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District 8 – Capitol Building, Room 319 Jefferson City, MO 65101

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Patriot Day: Recognizing the Missouri National Guard

The tragedy of September 11 has been forever etched in our minds, and this past week marked the seventh anniversary of the day that 3,000 people senselessly lost their lives in a cowardly attack on a civilian population center. This day of remembrance, Patriot Day, reminds us of the fateful events that changed the country and how we protect ourselves. In a post 9/11 world where terrorism is a very real and serious threat, the Missouri National Guard plays a critical role in keeping Missouri safe in the event of a terrorist attack. Although state homeland security officials have said that Missouri is safer because of early anti-terrorism efforts, we can never know when a terrorist attack may happen; if it does, the Guard will be called on and ready to serve.

Whether it is assisting with clean-up efforts after a flood or fighting the war on terror, the Missouri National Guard provides critical support to the state and country in times of need. The individuals who choose to serve in the National Guard are dedicated to protecting Missourians and Americans and the sacrifices they and their families make should be recognized and commended.

Although the National Guard as a whole is the oldest component of the U.S. Armed Forces — and one of the nation's most lasting institutions — its contribution to state and national security is often overlooked. However, the Missouri Guard has served in various conflicts, from the War of 1812 to World War I (where Missouri soldiers served under Capt. Harry S. Truman). Since 9/11, almost every unit of the Missouri National Guard has served on active duty, with most deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan. Approximately 11,500 Missourians serve in the Missouri National Guard. Nearly 1,500 have been deployed in the fight against terrorism, with 1,000 serving in Kosovo for a peacekeeping operation that has been in place since June 1999.

Still, National Guard members are not only asked to serve during times of war. Natural disasters such as hurricanes and floods often call the Guard to affected parts of Missouri or even other states. More than 2,000 members assisted in the devastating aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. More recently, the governor mobilized nearly 1,200 citizen-soldiers to Louisiana after Hurricane Gustav wreaked havoc on an already vulnerable New Orleans. In the last week, an aviation maintenance team was sent to Texas to help in Hurricane Ike recovery efforts.

Legislation passed this year continues to help the soldiers who volunteer in the Guard or Reserve, as well as their families. The Heroes at Home program, formerly known as Guard at Home, offers career

assistance, job training and other support for soldiers and their families. Oftentimes when a soldier is deployed, their family's income is reduced. This program is designed to help family members with any job assistance they need to help supplement lost income. Up to a year after discharge from deployment, returning Guard and Reserve members may also access any of these services to help them find employment. It is one small way we can repay those who have given so much and asked for little in return.

If you have any comments or questions about this week's column or any other matter involving state government, please do not hesitate to contact me. You can reach my office by e-mail at matt_bartle@senate.mo.gov or by phone at (888) 711-9278. My web address is <http://www.senate.mo.gov/bartle>.

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