary of Defense in January 2008 that "cannot be sustained over time," given "the current posture and utilization of the National Guard and Reserves,"** and the far-too-common practice of deploying National Guard units – sometimes repeatedly – without meeting the historical dwell-time ratio standard of five years at home for every one year mobilized.³ In addition, the nationwide reorganization of the National Guard at this time of incredible stress has added to the daunting challenges facing every National Guard leader, as well as lower-ranking Soldiers, and, of course, family members of these brave servicemembers.

As discussed below, however, the challenges facing the Alaska National Guard, especially the Alaska Army National Guard, are daunting even when compared to the other fifty-three National Guard bureaus. **Based upon VFA’s work to date, VFA concludes that it would be unwise for the United States to**

continue to deploy the Alaska National Guard in large numbers until this situation facing Alaska National Guard members and their families is adequately understood and remedied.

As outlined in the VFA's recommendations section, Alaska Governor Sarah Palin – who could take steps immediately to improve the lives of the Alaska National Guard members and their families who are not under U.S. Code Title 10 (i.e., Federal control) – should take immediate action to address this pressing national security issue.⁴ Like other complex social problems, providing urgently needed assistance to Alaska National Guard members and their families will require a combination of greatly improved leadership, better prepared personnel, and greatly increased funding. With the state of Alaska expecting a state budget surplus next year between \$5 billion and \$6 billion, there is a window of opportunity to do the job well – to do right by our brave men and women in uniform and their families.⁵

In conjunction with better leadership from Alaskan officials, addressing the challenges facing the Alaska National Guard are also the responsibility of other individuals and organizations, including: the White House, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Department of the Army and Department of the Air Force, the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Reserve Affairs, the National Guard Bureau, Congress (especially the Senate and House Armed Services Committees, and the Senate National Guard Caucus and the House Guard and Reserve Caucus, as well as members of the Armed Services-focused Authorizing and Appropriations Committees in the U.S. House and Senate), as well as others, such as the National Guard Association of the United States and the Enlisted Association of the National Guard of the United States.

Alaska's Congressional Delegation has taken steps to bring attention and additional funding to help ease the burdens on Alaska's National Guard. Historically, many such earmarks were for improving Guard facilities and equipment; fortunately, the continuing federal appropriations resolution recently signed into law included funds for Guard families and reintegration.⁶ Senator Lisa Murkowski's November 2007 Committee on Indian Affairs field hearing in Anchorage on the shortcomings in health care for Alaska Native veterans was noted by many Guard members VFA spoke with as a crucial step in publicizing the needs of members of the Alaska National Guard. VFA applauds these efforts, but much more needs to be done to address the momentous challenges facing Alaska National Guard members and their families.

While the voluntary service of Alaska National Guard members in defense of the United States is honorable, deploying them without sufficient support systems and programs in place after they return is dishonorable. VFA looks forward to continuing to work with leaders in Alaska, Washington, D.C., and elsewhere to ensure that the members of the Alaska National Guard receive the support their sacrifice merits.

Key Problems Identified by VFA Affecting Alaska Army National Guard

Overall

The greatest challenge facing Alaska National Guard members is limited access to adequate care.

First, Alaska Guard members who live in urban centers have limited access to Veterans Affairs (VA) health care and Tricare (i.e., Department of Defense-sponsored military health care). When Guard members are deployed, their families are often forced to switch their health insurance coverage to a very limited Tricare network of eight service providers. Furthermore, VFA was told that the Food Bank of Alaska in Anchorage has seen an increase of 400% in military families relying on their services.

VFA's assessment found that Guard members and families from rural Alaska were hit very hard after their deployment.⁷ More than one-quarter of Alaska Guard members live in rural areas, more than 60 miles from the nearest VA-sponsored clinic or facility. In Alaska, "rural" can mean the need to rely on a snow machine, boat, and/or airplane to reach minimal social services located dozens if not hundreds of miles away. Many Guard members live in such remote areas that their families have access to very few Tricare providers during the deployment of their spouse or parent/guardian. One of the most discouraging findings from VFA's assessment of the post-deployment needs of Native Alaskan Guard members of the Alaska National Guard is that Native Alaskans cannot receive services covered by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) within the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium. This bureaucratic embarrassment should be rectified immediately.

Under the current system of post-combat care, it can cost over \$1,500 for Guard members living in remote villages to travel to Anchorage for an appointment. Such travel also often costs the Guard member at least two days' wages. VA will reimburse these travel costs; however, Soldiers must pay upfront. In Bethel, Alaskan Native Elders and local VSOs have helped National Guard Soldiers pay for their travel and lodging. If VA services could be reimbursed within the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium, many of these problems could be rectified immediately.

While in Alaska, VFA met with Guard members from villages where every able-bodied male of the community plays an integral role in hunting and fishing. The deployment of only a few such males from such communities has created considerable difficulties at home. These include: forcing young children to fulfill the hard labor requirements normally done by their deployed parent, an overreliance on non-Guard village members, and a disruption in family cohesion after the Guard member returns home.

Within Native Alaskan villages, VFA also found that a number of Guard members whose families had been on public assistance lost their food stamps and Medicare eligibility when their husbands or wives were deployed because their household income had temporarily increased. As most in Alaska know, food is incredibly expensive in the remote villages of Alaska. For instance, in some villages, milk can cost up to \$10 for a half gallon.

