

Enhancing Cooperation Between Employers and Guardsmen/Reservists

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Witness:

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Testimony

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, I have the honor to speak to you as a representative of both Wachovia Corporation and as a citizen soldier. When reservists deploy, they must rely upon a support network that includes the businesses that the reservists work for or own. In my experience, that level of support varies widely. I would like to detail the outstanding support that I received as I prepared to mobilize, mobilized, deployed, and redeployed for Operation Iraqi Freedom, and relate to the committee what that level of support means on a personal level.

At the time of my initial alert, Wachovia's existing corporate policy was already what I considered generous, providing for continued full pay and benefits for 6 months in the event of activation. In March 2003, the corporation extended this policy to one year in recognition of the sacrifices being made to support the war on terror as more Wachovia employees joined the active ranks. Wachovia has since continued to extend that policy in subsequent months in support of our employees called to extended active duty for Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom.

Let me explain what these benefits meant to my family. As an active duty Sergeant First Class my pay was less than half of what I had been making at Wachovia, even factoring in the additional allowances for combat deployment. To compound this, my wife had to leave her job which involved night and weekend work that she would no longer be able to perform since I was no longer there to care for our children and daycare was not available during those periods. Her employer would not grant her a leave of absence, so she was forced to resign and subsequently lost her benefits.

I was faced with the prospect of losing two thirds of the annual income and benefits for my family while being halfway around the world and not able to do anything about it. While Tricare health care benefits began upon my activation, they involved a change in medical service providers and new and unfamiliar paperwork. Without the financial support from Wachovia and the extended benefits, we would have been in serious trouble. Not having to worry about my family's financial condition or health benefits gave me a great sense of relief and made it easier to focus on my duties.

I was initially concerned that the one year policy would leave a period where I would have only the Army salary. However, the extensions to the policy ensured that I was covered for the entire period of my service. The company also maintained the employer matching of funds in my 401(k), allowing me to continue pursuing our savings goals. Wachovia also counted my military service as qualifying towards the company funded

pension plan. I was also paid my full incentive plan bonus for 2003, even though it could have been pro-rated to exclude the three months that I was deployed in that year. These measures ensured that my future financial goals weren't derailed by the deployment.

During the call-up process I had a lot of questions, and was relieved to find the answers readily accessible. Wachovia has the entire military policy on its website with Frequently Asked Questions and linked me to Human Resources representatives whose support allowed me to plan thoroughly for the change. My Wachovia management team worked with me throughout the process and expedited it when possible. My employer didn't just make policy that benefited reservists; they made it easy to access and receive these benefits.

The company continued to count my years in service while I was gone, and when I returned paid me retroactively for a raise that I would have received in 2004 had I not been activated. My coworkers sent me a copy of a corporate newsletter applauding deployed Wachovia reservists that was published in the fall of 2004. There I learned that I worked for a company that the ESGR had named an "Outstanding Employer," although by that time I already knew that I worked for an outstanding employer.

I also learned that on 13 October 04 Wachovia teamed with the Charlotte Chamber of Commerce and the ESGR to sponsor a salute to the troops in atrium of Wachovia's corporate headquarters. This public demonstration of Wachovia's ongoing support makes me very proud to be a part of this company.

Upon my return to work in March of this year, I submitted a letter to the ESGR detailing the level of support that I had received from Wachovia, and was pleased to see this letter included on Wachovia's Military Support web page that was used as a source of information in consideration for the 2005 Secretary of Defense Freedom Award. Wachovia subsequently was awarded this honor here in Washington last Saturday, on October 15th, 2005.

Upon the announcement of the Freedom Award, the military's highest honor for a civilian employer, Wachovia interviewed several recently redeployed reservists and broadcast our stories of support through company print and visual media.

CEO Ken Thompson stated in a release that "Wachovia is proud to support the men and women who are serving our country and we are honored to receive an award that demonstrates our unwavering commitment to them. Their selfless service exemplifies the values we work hard to live up to every day — integrity, respect, teamwork, service, personal excellence and accountability, and winning."

I would also like to relate the level of support that I received from the employees of Wachovia.

Soon after the deployment my department made me aware that they were starting a fund to donate airline miles so that my family could visit relatives while I was deployed. My

wife and two sons were able to travel to Pennsylvania during the summer thanks to their generosity.

During the deployment I received from current and past co-workers more than 50 large and unbelievably well stocked care packages that I was able to distribute to my battery. The flood of donations became so overwhelming that I started to donate large quantities of items to other units attached to the 1/33rd Field Artillery whose soldiers were not as fortunate to have such a dedicated support channel. The Regular Army soldiers were amazed when I told them I had received all the items from work, and I was proud to tell them about the company and my experience. The care packages included disposable cameras, food items, toiletries, games, books, magazines, signed banners of support, sun block, lip balm, insect repellent, and curiously, a 12.5 pound box of sugar packets (which the coffee drinkers in the platoon took as a Godsend). I also received Wachovia office forms in case I was missing work too much. I can't begin to imagine the effort involved, and I am sincerely grateful.

I received countless letters and emails extending support and prayers, and discovered that my colleagues had told our clients about my experiences. Some of these clients, in turn, also started to send letters, emails, and packages to support me in the field. I returned to an outpouring of support from not only my teammates but also from individuals throughout the corporation, as I learned that my team had been sharing my correspondence from Iraq throughout the company. I had an ever larger group praying for my unit's safe return, and am still struck when someone whom I don't recognize will come up to me and thank me for my service and share with me that they too were praying for our safety.

Upon my return to work in March of this year, my Wachovia teammates helped me raise over \$2,000 for a severely wounded soldier in my platoon. My business unit donated over \$1,000 to a local non-profit, VALOR, which was conducting a fundraiser for my wounded soldier, and through the Wachovia charity matching funds program, We Give, the corporation donated a matching amount.

Again, I take great pride in detailing the encouragement and assistance that I received as I deployed with the 30th Brigade, North Carolina National Guard to Operation Iraqi Freedom. Over the 17 months of the deployment process Wachovia was more than an employer with deployed reservists; Wachovia was a partner to me in the deployment. The company has created a culture of encouragement for its reservists consistent with our core values. The experiences of the soldiers in my unit who did not receive the same level of support made me all the more grateful for my experience. It also made me acutely aware that more can be done to convince the employers of the thousands of reservist still on or entering active duty to fight the war on terror how vital their support is to their citizen soldiers at home and downrange.

Thank you.