

Department of Military Affairs – Montana
Office of the Adjutant General
Colonel Joel Cusker

HB 761

Life Insurance Premium Reimbursement of National Guard and Reserves

Mr. Chairman, honorable members of this Committee, Good-~~morning~~^{Afternoon} ... on behalf of Major General Randy Mosley, whose duties today have called him away from our State Capitol Building, I rise as a proponent of House Bill 761. I am Colonel Joel Cusker, a Montana Army National Guardsman.

On behalf of approximately 3,500 Soldiers and Airmen, who are today serving in the Montana National Guard in support of our communities, our State and our Nation, I would like to first thank this legislature for your progressive action in taking care of the men and women, as well as the employers and the families, of those who serve in our armed forces. I would also like to thank Representative Noonan for his many years of service to the community of Butte, the State of Montana and for his sponsorship of House Bill 761.

Today the Montana National Guard has approximately 1,300 soldiers and airmen deployed in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom, Operation Enduring Freedom, and Operation Noble Eagle ... of the 3,500 Montana Guardsmen assigned, it is anticipated that as high as 80% of the force will be deployed in support of the Global War on Terrorism.

Yesterday I was honored to be at a Memorial Service in Lewistown; Major General Randy Mosley presented the Flag of the United States of America, as a symbol, on behalf of a grateful Nation, to Annette McNary ... the wife of Master Sergeant Robbie McNary. Sergeant McNary, a Platoon Sergeant in Company C, 1st Battalion, 163rd Infantry, Montana Army National Guard was killed in combat action in Iraq; he was the first Montana Guardsman to pay the ultimate sacrifice in the cause of freedom in this Global War on Terrorism. As soldiers we will hold Mrs. Robbie McNary, and her young family, in our thoughts and prayers, we will be with her in this horrendous moment of grief, we will continue to do our duty in honor of her husband and the Vision of America he felt was worth his own life. This is the extent of what we can do, and what we will do as fellow soldiers, as his comrades in arms. Yet this body of ~~representatives~~^{Soldiers}, as the voice and the conscience of every Montanan can do more ... your support of House Bill 761 is a clear and resounding symbol that every citizen-soldier, serving in harms way, at enormous risk, is of value to what we hold dear to us in the Big Sky Country – Freedom.

Thank you for your support of House Bill 761 and for your professional service to the men and women of the Montana National Guard.