In addition to limited access to quality care, there was a pervasive lack of education regarding post-combat mental health needs at the Alaska National Guard armories that VFA visited outside of Anchorage. This is part of the larger trend of poorly understood post-combat psychological needs within many quarters of the U.S. military, as has been highlighted by, among others, the current chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Michael Mullen.⁸ Unfortunately, Alaska is not a positive exception in the area of properly understanding post-combat psychological needs (not to mention post-combat neurological needs).⁹

Mobilization/deployment

VFA learned of many challenges that members of the Alaska National Guard had faced during the mobilization phase.¹⁰ Many of the challenges centered on the mobilization of the 3rd Battalion, 297th Infantry Regiment in July 2006. For instance, the Alaska National Guard had to pull Soldiers from 81 communities across Alaska in order to staff units for the mobilization.¹¹ **In order to fill out the unit before it deployed, members of the 2nd Battalion, 297th Infantry were added to the 3rd Battalion, which created considerable leadership and cohesion difficulties.** (Appendix B of this report contains a post-9/11 deployment history of the Alaska Army National Guard compiled by VFA.)

When VFA visited Bethel and Kwethluk, numerous Guard members spoke about the difficulty that Native Alaskans had adjusting to the heat during training at Camp Shelby, Mississippi. Members of the Alaska Army National Guard spent the first 18 days of training living in open-air tents in extreme heat and humidity. To force the Native Alaskans to “adjust” to the expected heat they would endure in Kuwait, at times, water was apportioned in limited amounts.

In addition to the heat and periodic denial of water, members of the Alaska National Guard reported considerable anti-Native Alaskan racism among some Army National Guard leaders during mobilization and deployment. In addition, VFA was told of an unexpected, but welcomed, leadership change at the top of the 3rd Battalion, 297th Infantry Regiment during this mobilization phase.¹²

While in Alaska, VFA also noted that state of Alaska benefits for state employees who are deployed are paltry relative to other states—a fact worsened by the high costs of basic necessities in the state. For instance, the state of Alaska only provides military leave of up to 15 days (California, for instance, provides differential pay for all state employees when called to federal or state duty for up to 365 days).

Post-deployment

In Alaska, VFA noted the Army-wide problem of insufficient post-combat psychological screening. The causes of these shortcomings are, among others: a) Soldiers anxious to return home after deployment; b) Soldiers moving through post-combat screening process in an assembly-line style after deployment; and c) stigma that discourages Soldiers to get post-combat treatment for psychological problems. Fortunately, changes are taking place at the Federal level to improve this system. For instance, Admiral Mike Mullen, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, recently called for mandatory post-combat mental health by a mental health care professional for all servicemembers post-deployment. In the words of Admiral Mullen: “I’m at a point where I believe we have to give a [mental health] screening to everybody to help remove the stigma of raising your hand...Leaders must lead on this issue or it will affect us dramatically down the road...The PTS [Post-Traumatic Stress] issue is something we just all have to focus on...I think it’s a bigger problem than we know.”¹³

VFA was informed by numerous members of the Alaska National Guard that lack of anonymity of post-combat mental health counseling discourages many citizen Soldiers from seeking post-combat mental health care. For instance, VFA was told that some Alaska Army Guard aviators are afraid to seek counseling because they fear that they will be grounded immediately. VFA was told that Military One Source, a DOD-operated assistance and referral network for active and reserve Soldiers and their families, works well because it provides anonymity to those that call or e-mail for help.

At present, the Alaska Army National Guard Headquarters does not have access to considerable post-deployment health data. VFA was informed that this deficiency would soon be rectified. The current absence of substantial post-deployment data greatly hampers post-combat health assessment and treatment. The Alaska Army National Guard should immediately implement changes so that it can access the Post-Deployment Health Assessments (PDHA’s) of all members of the Alaska Army National Guard

who have been deployed in the post-9/11 period. Without such information, the Alaska Army National Guard will be lacking considerable data that could assist in better assessing the post-deployment needs of the Alaska Army National Guard.

As discussed above, there are essentially no Tricare providers in rural Alaska, and many Alaska National Guard members have difficulty accessing Tricare in urban areas, as well; for instance, recently there was a long wait for treatment for Guard members at Elmendorf Air Force Base, located just outside of Anchorage, because many active-duty Soldiers were preparing to deploy.

VFA found that Alaska's Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program – which aims to improve post-deployment screening and information sharing – is just getting started.¹⁴ As a result, more than 90% of the members of the Alaska National Guard who have returned from deployments have not gone through the Yellow Ribbon Reintegration.¹⁵ Concerns were expressed to VFA that some in Alaska National Guard leadership do not support steps such as more thorough face-to-face screening during the Post-Deployment Health Reassessment (PDHRA) phase (90 to 180 days after deployment). Furthermore, when Company B, 297th Infantry Regiment returned to Anchorage in April 2008, the Alaska National Guard Family Programs only had enough funding to house families in local hotels for the Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program. Some single soldiers slept in the barracks at Fort Richardson; a number of Soldiers went home after recognizing that they were being treated differently than married servicemembers, thus bypassing the Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program.

VFA found that Warrior Transition Units (WTUs), which are facilities where Soldiers are placed to focus on resolving their medical issues post-deployment, are slow to respond to the needs of National Guard members. One problem identified by VFA is that WTU administrative personnel on active bases know little about the National Guard post-deployment processes. Another problem identified by VFA is that Alaska Army National Guard members often are forced to compete for access to the WTU's at either Fort Wainwright or Fort Richardson, the largest Army bases in Alaska, with active-duty Soldiers who have returned from deployment. Since 2003, the active-duty Soldier population at both bases has increased from 4,000 to 6,000, and 3,000 to 7,000, respectively. The staffing levels, however, of mental health care providers and social workers at Fort Wainwright and Fort Richardson have remained relatively static.¹⁶ WTU access for wounded National Guard members is important because it allows them to heal closer to their homes and families, rather than at a distant Army hospital.

