

**Testimony of**  
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**Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation**  
**United States Senate**

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Chairman Stevens, members of the committee, thank you for this opportunity to testify before you today on issues related to S. 2686, the Communications, Consumers' Choice, and Broadband Deployment Act of 2006, to reduce telephone rates for Armed Forces personnel deployed abroad, cited in Title I – War on Terrorism, Subtitle A Sec. 101-102 as “Call Home.”

Since 1878, when a group of volunteer officers, veterans of the Civil War from both the North and South, gathered in Richmond, Virginia to discuss “matters of practical reform which would make the Militia a more effective instrumentality in our system of National Defense”, the National Guard Association of the United States has served as the voice on Capitol Hill to represent the interests of our Citizen Soldiers and Airmen.

The main thrust of our early founders was to ensure the Guard had the equipment and training necessary to attain desired readiness levels, and those efforts continue. However, since recruiting and retention is so important, a considerable amount of our efforts are now aimed at providing a wide variety of support to our military families.

During the Cold War years, the Guard was considered a “Strategic Reserve.” Today, the National Guard represents 28% of the Total Army and Air Force and is considered an “Operational Force.”

With “boots on the ground” of a year or more at a time, members of the Guard are up to the challenge. But, it doesn't come without significant strain on families that may not be used to having their loved one's deployed for extended periods of time to dangerous locations.

It is often said that we “recruit the member and retain the family.” However, when members of the military are deployed abroad, the ability to communicate over the phone with loved ones back home can be confusing and is almost always expensive.

Additionally, the inability to communicate with a spouse on as regular basis can result in family issues that, if allowed to fester, could ultimately affect the family's perception of life in the military and negatively impact retention.

The ability to use email has helped. But, nothing compares to the "voice" of the one you love, and having the ability to exchange thoughts and feelings, or to discuss an important issue person to person over the phone.

It has been a custom of the military to establish "welfare and morale" phone lines that are free of charge at some overseas locations. But, many times these services are extremely limited or inconvenient, resulting in some deployed members running up expensive phone bills.

This is not a Guard specific issue. It applies to all members of our Armed Forces. However, on behalf of the brave men and women of the National Guard who are serving our country, we both applaud and enthusiastically support your efforts to find creative ways to reduce the cost of calling home for Armed Forces personnel stationed outside the United States.

Doing whatever we can to support those who risk their lives to defend freedom is always the right thing to do. And, the National Guard Association stands firmly behind your Committee's efforts to help provide more cost effective means for our members to stay in touch with those back home.

Mr. Chairman, members of the Committee, I sincerely thank you for your time and look forward to your questions.