

Pennsylvania Guard Conference

Good MorningThank you General Lynch (or whoever) for that nice introduction, and thank you as well for inviting me to your annual conference. It is always a pleasure to be amongst the ranks of the finest National Guard in the country.

I say the finestbecause I have a distinct vantage point, unlike many other individuals in the legislature and various state agencies, . . . to see first hand the unique organizational structure of the PA National Guard. Under Title 32 U.S. Code . . . the National Guard, when activated in times of war or conflict, as we are currently in as a result of the

**deadliest attack ever on America, . . . serves the
President of the United States. In times of peace, . . .
you serve under Governor Schweiker as
commander-in-chief.**

(Pause)

**Understanding this unique balance can be somewhat
of a challenge for many legislators. . . as we legislate
from the capitol in Harrisburg. . . . and in many
cases . . . even a greater challenge for the family
members of an activated guardsmen. As you are
aware, the General Assembly recently passed Act 72
of 2000 which established “pay protection” for
National Guard personnel that are receiving**

unemployment compensation benefits. Act 20 of 2002, . . . which was just signed into law on April 2nd of this year . . . provides a state death benefit to the family of a National Guard member who is killed in the line of duty during activation for a state emergency.

(Pause)

Via the committee process and floor deliberations on important legislation such as this . . . the members of the General Assembly do obtain a heightened understanding of who you are. However. . . I will tell you that there is nothing more impressive than

spending time with you and your brethren soldiers .

..”in your world”.

**I would encourage your unit commanders to
continue to take every opportunity to showcase your
facilities . . .and strive to further develop a strong
working relationship with your State**

**Representatives and Senators. In short . . . not to
pass the buck in any way . . . but the harder you
work at fostering these relationships . . . the easier
my job becomes on the floor of the House.**

**General Lynch and Al Rutherford can attest to the
fact that when we run Title 51 (Military Affairs) bills
. . . we often encounter unnecessary floor**

amendments . . . amendments which are offered by members with good intentions of trying to help Guardsmen as well as veterans. While good intentioned . . . these amendments are often the result of misinformation or lack of understanding on certain issues. I will tell you what I tell the veterans organizations . . . if a legislator wants to help somebody, than he or she must first find out if that person or organization does indeed need that specific “help” . . . or change in the laws. Therefore, it is the role of your statewide organization, as well as your local posts . . .or in your case . . . armories or units . . . to constantly be in communication with

these “helpers” . . . thereby insuring that he or she fully understands the unique organizational structure and needs of your unit . . . and your Guard.

I myself, upon becoming Majority Chairman of your House Committee three and a half years ago, have indeed become enlightened via the observance of various small scale exercises, facility dedications, personal meetings with Generals . . . as well as privates . . . and through interacting with your National Guard officer and enlisted associations, which have been a very effective lobby tool on both the State and Federal level. In fact, I recently

enjoyed accompanying your association members on their annual legislative breakfast in Washington.

As well, it was my distinct pleasure this past summer to observe first hand the fine work that is performed by the men and women of our Pennsylvania National Guard. “Operation Roving Sands” was a perfect opportunity for me, and fellow committee members, to “put a face” on those individuals who are directly affected by our legislative amendments to Title 51 (Military Affairs) and similar statutes of relevance to their mission.

In the past, the legislature enacted Act 14 of 2000, which increased the Pennsylvania National Guard

Tuition Assistance Program from two-thirds college tuition to 100% college tuition. Upon handling House committee and floor deliberations on this legislative matter, it was my belief that this new law would enhance the recruitment and retention of our National Guard personnel. And, as current statistics show, it has indeed done just that. However, my participation in “Operation Roving Sands” further opened my eyes to an even more important factor on why these men and women serve in the National Guard. In short, it is their commendable sense of duty to Commonwealth and Country, brought about by their strong work ethic, . . .that these men and

women are compelled to devote not only multiple weekends, but also two weeks in the summer in places such as Ft. Bliss, Texas.

Another observation that I made was the professional manner in which the 213th Area Support Group worked side-by-side with active duty components of the United States Armed Forces. We often lose sight of the fact that the primary mission of these men and women is to train for combat missions, and to perform to their highest level when federally activated to participate in military missions that are vital to our nation's defense. The critical support mission that these National Guard soldiers

were tasked with in “Operation Roving Sands” further dispels the myth that our Commonwealth’s National Guard is only at the ready when the floodwaters rise or when there is civil unrest in our communities. Our current war on terrorism, and the pivotal role that our National Guard is tasked with...further dispels this myth.

In my capacity as chairman for the Oversight Committee on National Guard Matters, I assure you that I will continue to work diligently with my colleagues on our mission to fully support the endeavors of our National Guard. I pledge to work to ensure that these National Guard personnel are

not in any way penalized for their unselfish participation in the National Guard, and will focus on the important mission of ensuring that our National Guard has the adequate funding and resources to continue forward in a progressive manner.

Your presence here at your annual conference speaks volumes about your commitment to the betterment of “your” Guard...and I am pleased that you invited me here today to be a part of this conference. Take care of one another . . .and come home safe from whatever missions lay before you in these unsettled times. **THANK YOU.**