

NCFA Testimony:
**California Perspective on Employer Fatigue with Army National
Guard & Reserve Mobilization Policies**
Testimony 25 August 2015 by Andrew C. Wiktorowicz P.E.

Good morning Ladies and Gentlemen, I am Andrew Wiktorowicz Chairman California ESGR.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today... my comments are extracted from the white paper I submitted last week.

As California Chairman of Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve (ESGR). I would like to address the employer fatigue issue from the California perspective. California ESGR supports more than 58,000 NG&R personnel, 1,700 units, working with in excess of 15,000 employers with 178 ESGR volunteers. California is the largest state committee in ESGR.

1. ESGR Role with Employers:

ESGR is a Department of Defense office founded in 1972 to foster a culture of cooperation between employers and the uniformed services.

Ombudsman Services:

California has 33 certified ombudsmen; volunteer men and women specially trained to act as mediators (not advocates) for issues of conflict between employers and NG&R employees. The objective is to amicably settle issues before they are sent to the Department of Labor then, ultimately, to the Department of Justice.

The first place we would expect to see employer fatigue indications would be an increase of complaints to our ombudsmen.

In fact, California USERRA complaints have gone down over the last six years from **351** in Fiscal Year (FY) 2009 to **132** in FY 2015. Case settlement is at more than 80% at the local level. This is extraordinary given the significant number of personnel returning from deployments back to the workplace.

Based on USERRA Caseload, we see no substantial evidence in California to support the fatigue argument.

Employer Statements of Support:

ESGR volunteers are charged with contacting employers regularly to have them sign and display the Statement of Support for their NG&R employees.

Another telling area of employer fatigue would be a possible reduction in the California ESGR committee's ability to garner these Statements of Support. California ESGR had **3,255** statements signed for FY 2014 versus **3,042** in FY 2010. Based on Statements of Support, we see no significant evidence in California to support the fatigue argument.

Employer Awards:

Employers receive ESGR awards based on nominations from their NG&R employees. The awards are presented by local ESGR volunteers and the nominator; this is usually performed in ceremonies at the employers' facilities with the nominator and other military personnel in uniform. The "My Boss is a Patriot" Award is specifically for supervisors of our NG&R service members.

The third possible indication of employer fatigue would be a decline in nominations for employer awards by their employees in the last few years. The individual employee would be less likely to nominate their employer for an award if there were underlying resentments.

California ESGR had **644** "My Boss is a Patriot" awards presented for FY 2014 versus **582** in FY 2013. Based on employer awards, we see no compelling evidence in California to support the fatigue argument at the supervisor level.

Secretary of Defense Employer Support Freedom Award:

Annually, ESGR awards the Secretary of Defense Freedom Award, the highest recognition by the Department of Defense presented to employers.

California employers have received 20 Freedom Awards out of 205 presented nationally. Eleven Freedom Awards have been won by California employers in the last seven years.

During the nomination process, California receives more than 200 nominations annually. The national total is over 2,700 nominations annually.

Clearly, based on Freedom Award nominations, we see no significant evidence to support the fatigue argument.

At last week's Freedom Award ceremony at the Pentagon I spoke with several employers about the fatigue issue and they had no such experience in their own corporations.

Also Admiral Braun, Chief of [Navy Reserve](#) and Commander, Navy Reserve Force was emphatic that the Navy Reserve wasn't experiencing employer fatigue.

Employment Coordinators:

Finally, California Employment Coordinators have developed close relationships with their employer counterparts and truly sense the pulse of employers. They assist in providing qualified personnel to the employer to fulfil their hiring requirements.

Employers have found that military-trained employees bring highly desirable value systems (on time, drug free, team attitude, mission orientation, strong leadership skills, etc.) to the workplace. This attitude can affect their **entire** workforce in a positive manner, raising the overall organizational competence and efficiency.

If employers were indeed fatigued, they would not be hiring additional NG&R personnel for open positions. We have not experienced any pushback in this area.

2. Personal Observations (time permitting):

I would like to share some personal observations:

During my 6-year tenure as California State Chair, I have been fortunate to meet with numerous CEOs of large and small businesses, police and fire chiefs, sheriffs, and other employers' senior management.

I too, was concerned that after 13 years of war there would be less support for our vital NG&R Service members. So, of course, when face-to-face with these leaders, I asked the question:

"Are you still willing and able to continue supporting our National Guard and Reserve forces?" All responses I received were an unqualified, "Yes." There was a sense of pride in those responses. Pride in contributing to our national defense. Thus the follow-up question: "How can we help lighten this burden on your organization?" The messages I received were various forms of: "We could use a lot more **notice** on deployments." In my view, here is where we need to focus.

Some thoughts on Regular Extended Deployments:

Employers would be willing to agree to extended regular deployments once every 5 years provided they had longer advance notice 6 mo. to 1 year.

If this became policy perhaps inducements for employers' support could be included such as tax incentives.

In thinking about this now, in the context of force reduction, I would like to provide food for thought: Given the educational efforts today, where can our young people develop their value systems better than training with the National Guard or Reserves?

The young men and women I met were full of purpose, energy, vitality, and a can-do attitude. As a bonus, we have a proven, trained, and ready military force to support us during national disasters and augment our military forces when called upon.

Based on my experiences, and those of our California State Committee, our employers, with very few exceptions, are quite willing to invest in the young Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Marines, and Coast Guardsmen of tomorrow.

Thank You,

Andrew C. Wiktorowicz P.E.

California Chairman ESGR

Vice Chair ESGR Executive Advisory Committee

Executive Director Western Council of Construction Consumers

Questions...**Additional Historical Perspective for the record:**

As the Iraq war wound down, our NG&R veterans were faced with a very large unemployment problem. This was manifested most by young men and women who joined the military right after Sept. 11, 2001, and right out of high school. These former Service members never worked for an employer to acquire those marketable skills they needed.

ESGR marshalled the forces necessary to create the Hero to Hired (H2H) program and its supporting Employment Coordinators (ECs) to assist in translating military

skills (MOS) to employer needs. ECs assisted by developing employer contacts and working with individual NG&R members through a comprehensive case management system. This is a successful program met with enthusiastic support from employers with 1.7 million jobs listed on the website as of April 20, 2015. ECs' case management actions have produced 21,480 direct hires and recorded 276,602 indirect hires as provided by state and local partners.

When we asked the employers to help, they enthusiastically posted to the website and hired from it.

During this time we encouraged employers to focus on the positive aspects of the NG&R employees. Our mantra: "Hire for Values... Train for Skills..." struck a chord.

Here again employers, have continued to do their part to help our NG&R service men and women.