

## **Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve (ESGR)**

### **What is it?**

ESGR is a Department of Defense agency that seeks to promote a culture in which all U.S. employer's support and value the military service of their employees, with ESGR as the principal advocate within DoD. ESGR develops and promotes employer support for Guard and Reserve service by advocating relevant initiatives, recognizing outstanding support, increasing awareness of applicable laws and resolving conflicts between employers and service members.

More than 30 percent of Reserve Component (RC), Soldiers has been mobilized in support of Operation Enduring Freedom, Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation New Dawn. Soldiers are being mobilized more frequently than in previous decades, making it necessary to educate Army National Guard and Army Reserve Soldiers on the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act (USERRA), especially during pre-mobilization and demobilization periods.

The current National Defense Strategy indicates that Soldiers will continue to be full partners in the operational force. Our Soldiers will spend more time away from the workplace defending the nation, supporting a demanding operations tempo and training to maintain their mission-readiness. In this environment, civilian employers play a critical role in the defense of the nation by complying with existing employment laws protecting the rights of workers who serve in the RC.

USERRA was established in 1994, and outlines rights and responsibilities for Soldier employees and their employers. USERRA covers employment, reemployment and retention, when employees serve or have served in the uniformed services.

The DoD and ESGR are keenly aware of the importance of supportive employers and seek to recognize those employers that provide support to Soldiers. When a conflict arises between a Soldier and employer, ESGR provides free and neutral mediation to resolve any issues pertaining to the USERRA law.

Across the nation, more than 4,700 volunteers in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Guam, Puerto Rico, and the US Virgin Islands work with employers to help foster employer support. ESGR volunteers also reach out to RC Soldiers to ensure they understand their rights and responsibilities under the law.

For Soldiers who experience difficulty with their employers, ESGR ombudsmen are available to provide information, counseling and mediation support for issues related to USERRA. ESGR ombudsmen can be reached at 1-800-336-4590 or by e-mail at [USERRA@osd.mil](mailto:USERRA@osd.mil). In addition, the ESGR website provides detailed information about USERRA and helpful tools for military members. More information about ESGR can be found at [www.esgr.mil](http://www.esgr.mil).

## **What has the Army Done?**

ESGR continues an outreach campaign entitled, “We All Serve.” Advertisements and articles in the *GX* and *Foundations* magazines, as well as numerous other military and civilian publications to increase awareness of ESGR and the services provided to Soldiers. ESGR mailed brochures with a USERRA quick reference wallet card to newly accessed Soldiers and senior RC leaders in December 2010. The brochure also contained a “Call to Action” for ARNG Soldiers to thank supervisors and employers by submitting them for a Patriot Award at [www.esgr.mil](http://www.esgr.mil).

Recognizing supportive employers and maintaining open communication are key tools in promoting a good relationship with civilian employers.

By acknowledging employer support of Guard and Reserve service members, the Department of Defense takes a proactive stance in promoting support of the Armed Forces. This public acknowledgement strengthens community relationships and national security.

ESGR’s recognition program consists of a series of awards honoring employers for varying levels of support. The first-tier award, the Patriot Award, is bestowed upon employers directly by the service members and/or their spouses. A service member or their spouse may nominate a supportive supervisor or employer for this award online at [www.esgr.mil](http://www.esgr.mil). This award is significant to many employers because it comes directly from their own employee(s).

The Above and Beyond Award and the Pro Patria Award are the next two awards employers may receive from ESGR for exceptional service above and beyond USERRA requirements for their service member employees. These awards are presented at the ESGR state committee-level.

Employers may also receive the Seven Seals Award, representing all seven Reserve Components for recognition of significant individual or organizational achievement, initiative, or support that promotes and enhances the ESGR mission.

ESGR’s awards program culminates with the national recognition of 15 employers at the annual Secretary of Defense Employer Support Freedom Award ceremony. This award is the highest DoD award given to civilian employers. Each award helps foster supportive relationships and provides positive examples to all employers of the many ways to demonstrate support of the nation’s Guard and Reserve service members. Past Freedom Award winners have met with the President and Secretary of Defense for a personal “Thanks and Congratulations.”

Collectively, these outreach efforts help ESGR assist employers in signing Statements of Support (SoS). The SoS program provides a formal means for employers to publicly proclaim their support for employee participation in the National Guard and Reserve.

**What continued efforts does the ESGR have planned?**

ESGR continually seeks opportunities to support the Soldier. This is evident from the newly launched, Employment Initiative Program (EIP). This initiative facilitates employment opportunities by assisting service members with being competitive in the job market. It integrates the Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program, Employer Partnership of the Armed Forces, and the Family Readiness Program to form a coordinated and synchronized main effort to collaborate with emerging federal, state, and local programs and initiatives. This program connects the unemployed and the underemployed Guard and Reserve service members and family members, with vocational assistance and employment opportunities. For more information, visit, [www.employerpartnership.org](http://www.employerpartnership.org).

ESGR established a presence in the social media world on Twitter ([www.twitter.com/ESGR](http://www.twitter.com/ESGR)) and Facebook (become a fan of “Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve at [www.facebook.com/GOESGR](http://www.facebook.com/GOESGR)). In addition to following ESGR on Twitter and Facebook, “fans” can view videos of ESGR events and awards presentations at [www.trooptube.net](http://www.trooptube.net) (search for ESGR).

**Why is this important to the Army?**

ESGR encourages RC Soldiers to develop positive relationships with their employers and assists Soldiers in resolving disputes with employers, which creates a positive work environment. ESGR also links you up with the proper resources and tools to assist you in finding employment. ESGR is available to assist and support Soldiers at any time. You are valued for your service to our nation.