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Chief of the National Guard Bureau**

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Moderator: Good morning everyone. Welcome to this Defense Writers Group session. I'm incredibly honored that we're having as our guest speaker General Hokanson, the Chief of the National Guard. The General and I were speaking downstairs, it's been five years since a National Guard Chief has met with the Defense Writers group and I can't imagine a more timely or valuable speaker for us to have today.

I thank all of you for joining us today. There's been some questions, we will have some events on Zoom, but we're going to try to be back in person as much as possible because the poll that Chloe and I conducted in June when I took over as Director, people wanted the camaraderie and the in-person, so it's great that you're here. But if you have colleagues who are still uncomfortable traveling, tell them we will be doing more Zoom events as well.

General, it's truly an honor to have you here today. Thank you so much.

General Hokanson: Thank you, Thom.

DWG: For the first question, sir, when I reflect upon your mission, it truly is biblical. Fire, famine, pestilence, and I guess we can even add urban unrest which is biblical because of the Battle of Jericho maybe? I'm not really sure.

But as you end your first year, on a serious note, sir, is there anything that has surprised you or was unexpected? And as you look to the next three no doubt dramatic years of your term in office have you learned things that will make you refocus if not reset what the Guard is doing?

General Hokanson: Thank you, Thom. As you mentioned, it's been five years. I'm really fortunate to have this opportunity with all of you today.

I thought there were surprises, but I think we've eliminated all of them over the last 18 months. Sometimes when events come up

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we kind of just look at each other and smile and go oh my gosh, we didn't see that one coming. But the great thing when I look back at the National Guard, and many folks may not have seen this, but after 9/11 the National Guard really transformed, and what we're able to do today is because of the investment the nation made in the National Guard over the past 20 years.

And when you look at the leaders we have at every level, most of them have years and years of experience. I was previously the Adjutant General for Oregon. I was the Vice Chief, the Director of the Army Guard. I was also the Deputy Commander at Northern Command. So many of the surprises that we have seen over the past two years really defaults to having the right people at the right place. And when you look at what we've been able to do, we've had the resources, really the man, training and equipping that we do to fight our nation's wars allows us to do just about anything in the homeland because we've got leaders at every level.

That's one thing that we also saw not only as we transformed over the last 20 years, but most folks don't realize the size of the National Guard. We have 445,000 in all 50 states, three territories and DC, and we're involved in many operations overseas and here at home.

Like today, for example, we have 53,000 on duty. 28,000 are forward deployed, we've got 12,000 doing COVID response across the United States, and then others are doing various missions within their states and around the country.

So when I look at the surprises, Thom, the great thing is, just the investment made in our people over the last 20 years has really put them in a position that no matter what they get asked to do, they can really leverage not only what they've learned in the military but also their civilian skills to meet anything.

DWG: Can you talk just a little bit, on the way up we talked about your recent visit to Croatia. The Guard does a lot of national security/foreign policy liaison. Can you talk a little bit about that, sir?

General Hokanson: If you're not familiar, and thanks for that question, Thom. This is one of the really great programs that we try and make folks aware of whenever we get a chance. So in 1993 we started what we call State Partnership Programs. It started

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with 13 countries. And what we did is we assigned, a National Guard State actually teamed up with a country and for instance I was in Bulgaria and Croatia over this past week and Bulgaria is one of the original 13. So they paired up with the State of Tennessee. In the course of their 28-year relationship Bulgaria has gone on to become a NATO ally, now a member of the European Union, and they also, the Bulgarian military deployed with the Tennessee National Guard into Afghanistan multiple times.

So what we try and do is we share a lot of things that we learn in the National Guard: how to respond to our communities and how we develop our military, medical, anything that that nation needs to develop we work with them very closely.

And the great thing is because most of our National Guardsmen stay in their units for 10, 20, sometimes 30 years, all the senior leaders in the Tennessee National Guard have known now the senior leaders in Bulgaria and Croatia since many of them were captains or majors. So they build these enduring relationships that really help both of our countries.

DWG: That's true of reporters as well. Some of the Special Forces I met in Afghanistan in 2001 kept sending emails while they roasted general officers, so they can't get away from you.

The first question is from Meghann Myers of Military Times.

DWG: I wanted to ask about the Army Guard faction [inaudible]. Were you involved in the decision? Did they consult you? And [inaudible] from June 30th. Do you have any concerns about that long lead time? Because Guard units, particularly the Army Guard units [inaudible] the military.

