



NATIONAL GUARD ASSOCIATION OF THE UNITED STATES

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April 10, 2003

The Honorable Patrick Leahy
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Leahy:

On behalf of the men and women of the National Guard Association of the United States (NGAUS), I thank you for the stalwart support you have given the National Guard over the years. The NGAUS is pleased to offer its support for your legislation entitled the *National Guard and Reserve Comprehensive Health Benefits Act of 2003*. This important legislation would offer members of the selected reserve and their families, the opportunity to participate in the Tricare on a cost-share basis; provide a partial subsidy of private health insurance premiums for family members of Guardsmen who wish to retain their private health insurance; and improve transition coverage upon deactivation.

The National Guard and Reserve contributions to the ongoing operations in Iraq, fighting the global war on terrorism, protecting the homeland, and supporting contingency operations around the world are a key indicator of the importance of maintaining a high level of readiness. The General Accounting Office recently found more than twenty-one percent of National Guard and Reserve members do not have health coverage. Forty percent of those individuals without insurance are in the junior enlisted ranks.

Units with nearly twenty-one percent of its members unable to deploy due to medical reasons has a major impact on the ability of that unit to complete its mission. Providing Tricare during all phases of service can decrease an already lengthy mobilization process by ensuring medical readiness is routinely sustained. Medical readiness is an important factor in unit readiness.

Recent National Guard mobilizations have demonstrated how quickly the Guard can be ready to fulfill their federal mission. Some of these notifications for mobilization have given Guardsmen hours and days, as opposed to the days and weeks normally required. This reduced ramp also requires members of the Guard to maintain their family readiness plans in order to lessen the complications and distractions during deployments. Providing continuity of health coverage for family members will ensure those who support our service members and make it possible for them to serve, are provided for while their loved ones are away.

As always, the NGAUS stands ready to assist you and looks forward to our continued relationship ensuring a strong and viable National Guard.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Richard C. Alexander". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "R" and "A".

Richard C. Alexander
Major General (RET), AUS
President