

HB 247 TESTIMONY

**To: Alaska House Military and Veterans Affairs Special
Committee**

January 24, 2012

Comments by: Lt Gen (AKNG retired) Craig E. Campbell

I would like to start by thanking Representatives Lynn, Thompson, Saddler, Fairclough, and Costello for co-sponsoring this legislation.

The National Guard is the oldest component of the Armed Forces of the United States and one of the nation's longest-enduring institutions. Recognition of the National Guard by the Alaska Legislature, with a specific date to honor the Alaska National Guard, acknowledges the unique characteristic of the National Guard as being both a federal and state organization, primarily established to be under the control of a State's Governor. Please let me explain.

The National Guard traces its history back to the earliest English colonies in North America. First organized by decree of the Massachusetts Bay Colony General Court on Dec 13, 1636, the militias were responsible for their own defense. The militia, now National Guard, has been in continuous operation since that date, celebrating our 375th anniversary last year.

The National Guard is the only military service in the United States with both a federal and state dual role. Following independence, the authors of the Constitution empowered Congress to "provide for organizing, arming, and disciplining the militia." However, recognizing the militia's state role, the Founding Fathers reserved the appointment of officers and training of the militia to the states, with the Governor being the civilian leader of the militia, except when mobilized by the President for federal service. Today's National Guard remains that dual State-Federal force.

In 1947, Congress formally established the National Guard Bureau and the “National Guard” was recognized in lieu of state militia’s formally in 1948.

Today all 54 states, territories, and the District of Columbia have National Guard organizations, divided into both Army and Air National Guard units. The total number of personnel serving in the National Guard of the United States currently exceeds 500,000.

In Alaska, Governor Gruening initiated the formal actions to establish a National Guard for the Territory of Alaska in 1939. By September 1941, with the advent of World War II and the invasion of United States territory in Hawaii and Alaska, the federal government established the 297th Infantry Battalion, Alaska National Guard. Governor Gruening had achieved his goal.

However, in response to the threat of invasion during World War II, Governor Gruening further authorized the establishment of the Alaska Territorial Guard (ATG). Nearly 6,600 individuals, mostly men and mostly Alaska natives, volunteered for the ATG. It is noteworthy to mention that the ATG served without pay or benefits, and in 1947, when the ATG was disbanded, the members were discharged without formal military recognition. In 2000, Senator Ted Stevens introduced a bill recognizing the service of the ATG to the United States and directing federal “Honorable Discharge Certificates” be issued to all who honorably served. In October 2004, the first Honorable Discharge Certificate was issued to former ATG member Sam Herman.

Following World War II, and the establishment of the United States Air Force as a separate branch of the service, replacing the Army Air Corps, the Air National Guard was formed. In 1952, the first Air National Guard unit was formed in Alaska, marking this year as the 60th anniversary for the Alaska Air National Guard.

Today, there are over 4,000 proud men and women serving in the Alaska Army and Air National Guard. These citizen-warriors are predominantly part-time warriors, who also are civilian members of

our communities. They are all volunteers. Since 2003, members of the Alaska National Guard have deployed numerous times in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom to Iraq, Afghanistan, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain and many other countries in the Middle East. Additionally, the Alaska National Guard has deployed to Kosovo, the Horn of Africa, Pakistan, Kyrgyzstan, as well as conducting humanitarian missions to Haiti, Indonesia, Vietnam, Japan, and other countries throughout the world. Most notably, was the 2005 response of the Alaska National Guard to the southeast states in response to Hurricane Katrina, where Alaska Guardsmen and women were on the ground within hours after the storm's destruction. They saved lives and provided essential services to a devastated people.

And here in Alaska, your Alaska National Guard has routinely responded to floods, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, forest fires, and village freeze-ups, saving lives and preserving property. They conduct Operations Santa Claus, bringing holiday cheer to the children of rural villages, and they conduct Arctic Care missions to villages, offering essential dental care and treatment to Alaskans in need. Serving our state and serving our nation, the core value of the Alaska National Guard.

I will conclude by again thanking members who have co-sponsored this legislation to recognize our valiant heroes serving, both present and past, in the Alaska National Guard. Our state and our nation could not do the wonderful things we do to protect and preserve our states and nation without the unselfish service of our National Guard. Thank you for taking the time to recognize their service by establishing July 30 of each year as "Alaska National Guard Day." Please pass this bill, HB 247.

Thank you