VFA was told that the 3rd Battalion, 297th Infantry Regiment has experienced a dramatic rise in divorces, suicides, financial difficulties, and other problems post-combat. VFA was also told that retention and recruiting had also declined post-deployment of the 3rd Battalion, 297th Infantry Regiment. (VFA recently submitted a request for more information in these areas to the Alaska National Guard, but has not received the requested information to date.)

VFA was informed that deployment pay for Guard members sometimes created money management issues for some Native Alaskan families and other families of modest means. In addition, some Alaska National Guard members, especially those from rural areas, are often not ready to return home after deployments. A number of Alaska Army National Guard members have chosen to remain in cities, which can harm the family and village to which they belong.

VFA found that some Guard members with seasonal employment are deployed during the prime income-earning time of the year, often resulting in such jobs not being available post-deployment. In addition, some Army National Guard members have returned home to find that their job has been taken by someone else or that they are last on the list for upcoming union jobs. VFA was also informed that possible Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act (USERRA) violations are frequently treated dismissively in Alaska and that the Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve

(ESGR) Program frequently did not provide a quality means by which to register employment-related concerns.

Veterans' advocates in Alaska noted to VFA that there is essentially no outreach for women veterans post-deployment. These advocates called for the leadership of the Alaska National Guard to go beyond Governor Palin's appointment of General Deborah McManus to head the Alaska Air National Guard. Non-governmental National Guard advocates in Alaska noted that they had seen little accomplished since General McManus had been, according to Lieutenant General (Alaska) Craig E. Campbell, tasked with focusing greater attention on women's issues in Alaska National Guard.

VFA Proposals to Assist Alaska Army National Guard

The Alaska National Guard, Veterans Service Organizations, faith-based and community outreach groups, and many others, are, in a number of cases, doing their best to meet the needs of the Alaska National Guard members and their families. Nevertheless, there are nine specific proposals that the VFA recommends to close the wide gaps between the services available and the pressing needs created by deployments.

1. Before the next member of the Alaska National Guard is deployed, Governor Palin should appoint a blue ribbon panel composed of members of the government of the state of Alaska; municipal and Native Alaskan leaders; representatives of leading Veterans Service Organizations in Alaska; and members of Alaska's academic, medical, and social service communities, among others, with the sole task of constructing a plan to greatly improve the assistance that members of the Alaska National Guard receive pre-deployment, during deployment, and post-deployment. Given the approximately \$6 billion state surplus expected for the next fiscal year, this panel should develop a plan that determines the portion of this massive surplus that should be devoted to making Alaska the nation's leader in caring for the members of its National Guard and their families.
2. To have a better understanding of pre-deployment and post-deployment needs, two steps need to be taken:
 - a. The state of Alaska, at Governor Palin's request, should conduct a sophisticated pre-combat screening for the upcoming deployers from the Alaska National Guard. This baseline should then be compared to a sophisticated screening conducted post-combat.
 - i. Steps need to be taken immediately to ensure that the 140 members from the 1st Battalion, 207th Aviation Regiment are well taken care of, as well as their families, when their mobilization begins in December 2008.
 1. Alaska should use this deployment as an opportunity to test new, innovative techniques for better screening these servicemembers before deployment. For instance, the New Jersey Department of Military and Veterans Affairs recently conducted a sophisticated screening for the almost 3,000 members of the 50th Brigade Combat Team who were recently deployed to Iraq. This screening revealed considerable challenges facing a large percentage of members of the unit, especially for those who had been deployed before.¹⁷
 - b. The state of Alaska, at Governor Palin's request, should conduct a comprehensive assessment of the needs of members of the Alaska National Guard who have deployed post-9/11, as well as their families; these findings should then be compared to programs in place; where necessary, new programs should be implemented. Such a study is already underway at a national level and in state-level studies have begun in New York, as well as elsewhere. Appendix D of this report contains the legislation, which was unanimously supported by the Senate Armed Services Committee, authorizing the national study of the post-deployment needs of all who have been deployed overseas in the post-9/11 period.

