

Testimony of James Baldrige, for "Keep the Maryland Guard Home"
to the Senate Education Health and Environmental Affairs Committee
March 4, 2009

SB 501--Public Safety - National Guard Deployment - Governor's Powers

SUPPORT

Chairwoman Conway, members of this committee:

I'm a Vietnam-era veteran of the US Navy. I enlisted in Sept. '65 and served until Nov. '69, the last 2 ½ years of which I was stationed at Pax River Naval Air Station in St. Mary's County. I'm originally from a rural state, Nebraska. I know from personal experience that rural areas of our country participate disproportionately as members of the National Guard, and as volunteers in many other aspects of their local or national life. That's what folks do in rural America, and joining the service or the Guard is a part of it.

Volunteerism IS rural America. Volunteer fire departments, EMS, 1st responders – they are filled with National Guard members, and all are depleted when the National Guard deploys. Thus, our rural communities lose the ability to deal effectively with even the day-to-day emergencies because those key volunteers are gone. When the National Guard deploys within the state or to neighboring states, as they do for disasters of all kinds, it's one thing. But when they are federalized, they are removed from their core mission of civil defense and disaster response for months to years

One of the ways that some states expect to use a portion of their "stimulus package" is to create tax credits for emergency responders. This could be used for continuing education and to offset expenses incurred as a result of their volunteering their services. But if emergency responders are in Iraq or Afghanistan, along with state guard equipment, they aren't at home to support responses to emergencies here, in their home state or a neighboring state.

It is my opinion, our opinion, that if there was proper justification for federalizing the National Guard in the beginning of the Iraq War, it is no longer justified, and this is the basis for these two legislative proposals, SB501 and it's companion, HB907.

There are several other states that have introduced or are considering similar legislation, with active "Keep the Guard Home" campaigns in several more. Of these, a number are substantially rural states, for example, Alaska, Vermont, Wisconsin, and others. And just as President Obama's Stimulus Bill is non-partisan, so are these bills. Legislators and citizens from across the political spectrum are supporting this effort around the country, and in Maryland.

SB 501 doesn't propose to challenge the President's authority. It DOES challenge the continuance of the CURRENT authorization that is no longer justified, in need or in law.

Thank you

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