Also, why do you need that extra time? Is it more about getting information in computers? And [inaudible]? How was that decision made and how is it going to play out?

General Hokanson: They did ask us what our thoughts were. Ultimately the Service Secretary, Secretary Kendall and Secretary Wormuth made the decision.

It's a little bit different between the Air Guard and the Army Guard.

For the Air National Guard, their deadline is in December and for

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the Army Guard it's in June of next year. When we look at the unique differences, that was part of the conversation.

So the Air Guard is primarily base centric. So all the units come into their air base and the drill on a weekend. So they decided based on the number of times that they would get together as an organization that they could do it by December.

On the Army Guard, it's a little bit different because we're in really 2800 communities across the United States. So instead of everybody coming to a base, it's a little bit different.

When I was a brigade commander in Oregon, some of my units were seven hours away and they were disbursed in units as small as 30 all the way up to 600.

So the reason we had asked for additional time for the Army Guard is to get out to all of those units. When you look at the time that the decision was made, Pfizer was the only one they could mandate, and when you look at the requirements for freezing and for administration within a certain time period, we wanted to provide the greatest flexibility to reach every single soldier. Our numbers continue to go up a couple of percentage points every week, but we do only see them one weekend a month. So when you look at now to June, we'll probably only see them for 14 days in that timeframe and we have 336,000.

So we're tracking it really daily now. We're making progress along the way, but it is a pretty big task to get it all out there.

DWG: Do you have any concerns about any more deaths or the number of cases with regard to the Army Guard [inaudible] that time?

General Hokanson: I'm always concerned about that. The loss of any soldier is just devastating to our organization and the people and the families involved. So we're doing everything we can to get them out there, and many of those have the option to go within their civilian community to get it as well, and we're trying to make sure that we track that as well so that they bring in their vaccination card so it's recorded and accounted for as well.

Moderator: Next is Steve of Military.Com.

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DWG: The border mission has generally been kind of an information black hole. There's been virtually no press conferences on it. I talk to E-4s, E-5s, E-6s every single day that are on it, but I can't secure one interview with a senior leader that's been involved in that mission.

The state won't even give me the number of troops on the mission, based on OpSec concerns which I find hard to believe because NORTHCOM will give me numbers to Title 10 orders.

Do you want to be more transparent about this mission? How can you do that? And is Texas basically just doing its own thing with the Guard there? They don't seem to be held accountable to NGB, because they can't give me numbers either, and they're not being held accountable in the press.

General Hokanson: Related to that, when they come on Title 10 orders, obviously we're very transparent. That's where I come into play. We work very closely with NORTHCOM. We track the numbers of all of our personnel there.

Now when it comes to the individual states when you look at the border states, the folks that they send there are under state active duty, which you're under command and control of the governor. So under those cases, really their chain of command goes up to the governor, and it's up to the governor to determine whether they do that or not.

But for us, we try and stay as close as we can and be informed.

DWG: But for the Title 10 part of the mission, the National Guard a do imbeds, you can do press conferences.

General Hokanson: Right.

DWG: Why haven't those things been done? Because my requests for those things are being denied. Is that something you can do in the future?

General Hokanson: That would fall under NORTHCOM because they're under the command and control of NORTHCOM. So the best thing I can say is work with the public affairs at NORTHCOM for that opportunity because I wouldn't have the authority to allow that.

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Moderator: Next is Kimberly Underwood.

DWG: I wanted to ask you about the Guard [inaudible]. Can you talk to us about the progress and status of the U.S. [inaudible] so that they can [inaudible] you've established in the last few years and how you're working with them generally in the States [inaudible]?

General Hokanson: So you're talking about the IW information?

DWG: Uh-huh.

General Hokanson: When we look at those, they're still in the early stages of what they're actually going to look like and what they're going to do. The one that we're working on right now is in Mansfield, Ohio, one of the [links] that's converting. And we're still early in the process. I really couldn't tell you what it's exactly going to look like. As we look at the things that they want that to do under the current environment, they are changing. But we can follow up as soon as we have more details on all the locations and what it will actually look like.

DWG: Are you planning an original - I've heard there were two possible locations. Mansfield and [inaudible]. Do you know about another one?