3. Radical changes must be implemented so that members of the Alaska National Guard from rural areas who have been deployed have easier access to affordable, quality post-combat health care. In short, more post-combat health services need to be brought to rural National Guard combat veterans and more rural National Guard veterans need to be brought to services provided in urban areas and/or Hub communities
 - a. Roughly one-quarter of Alaska Guard members live in rural areas, more than 60 miles from the nearest VA-sponsored clinic or facility. The state of Alaska should ensure the timely travel and lodging reimbursement is provided to veterans and servicemembers who must travel long distances to seek treatment.¹⁸ Anchorage Mayor Mark Begich's proposal to increase reimbursement rates for rural Alaska veterans would also be a good start.¹⁹
 - b. The state of Alaska should also greatly increase support for groups such as Veterans Aviation Outreach (VAO), which flies to remote villages to provide a range of social services, and transport poor or disabled veterans to hospitals and health clinics. In 2007, VAO's President, Maurice Bailey, was awarded the Governor's Veterans Advocacy Award, but the organization has never received state funding, despite direct appeals to Governor Palin and other state leaders.²⁰
4. The Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium should accept reimbursement from the VA to cover post-combat care for rural Guard members who have served overseas post-9/11. The recent federal continuing appropriations resolution contains a provision that directs the Secretary of the VA to better coordinate access for rural Alaskan veterans to Native Health Services.²¹ It remains to be seen if this provision will help to resolve the problem.
5. Governor Palin should make face-to-face mental health screening by a qualified medical professional a mandatory part of the Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program.
 - a. For example, the almost 600 members of the 3rd Battalion, 297th Infantry Regiment who returned from Operation Iraqi Freedom in October 2007 have faced considerable post-deployment problems such as suicide, domestic violence, divorce, family issues, and financial problems. At least one-quarter of them have sought transition assistance.²² These brave servicemembers need greatly improved post-combat mental health assistance now.
 - b. In addition, approximately 1,000 members of the Alaska Army National Guard who deployed before 2008 did not benefit from the Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program. The Alaska National Guard should immediately take steps to host Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program events for all of these servicemembers (including single servicemembers), their families, and other loved ones.
6. As noted earlier, the Alaska Army National Guard should immediately implement changes so that it can access the Post-Deployment Health Assessments (PDHA's) of all members of the Alaska Army National Guard who have been deployed in the post-9/11 period. Without such information, the Alaska Army National Guard will be lacking considerable data that could assist in better assessing the post-deployment needs of the Alaska Army National Guard.
7. National military leaders and Alaska state military leaders must ensure that citizen Soldiers have adequate time at home between deployments (i.e., dwell time). Department of Defense findings have shown that inadequate dwell time is a key variable in markedly raising the rate of psychological wounds of war; for instance, the Mental Health Advisory Team IV report found

that the likelihood of a servicemember having a psychological wound rose by 60% with each subsequent deployment.²³

- a. As an initial step to ensure that dwell time for Alaska National Guard members is sufficient, the Alaska National Guard should release a detailed accounting of members of the Alaska National Guard who have been deployed post-9/11. To the credit of the Pentagon some information, though insufficient, has been released regarding the number of multiple deployers in the U.S. military. For more information, see Appendix E of this report.
8. The state of Alaska must ensure that Alaska has an adequate number of geographically distributed Family Assistance Centers to guarantee that the Alaska's National Guard members' 2,201 spouses and 4,138 children are adequately cared for.²⁴ Local efforts—such as Anchorage First Lady Deborah Bonito's Military and Family Support Initiative—are laudable attempts to fill this gap, but to provide additional assistance more Family Assistance Centers should be opened across the state.
9. Governor Palin should expand the state of Alaska Grant Program that provides emergency financial assistance for Guard members and their families.²⁵

Appendix A: Alaska Army National Guard Background

The Alaska Army National Guard was among the last state Guard bureaus deployed post-9/11. As of May 2004, Alaska had the lowest deployment rate of any state National Guard—5%.²⁶ By the end of 2007, the deployment rate had risen to around 80%, or 1,600 members.²⁷ The bulk of this increase was as the result of three separate deployments from the 3rd Battalion, 297th Infantry Regiment to support Operation Iraqi Freedom: 175 in 2005, 575 in 2006-2007, and 180 in 2007-2008. These represented the first call-ups of Alaska Army National Guard infantry in more than 60 years.²⁸ In total, since September 11th, three members of the Alaska Army National Guard from Alaska have died while deployed abroad—all in a Blackhawk helicopter crash at Tal Afar, Iraq in January 2006. (A fourth Alaska Army National Guard member, who is listed as living in Washington by the National Guard, also died in the Blackhawk crash.) These were the first wartime deaths by members of the Alaska Army National Guard since World War II.²⁹ In addition, two Alaska Army National Guard Soldiers were killed during training on July 20, 2006, when the Humvee they were in was hit by an 18-wheeler. Two other Alaska Army National Guard Soldiers were injured in the crash. All were members of the Alaska National Guard's 3rd Battalion, 297th Infantry Regiment, which was training at Camp Shelby, Mississippi, prior to its deployment in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Like many other National Guard state bureaus, Alaska has felt the strains of its overseas deployments in terms of its personnel, equipment, and readiness. A leaked March 1, 2008 memo from Maj. Gen. Craig Campbell, the state's adjutant general, to his Deputy, warned that the retention levels of the Alaska Air National Guard had "reached a crisis level," and that "missions were at risk."³⁰ Six months later, Major General Campbell said that the situation had improved, but personnel and equipment shortages could still result in the "burnout" of troops in the Guard.³¹ Consistent with other National Guard bureaus, Alaska has access to approximately one-half of its authorized equipment at any given time.³² This can put great stress on the Alaska Army National Guard and the Alaska Air National Guard efforts in rural communities, including rescuing lost travelers and providing assistance during natural disasters.³³

The state of Alaska's own readiness ratings demonstrates that the Alaska Army National Guard is poorly prepared to respond to a major domestic emergency. Under the "Training Capability Rating," each Alaska Army National Guard unit is assigned a rating or T-1—representing the best trained, to T-4—requiring additional training. For every quarter since FY 2005, the Training Capability Rating for the Alaska Army National Guard as a whole has been a T-4, with the goal of reaching a T-3 rating.³⁴

