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National Guard Tuition Assistance

Keeping Our Promise to Missouri's National Guard Members

I am grateful to Jerry Neels of Cape Girardeau for sending me a letter a few months ago regarding his son Bradley, a member of the Missouri Army National Guard.

Bradley began serving in the Missouri Army National Guard upon graduating from high school in May of 2001. Like many men and women, he was attracted to enlist because the state would help pay for his college education in return for his service. Missouri provides Guard members with tuition assistance consisting of \$216 per credit hour, up to \$8,424 per year. It is a great program for those men and

women who otherwise would not be able to afford a higher education, and it also provides the Guard with a valuable recruiting tool to promote and assist our country's all-volunteer military.

One of the rules of the tuition-assistance program requires Guard members who utilize tuition assistance to remain in active-drilling status for three years from the end of the last semester that funding was provided. If a member leaves the Guard before the three years are complete, he or she must repay all money received. The only exception is when a member is discharged for medical reasons. Because of the three-year rule, Guard members plan on using tuition assistance in the early years of their service so they are not forced to extend their commitment to the Guard just to receive funding.

The problem that Jerry Neels brought to my attention is what happens when Guard members are mobilized, such as when they are sent to Iraq, Afghanistan, or even New Orleans. Obviously when this happens, they are unable to enroll in classes. As a result, Guard members often lose out on fully utilizing their window of tuition assistance to which they are entitled.

Bradley Neels made an eight-year commitment to the Guard. Due to the three-year rule, Bradley planned on using his tuition assistance during his first five years. Bradley began working towards his bachelors degree in criminal justice at Southeast Missouri State University in the Fall of 2002. In January of 2003, he was



Sen. Crowell greets National Guard members as they embark on the War on Terror in 2002.

mobilized and sent to Kosovo. He served there for almost a year and a-half as a military police officer, returning home during the spring of 2004. Unfortunately for Bradley, he lost out on using tuition assistance for the year and a half he was gone, as his original five-year window shrunk to three-and-a-half years.

Bradley's story is not unique. Since September 11, 2001, National Guard members across the country have been used at unprecedented levels and for extended durations. While I am not against using the National Guard in Afghanistan, Iraq, Kosovo, or New Orleans, I am against penalizing the brave men and women by preventing them from taking full advantage of their educational assistance benefits. We made a promise to Guard members to help pay for their education in exchange for service, and I'm not going to break that promise based on a technicality.

To ensure that the state keeps its commitment to these young men and women, I am proposing legislation enabling Guard members to subtract the time served in active duty from the three-year rule. This will extend the time a Guard member can receive educational assistance benefits without penalty of repayment. In Bradley Neels' case, he will be able to use the tuition assistance for an additional year and a half, equal to the time he served in Kosovo. The legislation will apply to any Guard member called to active duty on or after September 11, 2001.

I appreciate Jerry Neels bringing this situation to my attention. If there are issues that are important to you, I encourage you to contact me in Jefferson City at (573) 751-2459. You may write to me at Jason Crowell; State Capitol, Room 323; Jefferson City, MO 65101, or email me at: jcrowell@senate.mo.gov or visit me on the web at <http://www.senate.mo.gov/crowell>.

Fourth Important Lesson- The Obstacle In Our Path

This week is the fourth story in the series of five entitled: "Five Important Lessons To Make You Think About the Way You Treat People." Here is the fourth story:

In ancient times, a king had a boulder placed on a roadway. Then he hid himself and watched to see if anyone would remove the huge rock. Some of the king's wealthiest merchants and courtiers came by and simply walked around it. Many loudly blamed the king for not keeping the roads clear, but none did anything about getting the stone out of the way.

Then a peasant came along carrying a load of vegetables. Upon approaching the boulder, the peasant laid down his burden and tried to move the stone to the side of the road. After much pushing and straining, he finally succeeded. After the peasant picked up his load of vegetables, he noticed a purse lying in the road where the boulder had been. The purse contained many gold coins and a note from the King indicating that the gold was for the person who removed the boulder from the roadway. The peasant learned what many of us never understand:

Every obstacle presents an opportunity to improve our condition.

Senator Jason Crowell proudly represents the people of Bollinger, Cape Girardeau, Madison, Mississippi, Perry and Scott counties in the Missouri Senate.