



State of Alabama
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Alabama Strengthens Military Assets

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In Alabama, honor and reverence for the military is not confined to a few days in a year designated for that purpose. Patriotism is not prompted or acted on out of obligation. For most Alabamians, it is knit into the fiber of their being. Hearts swell with pride and gratitude at the sight of the American flag being carried onto the field before kickoff, after watching a news story about soldiers coming home to their families, or by reading the obituary of a war hero. My father was among the Greatest Generation and proudly served in World War II. I am grateful to live in a state where service to our country is highly regarded. Though patriotism alone does not determine the sustainability of Alabama's military assets, it does aid in promoting a positive environment where collaborations and initiatives which support and strengthen the military in our state are welcomed and can thrive.

Military Stability Commission Created

Building on the strong foundation of high esteem for military, the Alabama Legislature passed [Senate Joint Resolution 69](#) (SJR 69) in 2011 establishing the Alabama Job Creation and Military Stability Commission (MSC). SJR 69 clearly lays out the Commission's mission (Section f): "The commission shall attempt to proactively insure the stability of Alabama assigned Department of Defense (DoD) resources by study and evaluation of all currently assigned military forces or civilian contractors, or both, and the move of these resources within, to, or from the State of Alabama." The SJR also designates the Lieutenant Governor serve as Chair of the Commission, which I can say is the most personally rewarding task of my time in office.

Military's Impact in Alabama

Alabama is home to more than 11,900 active duty members, more than 22,000 reserve and National Guard personnel, and 420,000 veterans. Many National Guard units and four major military installations are located in Alabama including the Anniston Army Depot, Redstone Arsenal, Maxwell Gunter Air Force Base, and Fort Rucker Army Post. Some of the most vital missions to the DoD's overall strategy are completed by Alabama-based military units, like the 2,033 sorties the 187th Fighter Wing based out of Montgomery flew during Spring-Fall 2014 in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. It was a deployment that the 187th was hand-selected to complete and marked the first time a fighter wing, Guard or active, was deployed for six months without changing crew out. Or at Army Materiel Command where every resource a soldier could shoot, drive, fly, wear, eat, or communicate with is provided. Headquartered at Redstone Arsenal, AMC impacts or has a presence in all 50 states and 144 countries. And at Fort Rucker where nearly every Army helicopter operator must pass through rigorous training that is often the difference in a matter of life or death on the battlefield.

In addition to the extensive defense value of Alabama's military, it is a major economic engine in the State. The military in Alabama provides 177,000 direct and indirect jobs and an economic impact totaling \$17 billion – 12% of the State's GDP. Every county and community in the State is impacted by the military's presence. Changes to the force or structure of military in Alabama are felt across the State, and particularly in areas where installations are located.

Assessing the Needs

The establishment of MSC and the Military Stability Foundation (MSF), which acts as the operational arm of the Commission, provides a statewide comprehensive and coordinated effort to protect and expand Alabama's military assets. MSC and MSF are composed of top-notch retired military officers, local officials, business leaders, and state leaders who are communicating in an intentional and

strategic way. As a result, Alabama is strengthened against any potential cuts or changes due to the Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) process, sequestration, or other realignments.

One of the first significant actions was to retain Anthony Principi, Secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs during the George W. Bush administration and Chair of the 2005 BRAC. His insight and expertise proved invaluable as his company, Principi Group, conducted an in-depth study of Alabama's military bases to identify their critical needs. The DoD examines a number of factors when evaluating the value and viability of a base during the BRAC process, including, but not limited to, the condition and capabilities of the facilities, the availability and condition of land near military bases, and the overall military-friendliness of the State and the region where an installation is located. The Principi study provided MSC and MSF with a roadmap – a tool we have utilized and referenced to prioritize Alabama's most pressing needs in preparation for the next round of BRAC.