Appendix B: Post-9/11 Deployment History of Alaska Army National Guard Units³⁵

- Embedded Transition Team (various units from Alaska Army National Guard (AKARNG), 15 members deployed)³⁶
 - Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF): September 2008 to Present
 - Will help train the Afghan National Army (ANA), providing tactical support for ANA counterinsurgency operations.
 - These Guardsmen are from Anchorage, Eagle River, Chugiak, Wasilla, Palmer, Kenai, and Dillingham.³⁷
 - The unit is expected to return to Alaska around August 2009.³⁸
- Embedded Transition Team (various units from Alaska Army National Guard (AKARNG), 13 members deployed)³⁹
 - Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF): July 2007 to April 2008
 - 9-month deployment
 - Helped to train the Afghan National Army, and provide tactical support for ANA counterinsurgency operations.
- Company B, 297th Infantry Regiment Company (HQ: Kenai, 180 members deployed)
 - Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF): October 2007 to April 2008
 - 6-month deployment⁴⁰
 - The soldiers provided security for combat logistics patrols, and were based at Camp Anaconda.⁴¹
- 3rd Battalion, 297th Infantry Regiment Company (HQ: Juneau, 575 members deployed)⁴²
 - Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF): October 2006 to October 2007
 - 12-month mobilization
 - 150 were from the Bravo Company, based in Bethel. 95 percent of the members from this unit speak Yup'ik as their first language.⁴³
 - The 3rd Battalion was represented by members from 81 communities across Alaska.⁴⁴
 - Included in the deployment were a 46-year old father and his two sons: 20 and 26-years old.⁴⁵
- HHC, 207th Infantry Group (Scout) (HQ: Fort Richardson, 75 members deployed)⁴⁶

- Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF): April 2006 to June 2007
 - 14-month mobilization
 - These Guardsmen were primarily from Nome, and the Fairbanks and South central regions⁴⁷
- 1st Battalion-207th Aviation Regiment (HQ: Anchorage, 60 members deployed)
 - Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF): August 2005 to May 2006
 - 9-month mobilization
 - Four members died when their Blackhawk helicopter crashed at Tal Afar—three of them were from Alaska, and one from Washington. They were the first wartime deaths by members of the Alaska Army National Guard since World War II.⁴⁸
 - These Guardsmen were primarily from Eagle River, the Mat-Su, Anchorage, Nome, Bethel, and Juneau.⁴⁹
- Company A, 3rd Battalion, 297th Infantry Regiment (HQ: Juneau, 175 members deployed)
 - Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF): February 2005 to January 2006
 - 13-month deployment
 - The activation of the 175 Guardsmen was the first call-up of Army Guard infantry in Alaska in more than 60 years, the military said.⁵⁰
 - The unit provided force protection in and around Baghdad.⁵¹
- 1st Battalion, 207th Aviation Regiment (HQ: Anchorage, 70 members deployed)
 - Kosovo: October 2003 to October 2004
 - 12-month deployment
 - “It’s the first major deployment by Alaska Army National Guard troops since World War II, said Brig. Gen. Craig Christensen, then the commander of the Alaska National Guard.”⁵²
 - The unit and eight Blackhawk helicopters were deployed to Pristina to transport peacekeepers and supplies.⁵³

Appendix C: State of Alaska, Department of Military and Veterans Affairs, “Alaska Army National Guard,” October 2, 2008

CAMP DENALI, Alaska – A preliminary findings report that does not appear to be comprehensive or scientific was released by Veterans for America Oct. 1 filled with inaccurate assertions regarding the Alaska Army National Guard.

Central to the report is an unsubstantiated conclusion that the Alaska Army National Guard should not continue to deploy in support of the Global War on Terror. Our Soldiers are highly-trained, motivated individuals that meet each deployment, whether home or abroad, with enthusiasm, determination and success. They return home to a thankful nation, a helpful community and an ever-improving healthcare system for assistance and support.

“We are experienced, skilled professionals who meet the needs of Alaskans and the nation whenever we are called upon,” said Lt. Gen. (Alaska) Craig E. Campbell, adjutant general of the Alaska National Guard. “The Alaska Army National Guard is constantly working with its Soldiers, families and organizations such as Veterans Affairs to ensure the highest level of services and care are provided.”

Governor Sarah Palin has advocated for increased benefits to Alaska National Guard members. This year, she signed into law a provision that waives the fee for hunting and fishing licenses to Alaska National Guard members. Educational benefits for Alaska National Guard members have also increased under her leadership.

With the backing of Governor Sarah Palin, federal law changes have also increased benefits to Soldiers. Alaska is one of five states that provide veterans home loans from the proceeds of issuing the tax-exempt Qualified Veteran Mortgage Bonds. The Alaska Veterans and Pioneers Home was accredited by Veterans Affairs, and now qualified veterans living at the facility will have up to 30 percent of their personal monthly expense for care paid for by the VA.

The State of Alaska Veterans Office has continued to support other major programs to include: the Veterans Memorial Endowment Fund, Stand Down programs; Governor’s Alaska Veterans Advisory Council staff support; and the design and release of the Gold Star Family license plate with the Division of Motor Vehicles. In addition, the State of Alaska and Department of Military and Veterans Affairs augment the federal benefits and services system.

The Alaska Army National Guard, along with the rest of the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs, has made tremendous strides in support of its members under the leadership of Gov. Palin. We continuously work to implement improvements to services and benefits, as it is our mission to provide our members with the very best resources.

Appendix D: National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2008, Title XVI, Subtitle E, Sec. 1661.

SEC. 1661. STUDY ON PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH AND OTHER READJUSTMENT NEEDS OF MEMBERS AND FORMER MEMBERS OF THE ARMED FORCES WHO DEPLOYED IN OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM AND OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM AND THEIR FAMILIES.

