

An open letter to our Tennessee National Guard Soldiers and Airmen, their families, and their employers,

As we begin the eighth year following the terrorist attacks on our homeland, I want to take the opportunity to thank our Tennessee National Guard Soldiers and Airmen for the outstanding job they have done both in the War on Terrorism and also here at home.

Since that fateful day in 2001, we have deployed more than 13,000 Guard men and women to Iraq, Afghanistan, Kuwait, and Kosovo. In the aftermath of Hurricanes Katrina, Rita and Gustav, we deployed more than 3,000 personnel and countless numbers of equipment to assist our neighbors in Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas.

These outstanding men and women are consummate professionals and true Tennessee Volunteers. They know what their job is and they do it exceptionally well.

But there is another group of individuals that I want to thank for their sacrifice, and that is the families and employers of our National Guard men and women. The burdens they bear are just as real and sometimes more frustrating than anything their Soldier or Airman endures in a combat zone.

Without the love and support of our families, we simply could not accomplish our mission. Our Tennessee Guard families are without doubt the strongest, most resourceful people I have ever had the honor to work with. Our soldiers have specific missions that occupy their time and minds. They also have their friends and comrades with them to provide support. Our families are sometimes separated by miles and don't have the support structure provided by an active duty base. For them it is vital that they have the support of our National Guard family, the community and their families and friends here at home. Each unit throughout the state has a Family Readiness Group comprised of spouses, family, friends, and community supporters. These Family Readiness Groups are the cornerstone of our community support, and I thank you for all you are doing to encourage and assist our families left here at home.

Our employers are simply outstanding! They have absorbed the loss of valued employees for as much as eighteen months at a time, and they continue to support not only the troops, but also their families.

Employers support us in different ways. Some continue the benefits for both the Guard member and their family during extended deployments. Some, like the State of Tennessee, make up the difference between their employee's military and civilian pay. Some continue their employee's full pay and benefits for the entire time they are gone. But whatever they do for their Guard employees, their support is unwavering, and for that they have my heartfelt thanks.

I am indeed honored to command the more than 14,000 Tennessee Army and Air National Guard Soldiers and Airmen. During the past eight years, we have become a closer knit organization caring for each other in a way that many people don't, and can never understand. The National Guard Family, which encompasses our Soldiers, Airmen, families, friends and employers, is strong, and you all have my heartfelt thanks.

I have never been prouder to be a Tennessee National Guardsman!

Major General Gus L. Hargett, Jr.
The Adjutant General of Tennessee