Supplementing the study, there is no replacement for first-hand experience and face-to-face communication. With the priority list in hand in the Summer and Fall of 2014, I traveled to each of the four major military installations and several National Guard units across the State to meet with military leadership and put eyes on the situation. It is one thing to read about an aging air traffic control tower at Maxwell Air Force Base where the 908th Airlift Wing is stationed, and another to see it in person. Through these visits, I had the opportunity to meet with military leadership, review the findings of the Principi study, and discuss what assistance may be provided to better support their mission. Building strong relationships with military leaders has been a critical component of MSC and MSF's strategic plan.

Statewide Legislation

Since the creation of the MSC and MSF, the Legislature has been committed to protecting Alabama's military assets, improving the military value of those assets, and making the state a welcoming place

for those who serve. To that end, the Legislature has passed significant legislation for military bases and communities and for military families. Below is a list of legislation enacted relating to military issues:

Relating to Military Bases and Communities

- The Military Land Use Planning Act, Act 2014-13, to require communities near military installations to notify and seek comment from base commanders when making zoning changes that could affect the military value of an installation.
- Act 2013-78, to allow local communities' federal building authorities to spend money directly on military installation upgrades.
- Act 2012-562, to extend the bonding authority of the Alabama Public School and College Authority by \$175 million in order to help schools affected by the 2005 BRAC.
- Act 2013-266, a constitutional amendment to extend the state's bond authority by \$50 million in order to maintain and upgrade the state's National Guard facilities. The amendment was passed by referendum on the 2014 general election ballot.

Relating to Military Service Members & Families

- Act 2013-350 to require colleges and boards of licensure to adopt policies that take into account experience that military service members have gained while in the service.
- Act 2012-533 to expedite the processing of professional licenses for military spouses.
- Act 2012-505 to classify National Guard as residents for purposes of in-state tuition.
- Act 2013-423 to classify dependents of active duty military service members stationed in Alabama as residents for purposes of in-state tuition.
- Act 2014-179 to revise the definition of "tuition" under the National Guard Educational Assistance Act to remove low caps on the amounts that ACHE may grant to guardsmen for their higher education tuition benefit.

- Act 2014-177 to repeal the requirement that a veteran have served “in wartime” to receive education benefits for his/her dependents.
- Act 2014-295 to provide military personnel deployed overseas with an additional 30 days from the date their deployment ends to renew their car tag without incurring late fees.
- Act 2014-6 to bring Alabama in line with federal election laws and insure that military service members can exercise their right to vote when they are deployed overseas.
- Act 2012-333 to allow National Guard who suffer personal injury as a direct result of active military service for the state to be included in the State Employees Injury Compensation Program, and to authorize the Military Department to pay medical expenses for service members who become ill or suffer minor injuries during state-related duties.
- Act 2012-408 to allow persons outside the state on military duty, mission assignment, etc., to file with a probate judge to declare their place of residency in Alabama for all purposes other than in-state tuition, qualification for election, or voting.
- Act 2012-486, the Jason Barfield Act, to provide an income tax exemption for military service members killed in action and their spouse.
- Act 2012-507 to allow spouses of active duty members of the military who receive change of station orders, activation orders, or unit deployment orders to receive unemployment benefits if they voluntarily quit working in order to relocate.
- Act 2012-516 to create a special veteran’s driver's license for veterans who have been honorably discharged.

A number of bills have also created leisure benefits for veterans, such as Act 2012-508 which allows free admission to state parks on state or federal holidays; and Act 2013-248 which creates a special military appreciation hunting license.

Closing Observations

While it is unknown exactly when BRAC may occur, Alabama is at the ready. In fact, we are better poised now than ever before. The State is united in efforts to support and strengthen our military and cultivate a military-friendly environment. And on the Federal level, Alabama is fortunate to have one of the strongest Congressional delegations in the Nation when it comes to advocating for military issues.

As Lieutenant Governor and Chair of MSC, I am committed to supporting those who make daily sacrifices to serve our Nation and I am working to protect Alabama's military assets which benefit our citizens and communities and contribute to our economy so significantly.