- (a) Study Required- The Secretary of Defense shall, in consultation with the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, enter into an agreement with the National Academy of Sciences for a study on the physical and mental health and other readjustment needs of members and former members of the Armed Forces who deployed in Operation Iraqi Freedom or Operation Enduring Freedom and their families as a result of such deployment.
- (b) Phases- The study required under subsection (a) shall consist of two phases:
- (1) A preliminary phase, to be completed not later than one year after the date of the enactment of this Act--
 - (A) to identify preliminary findings on the physical and mental health and other readjustment needs described in subsection (a) and on gaps in care for the members, former members, and families described in that subsection; and
 - (B) to determine the parameters of the second phase of the study under paragraph (2).
 - (2) A second phase, to be completed not later than three years after the date of the enactment of this Act, to carry out a comprehensive assessment, in accordance with the parameters identified under the preliminary report required by paragraph (1), of the physical and mental health and other readjustment needs of members and former members of the Armed Forces who deployed in Operation Iraqi Freedom or Operation Enduring Freedom and their families as a result of such deployment, including, at a minimum--
 - (A) an assessment of the psychological, social, and economic impacts of such deployment on such members and former members and their families;
 - (B) an assessment of the particular impacts of multiple deployments in Operation Iraqi Freedom or Operation Enduring Freedom on such members and former members and their families;
 - (C) an assessment of the full scope of the neurological, psychiatric, and psychological effects of traumatic brain injury on members and former members of the Armed Forces, including the effects of such effects on the family members of such members and former members, and an assessment of the efficacy of current treatment approaches for traumatic brain injury in the United States and the efficacy of screenings and treatment approaches for traumatic brain injury within the Department of Defense and the Department of Veterans Affairs;
 - (D) an assessment of the effects of undiagnosed injuries such as post-traumatic stress disorder and traumatic brain injury, an estimate of the long-term costs associated with such injuries, and an assessment of the efficacy of screenings and treatment approaches for post-traumatic stress disorder and other mental health conditions within the Department of Defense and Department of Veterans Affairs;
 - (E) an assessment of the gender- and ethnic group-specific needs and concerns of members of the Armed Forces and veterans;
 - (F) an assessment of the particular needs and concerns of children of members of the Armed Forces, taking into account differing age groups, impacts on development and education, and the mental and emotional well being of children;
 - (G) an assessment of the particular educational and vocational needs of such members and former members and their families, and an assessment of the efficacy of existing educational and vocational programs to address such needs;

- (H) an assessment of the impacts on communities with high populations of military families, including military housing communities and townships with deployed members of the National Guard and Reserve, of deployments associated with Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom, and an assessment of the efficacy of programs that address community outreach and education concerning military deployments of community residents;
- (I) an assessment of the impacts of increasing numbers of older and married members of the Armed Forces on readjustment requirements;
- (J) the development, based on such assessments, of recommendations for programs, treatments, or policy remedies targeted at preventing, minimizing, or addressing the impacts, gaps, and needs identified; and
- (K) the development, based on such assessments, of recommendations for additional research on such needs.

(c) Populations To Be Studied- The study required under subsection (a) shall consider the readjustment needs of each population of individuals as follows:

- (1) Members of the regular components of the Armed Forces who are returning, or have returned, to the United States from deployment in Operation Iraqi Freedom or Operation Enduring Freedom.
- (2) Members of the National Guard and Reserve who are returning, or have returned, to the United States from deployment in Operation Iraqi Freedom or Operation Enduring Freedom.
- (3) Veterans of Operation Iraqi Freedom or Operation Enduring Freedom.
- (4) Family members of the members and veterans described in paragraphs (1) through (3).

(d) Access to Information- The National Academy of Sciences shall have access to such personnel, information, records, and systems of the Department of Defense and the Department of Veterans Affairs as the National Academy of Sciences requires in order to carry out the study required under subsection (a).

(e) Privacy of Information- The National Academy of Sciences shall maintain any personally identifiable information accessed by the Academy in carrying out the study required under subsection (a) in accordance with all applicable laws, protections, and best practices regarding the privacy of such information, and may not permit access to such information by any persons or entities not engaged in work under the study.

(f) Reports by National Academy of Sciences- Upon the completion of each phase of the study required under subsection (a), the National Academy of Sciences shall submit to the Secretary of Defense, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, and the congressional defense committees a report on such phase of the study.

(g) DoD and VA Response to NAS Reports- Not later than 90 days after the receipt of a report under subsection (f) on each phase of the study required under subsection (a), the Secretary of Defense and the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall develop a final joint Department of Defense-Department of Veterans Affairs response to the findings and recommendations of the National Academy of Sciences contained in such report.

Appendix E: Data Excerpt from Thom Shanker, “Army Is Worried by Rising Stress of Return Tours to Iraq,” *New York Times*, April 6, 2008.

Tracking Deployments

Data from the United States Army shows that 40 percent of current military service members have been deployed more than once, and one in eight have been deployed three or more times. A study by the Army Surgeon General's Mental Health Advisory team found a significant increase in mental health problems in male noncommissioned Army officers who had more deployments. Of those who were deployed once, 12 percent had depression, anxiety or acute stress. The figure increased to 27 percent for those who were deployed three or four times.

