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**State of New York**  
Testimony before the  
House Committee on Government Reform  
Role of the National Guard  
April 29, 2004

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee:

Thank you for inviting me to speak on this important subject today. At no time in America's history has the National Guard played so critical a role in both the security of our homeland and in our nation's military objectives overseas. In today's world, the notion of the traditional citizen soldier, training one weekend a month and two weeks a year for a war that might never occur, is a thing of the past. Our troops are actively engaged on the front lines – supporting both our State's efforts to keep New Yorkers safe at home and our nation's efforts to combat terror abroad.

In February, I had the great privilege of joining five other governors from across the nation on an historic bipartisan mission to visit our troops in Iraq. I was inspired by the tremendous spirit, professionalism and resolve of the soldiers I met. They understand the mission before them and why we must seize the opportunity to break the back of terror, so that our children and their children can live in freedom.

The trip also reinforced just how involved and essential the role of our National Guard troops is to our nation's mission. Each day we flew into and out of Iraq from Amman, Jordan, and it was National Guard soldiers who piloted us each way. And everywhere I went, I met with National Guard soldiers from New York and other states.

As I speak, more than 3,700 members of the New York National Guard are currently on active duty supporting state security missions, federal security missions under Operation Noble Eagle, and overseas military operations as part of Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom. Thousands more are engaged in regularly scheduled training and operational requirements around the state, nation and world.

From riflemen to fighter pilots, in the turrets of Humvees and in the huge bellies of C-5 Galaxies, New York National Guard Soldiers and Airmen are providing an historic level of support to the Coalition Forces in Iraq and Afghanistan. From a total force perspective, the Guard has never played a more vital role in major combat operations.

What truly sets the Guard apart, however, is its dual role. Our Guardsmen and women are not just part-time members of our nation's military forces; they are their state's primary emergency response force, providing support to their communities and to civil authorities and first responders throughout their state.

At no time in New York's history was this aspect of the National Guard's role more evident than on September 11, 2001.

Within hours of the attacks on the World Trade Center, 1,500 New York National Guard troops from units within New York City had reported for duty. Another 1,500 from units in Upstate New York were en route. Within 24-hours of the attacks, over 8,000 New York National Guard Soldiers and Airmen and women were on active duty supporting New York State's security needs. These troops provided not just a calming presence on the streets of New York during unsettling times, they provided New York's first responders with critical perimeter security support, refueling for civilian emergency vehicles, emergency lighting, power generation, communications, emergency transportation, engineering assets and other logistical support.

In the days, weeks, and months that followed, our National Guard force would assume missions and responsibilities within New York State that could never have been imagined by previous generations of National Guard soldiers.

Today, hundreds of New York Army National Guard soldiers are serving on State Active Duty as part of Taskforce Empire Shield. These soldiers support security operations at New York's major rail stations and at nuclear power facilities – missions that have been ongoing since September 11, 2001.

During times that warrant an elevation of the threat level, the National Guard's Taskforce Empire Shield is integrated into NYShield, the state's multi-agency joint security taskforce headed by the New York State Office of Public Security.

In addition, our Civil Support Team (CST) for Weapons of Mass Destruction is on call 24-hours a day to respond to incidents known or suspected to involve nuclear, biological or chemical weapons. We continue to deploy our CST to provide proactive precautionary monitoring at major public events and strategic locations throughout the City and State of New York.

Soon our CST will play an instrumental role in the standup of a new type of National Guard capability– a Chemical Biological Radioactive Nuclear and Explosive (CBRNE) enhanced response force. This joint National Guard taskforce will integrate the CST with an enhanced medical company possessing robust decontamination and treatment capabilities, engineer assets specializing in search and rescue and specially trained combat units capable of supporting civilian law enforcement.

Even with all these added responsibilities and missions, the New York National Guard remains our State's primary emergency response force. As New York's Governor, I have called upon New York's Guard more than any other governor in State history. Each time, they have responded heroically and met every mission asked of them, particularly in times of crisis - the attack on the World Trade Center... eight natural disasters... four plane crashes... eleven crippling blizzards... two major wildfires, a statewide blackout... and now of course... the threat of global terror.

National Guard Bureau Chief, Lieutenant General Blum is working in Washington to transform the Guard into a modern, highly relevant and appropriately structured force capable of combating the asymmetrical threat of terror at home and abroad. I salute Gen. Blum's efforts to enhance and modernize the Guard's mission while preserving both its relevancy to the Department of Defense and the capabilities it provides to the governors.

As state commander-in-chief of one of the largest Guard forces in the nation, I am encouraged by Gen. Blum's vision and his appreciation of the Guard's dual role and the necessity for preserving that role. Gen. Blum is committed to enhancing the National Guard's role as an active participant in the nation's military force and he aims to preserve and enhance the National Guard's state role. As we work to transform the United States military and specifically the National Guard, it is critical to ensure that the governors, who are most intimately familiar with and better understand their unique needs, retain the ability and authority to deploy their National Guard troops to best meet those needs.

Gen. Blum's transformation plan would allow for a generous National Guard contribution to federal missions at home and abroad and ensure that at least 50 to 75 percent of a state's National Guard troops remain available for State active duty. His model shows real commitment to the traditional dual role of the National Guard and it is one that I strongly support.