All Services

Total current service members: 2,699,087

Number deployed at least once: 1,321,019

Number of times deployed	Number of people	Pct. of those deployed at least once
Once	796,483	60
Twice	358,052	27
Three times	111,043	8
Four times	31,256	2
Five times	10,854	<1
Six times	13,331	1

Army

Total current service members: 1,232,760

Number deployed at least once: 642,952

Number of times deployed	Number of people	Pct. of those deployed at least once
Once	416,555	65
Twice	164,955	26
Three times	45,963	7
Four times	10,451	2
Five times	2,666	<1
Six times	2,362	<1

Marine Corps

Total current service members: 292,344

Number deployed at least once: 166,330

Number of times deployed	Number of people	Pct. of those deployed at least once
Once	94,384	57
Twice	55,011	33
Three times	14,274	9
Four times	2,198	1
Five times	277	<1
Six times	186	<1

Air Force

Total current service members: 622,510

Number deployed at least once: 276,484

Number of times deployed	Number of people	Pct. of those deployed at least once
Once	142,265	51
Twice	71,986	26
Three times	32,854	12
Four times	14,395	5
Five times	6,577	2
Six times	8,407	3

Navy

Total current service members: 495,957

Number deployed at least once: 231,799

Number of times deployed	Number of people	Pct. of those deployed at least once
Once	140,426	61
Twice	65,629	28
Three times	17,868	8
Four times	4,189	2
Five times	1,326	<1
Six times	2,361	1

Coast Guard

Total current service members: 55,516

Number deployed at least once: 3,454

Number of times deployed	Number of people	Pct. of those deployed at least once
Once	2,853	83
Twice	471	14
Three times	84	2
Four times	23	<1
Five times	8	<1
Six times	15	<1

Active Duty (all branches)

Total current service members: 1,402,348

Number deployed at least once: 792,639

Number of times deployed	Number of people	Pct. of those deployed at least once
Once	439,667	55
Twice	238,277	30
Three times	79,179	10
Four times	21,605	3
Five times	6,803	<1
Six times	7,108	<1

Reserves (all branches)

Total current service members: 832,397

Number deployed at least once: 315,969

Number of times deployed	Number of people	Pct. of those deployed at least once
Once	206,125	65
Twice	78,636	25
Three times	19,748	6
Four times	5,319	2
Five times	2,074	<1
Six times	4,067	1

National Guard (all branches)

Total current service members: 464,342

Number deployed at least once: 212,411

Number of times deployed	Number of people	Pct. of those deployed at least once
Once	150,691	71
Twice	41,139	19
Three times	12,116	6
Four times	4,332	2
Five times	1,977	<1
Six times	2,156	1

¹ For more information on the post-9/11 history of the Alaska Army National Guard, please refer to Appendix A.

² The Active Component is the permanent force of the United States military that is maintained during peacetime; servicemembers in the Active Component serve “full-time.” The Reserve Component consists of state and territorial National Guards, which are organized under Titles 10 and 32 of the US Code, as well as the Reserves of each service branch of the US military. Members of the Reserve Component generally serve part-time unless called upon by a governor (if National Guard) or the President of the United States to serve as active duty servicemembers.

³ Commission on the National Guard and Reserves, “Transforming the National Guard and Reserves into a 21st Century Operational Force: Final Report to Congress and the Secretary of Defense,” January 31, 2008, p. 10; and Defense Science Board Taskforce, *Deployment of Members of the National Guard and Reserve in the Global War on Terrorism*, Office of the Secretary of Defense For Acquisition, Technology, and Logistics, September 2007.

⁴ Under Title 10 of the U.S. Code, the President may call into Federal Service members and units of the National Guard of any state. When state National Guard members are called into federal service their units are supported funded by the federal government. When they are not under Title 10, they are supported and funded by their home state or territory.

⁵ Brian Mooney, “Fueled by Oil Taxes, Alaska Spending Soared Under Palin,” *Boston Globe*, September 13, 2008, p. A1.

⁶ Senator Ted Stevens, “Senator Stevens Secures Funding for Military Families, Health Care, and Research in Alaska,” press release, September 30, 2008; and Rep. Don Young, “Rep. Young Votes for Continuing Resolution,” press release, September 24, 2008.

⁷ Joseph R. Scotti, PhD, "Mental Health Issues and Service Access in West Virginia Veterans of Recent Conflicts: National Guard/Reserve Status and Rurality," Written testimony to the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs, July 22, 2008.

⁸ Tom Vanden Brook, "Mullen: PTSD screenings for all returnees," *USA Today*, October 13, 2008.

⁹ For information on VFA's work assessing the post-combat psychological and neurological needs of U.S. servicemembers, see: Veterans for America, "Trends in Treatment of America's Wounded Warriors -- Psychological Traumas and Traumatic Brain Injuries: The Signature Wounds of Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom," <http://www.veteransforamerica.org/2007/11/06/trends-in-treatment-of-americas-wounded-warriors>.

¹⁰ To put the challenges of mobilization for deployment in context, VFA was informed by a retired member of the Alaska National Guard who was a key member in preparing the Alaska National Guard for its two weeks of Annual Training in the pre-September 11, 2001 period, that logistics involved in moving Alaska National Guard Soldiers around the state to prepare for Annual Training had been an incredible challenge.

¹¹ Senate Committee on Indian Affairs, "Field Hearing on Health Care for Alaska Native Veterans Returning from Kuwait and Iraq and Other Native Veterans Living in Alaska Native Villages: Access to and Delivery of Services," November 30, 2007.

¹² Alaska Department of Military and Veterans Affairs, "New Commander for Alaska Guard Battalion in Kuwait," June 1, 2007.

¹³ Tom Vanden Brook, "Mullen: PTSD screenings for all returnees," *USA Today*, October 13, 2008.

¹⁴ Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program was mandated by Congress in the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2008.

¹⁵ The Alaska Air National Guard is even further behind in comprehensively implementing the Yellow Ribbon Integration Program. VFA was informed that such a program will not be implemented for the Air Guard until next year.

¹⁶ Information provided by the U.S. Army Medical Command, Fort Houston, Texas, September 23, 2008.

¹⁷ Anna Kline, et. al., "Mental and Physical Health Status of New Jersey National Guard Troops Prior to Deployment to Iraq," undated. A one-page summary of the findings of the study can be found at: <http://www.veteransforamerica.org/national-guard/>.

¹⁸ Senate Committee on Indian Affairs, "Field Hearing on Health Care for Alaska Native Veterans Returning from Kuwait and Iraq and Other Native Veterans Living in Alaska Native Villages: Access to and Delivery of Services," November 30, 2007.

¹⁹ Mark Begich for U.S. Senate, "Veterans," <http://begich.com/issues/veterans>.

²⁰ Alaska Department of Military and Veterans Affairs, "Governor's Veterans Advocacy Award Presented on Veterans Day," November 11, 2007; and interview with Maurice Bailey, President of Veterans Aviation Outreach, October 7, 2008.

²¹ Public Law 110-329, “Consolidated Security, Disaster Assistance, and Continuing Appropriations Act, 2009,” section 215, September 30, 2008.

²² E-mail communication with Alaska National Guard Transition Assistance Program, September 12, 2008.

²³ Mental Health Advisory Team IV, Operation Iraqi Freedom 05-07, *Final Report*, Office of the Surgeon Multinational Force-Iraq and Office the Surgeon General United States Army Medical Command, November 17, 2006.

²⁴ National Governor’s Association, *State and Territorial Support for Members of the National Guard, the Reserves and Their Families*, July 30, 2008, p. 5.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Dawn House, “Returning Guard May Be Called to Fire Duty,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, May 14, 2004, p. A1.

²⁷ State of Alaska, *FY2009 Governor’s Operating Budget*, “National Guard Military Headquarters,” December 2007, p. 10; and George Bryson, “Palin’s Military Command Limited,” *Anchorage Daily News*, September 4, 2008, p. A2.

²⁸ Peter Porco, “Leaving For Iraq,” *Anchorage Daily News*, October 3, 2004.

²⁹ Army National Guard Bureau, “Some Gave All,” webpage updated as of October 7, 2008, <http://www.ngb.army.mil/features/somegaveall/index.html>; and Robert Burns, “Helicopter that Crashed in Iraq, Killing 12, Was from Alaska National Guard,” *Associated Press*, January 11, 2006.

³⁰ Memo available at <http://www.andrewhalcro.com/files/AKANG%20Senior%20Promotion%20Letter.pdf>.

³¹ Richard Lardner, “Alaska National Guard Faces Personnel Crisis,” *Associated Press*, September 4, 2008.

³² “How Ready is Your State’s National Guard,” *USA Today*, June 14, 2007.

³³ “Deployment to End Alaska Air Ambulance Service,” *Associated Press*, February 12, 2008; and “Guardsmen Rescue Backpackers from Ice Floe,” *Associated Press*, March 8, 2007; and R.A. Dillon, “Guard’s Role Gets Bigger,” *Fairbanks Daily News-Miner*, August 31, 2005.

³⁴ State of Alaska, *FY2009 Governor’s Operating Budget*, “National Guard Military Headquarters,” December 2007, p. 7.

³⁵ This deployment history represents Veterans for America’s best estimate of Alaska Army National Guard unit deployments based upon open-sources.

³⁶ E-mail communication with Public Information Officer, Kalei Brooks, September 18, 2008.

³⁷ Alaska Department of Military and Veterans Affairs, “Alaska Army Guardsmen Deploy to Afghanistan,” September 2, 2008.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Alaska Department of Military and Veterans Affairs, “Welcome Home Ceremony to Honor Guard Members’ Service in Iraq,” April 30, 2008; and “Handling the Mission,” Anchorage Daily News, January 7, 2008.

⁴² Alaska Department of Military and Veterans Affairs, *2007 DMVA Annual Report*, p. 10.

⁴³ Tatoboline Brant, “From Tundra to Desert,” Anchorage Daily News, July 8, 2006.

⁴⁴ Senate Committee on Indian Affairs, “Field Hearing on Health Care for Alaska Native Veterans Returning from Kuwait and Iraq and Other Native Veterans Living in Alaska Native Villages: Access to and Delivery of Services,” November 30, 2007.

⁴⁵ Tatoboline Brant, “Deployment of Father 2 Sons Makes Family Proud but Worried,” Anchorage Daily News, October 15, 2006.

⁴⁶ In April 2008, the 207th Infantry Group (Scout) was transformed into the 297th Battlefield Surveillance Brigade (Scout) and 38th Troop Command, which will remain headquartered at the Fort Richardson Armory. Alaska Department of Military and Veterans Affairs, “Alaska Army National Guard Holds Transformation Ceremony,” April 25, 2006; and e-mail communication with Public Information Officer, Kalei Brooks, September 18, 2008.

⁴⁷ State of Alaska, *FY2007 Governor’s Operating Budget*, “National Guard Military Headquarters,” December 2005, p. 9.

⁴⁸ Robert Burns, “Helicopter that Crashed in Iraq, Killing 12, Was From Alaska National Guard,” *Associated Press*, January 11, 2006.

⁴⁹ State of Alaska, *FY2007 Governor’s Operating Budget*, “National Guard Military Headquarters,” December 2005, p. 9.

⁵⁰ Peter Porco, “Leaving For Iraq,” *Anchorage Daily News*, October 3, 2004.

⁵¹ Mary Rose, “Alaska Troops Focus on Mission, Hot Weather,” Department of Defense, August 19, 2005.

⁵² Joel Gay, “Alaska Guard Heads to Kosovo,” *Anchorage Daily News*, October 1, 2003.

⁵³ Ibid.