When President Bush gave authorization to deploy troops to airports across the nation following the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks, New York was among the first to respond. Because this mission was in Title 32 status, where troops are paid federally but remain under their state's command and control, rather than in Title 10 status, where they would have served under the active duty Army, we were able to meet this requirement quickly, smoothly, and with the troops best-suited for the tasking.

From an operational standpoint, this approach makes the most sense and is consistent with Gen. Blum's innovative thinking on this matter. We need to ensure that troops activated under Title 32 status remain under the authority and control of the State's governor to ensure maximum flexibility and effective deployment.

Gen. Blum's plan promises to bring predictability and regularity to federal deployment of National Guard units. His Full Spectrum Availability Model would call for one federal Title 10 Army Guard deployment every six years and one Air Guard rotation every 15 months. This would distribute the burden equally among states and units and provide predictability and ample planning time for both unit commanders and individual troops and their families.

Having spoken directly with families of deployed troops across New York and having talked with troops on the ground during my trip to Iraq in February, I can tell you that Gen. Blum's plan is not only welcome, it is urgently necessary.

In today's post September 11<sup>th</sup> climate, we are asking more from our National Guard troops than ever before. In New York, we strongly believe it is incumbent upon our government to do more FOR our troops than ever before.

No state in the nation is doing more than New York to support our troops and their families. Last year, I was proud to sign an historic measure called the "Patriot Plan" into law. The Patriot Plan – without question – provides the most comprehensive package of protections and benefits in the nation to assist New York's military personnel and their families.

This historic package of benefits and protections for deployed New York National Guard and Reserve troops was a recognition that the National Guard, like the rest of the US military, cannot hope to continue its mission without these brave men and women who join its ranks.

The Patriot Plan's 28 points include:

- Providing protections against housing and employment discrimination for National Guard and Reserve members;
- Permitting military personnel to terminate a car lease if he or she is called to active duty;
- Providing scholarships for dependents of troops killed or permanently disabled while on active duty;
- Capping the rates of interest on installment loans at 6 percent while a soldier is on state active duty.
- Making free passes to New York State parks and beaches available for Guard members;
- Designating Family Liaison Officers to assist families of military personnel during periods of deployments ordered by Presidential or Congressional directives;
- Requiring colleges and universities to provide educational military leave of absence for students called to active duty, so that they do not lose any tuition money or earned college credits;
- Establishing a voluntary, state-sponsored program for merchants who agree to provide reduced price discounts for merchandise and services for all military personnel;
- Waiving teaching license fees for licenses that lapse during deployment and extending EMT and First Responder certifications that expire during deployment. Professional licenses and continuing education requirements are also extended during deployment; and
- Permitting children of overseas deployed parents to remain in the same school, without disruption for period of deployment;

These are just some of the measures we have enacted in New York that are squarely aimed at easing the burdens that extended deployments impose on citizen soldiers and their families.

This year, we are building on this historic new law by introducing Patriot Plan II, which will, among other things, raise State Active Duty pay by 25 percent in the face of serious fiscal challenges. If the National Guard is to remain a viable asset to our nation, we must take care of its people.

Whether it is protecting their employment rights, taking care of their families' needs when they are deployed, providing them with the best, most modern equipment available, or guaranteeing them the best possible medical screenings, treatment and monitoring upon returning home, we must do all we can to protect those who protect us.

Over the last five weeks, New York welcomed home four units from a year of combat duty overseas. One of these units, the 105<sup>th</sup> Military Police Company, lost two of its members in separate incidents. Many of these troops were away from home for up to 18 months, including their post-mobilization training.

While it is too early to tell how current events and the challenges facing our troops might affect re-enlistment rates, we should proactively be considering additional steps that can be taken to keep recruitment and retention rates strong.

After my trip to Iraq and meeting our troops firsthand, I can tell you that measures such as New York's Patriot Plan have been well-received and I believe, can help a great deal in maintaining and enhancing strength levels.

As you look to the future of the National Guard in our nation, I urge you do so with an eye toward preserving the traditional dual role that has served this nation so well during some of our toughest times. I urge you to also consider and take every action necessary to protect and enhance the well-being of the men and women and their families who choose to serve their state and nation as members of the National Guard.

Just a few months ago, I saw the dangers our troops are facing in Iraq, and we must ensure that members of the Guard and all of our troops overseas are provided with the latest, most advanced equipment to protect them to the greatest extent possible. I understand the Army is doing everything possible to provide our National Guard soldiers with the best equipment available. Our soldiers serving on the front lines of the War on Terror deserve nothing less than the best.

Before I close, I have an urgent message for every Governor and State Legislature in the nation – follow New York's lead.... pass your own "Patriot Plan" into law. This is the single, most important measure a state can take to support our military personnel and their families.

While our courageous servicemen and women focus on their mission to fight for freedom and fight terror overseas, we must do our part to make sure their families are cared for here at home.

I cannot tell you how impressed I have been with the tremendous strength, resolve and unwavering support the families of deployed soldiers have shown. When you look into their eyes, you see concern for their loved one's safety, but you also see the tremendous pride they feel for the duties and responsibilities their loved one is assuming to protect our freedom and keep us safe from threats of terror.

The sacrifices our military men and women make while serving on active duty should not be compounded by their families having to make additional sacrifices at home. Passing a Patriot Plan – like the one we passed in New York – in every state will help ensure they won't have to.

Mr. Chairman, I thank you for the opportunity to participate in these proceedings and look forward to any questions you may have.

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