General Hokanson: Not at this time. And that will be a Secretary of the Air Force decision. And as we look at the future budgets it will of course be dependent on that as well.

DWG: And are you seeing appropriate budgetary measures in the current year? Or are you looking years out?

General Hokanson: We're kind of waiting for the National Defense Authorization Act. That will kind of tell us. But we do watch that closely and we're hoping that we have the resources to do all the things we're being asked to do.

DWG: Thank you.

Moderator: Next is Jim Garamone.

DWG: I'm going to go back to [INSA], the State Partnership Program if you don't mind.

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In the last four months I've had folks in five countries make a point that they're partnered with National Guard units. Ukraine, Slovenia, someplace in Asia. They're all over the place. Frankly, I'm sort of amazed at how much these foreign military leaders value the program.

What is happening with the State Partnership Program? And as we entered this era of strategic competition, what do you anticipate changing? And how much does this program cost?

General Hokanson: All fantastic questions. As Thom mentioned, I was in Croatia over the weekend and Minnesota's had a partnership for 25 years with Croatia. When I showed up the President met with me for 30 minutes, of Croatia, the Minister of Defense and the Chief of Defense and the head of their Army. Across the board they all said how valuable that was to them as they transitioned really over the past 25 years to becoming a NATO ally, and how important it was.

And when you look across the globe, we've got 64 and obviously if you look at Indo-PACOM we've got 13 in that region alone. When I was the adjutant general for Oregon, we had partnerships with Bangladesh and Vietnam and it benefited both of us significantly.

On one end we worked with the countries to determine hey, here's what they wanted to work on. And in the case of Vietnam they wanted to help set up an Emergency Management Center and wanted to know how we did that. So we helped them with the design and really the early operational procedures on how they could do that. The benefit it provided to them was we got to see that and they got to hear the things we had learned; but also we learned from them how they dealt with flooding in the Mekong Delta. And then when we sent our soldiers and airmen over there, they developed those relationships and for the folks in Vietnam, they got to learn a lot of the things we had learned, but for our soldiers and airmen they got a more global perspective of what was going on and their role in it. So it's hugely beneficial. It's one of our best recruiting tools, is to send somebody to one of our state partners for a two-week assignment and they'll work with medical care, legal issues or whatever the country would like to do. So it helps us a lot and we learn from each other, as I mentioned.

But when you look at the cost of this, it's roughly about \$30 million a year and this is for 64 --

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DWG: For the whole program?

General Hokanson: Right. So we do this at a very, very low cost and we're trying to get more consistent funding, fiscal year to fiscal year, but it is probably one of the best values our nation gets when it comes to developing long-term relationships. And in many cases it's another avenue of communication. That way if one country has an issue, they'll let the National Guard know and we can share that information as well.

DWG: So flooding happens in Bangladesh, they may call the adjutant general in Oregon and say hey, what do we do. Does that sort of thing happen?

General Hokanson: It does, actually, quite a bit. They'll come say hey, we're working on a certain thing like say our earthquake plan. In Oregon we wrote what was a Cascadia Fault Plan on what we would do. We openly share all that documentation with them. So at the end of the day, just like us, they're trying to really take care of their communities and their nation and respond to things to really mitigate human suffering. So anything we can do to do that, it helps stabilize the environment and it just makes better global partners.

DWG: I guess the fact that the National Guardsmen are there for a long time is why it's a National Guard program rather than an active duty one.

General Hokanson: Right. And this kind of goes back to the duration. So when we look at Tennessee and Bulgaria, they've been partners for 28 years. Jeff Holmes is the adjutant general for Tennessee, he's been going there for decades. They all know him. They're very comfortable, familiar with him. He's been to all sorts of parts of Bulgaria. Now we're at the phase where our leaders are working directly with their leaders. In fact they're there this week sharing a lot of stuff, looking back at what they've done over the past 28 years, obviously they've gone on to be NATO allies, they've co-deployed, and now they're looking at hey, what are we doing for the next ten years to make each other better?

DWG: The focus is now on the Indo-Pacific. Is that where the program may be shifting to? Or how do you deal with all of the things that are going on in Africa, in South America, in other

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parts of the world but still shift your focus to maybe the Indo-PACOM?

Moderator: And along the Russian periphery, if I could add to Jim's question. You're in those states too.

General Hokanson: Definitely. When we look at that, we work very closely with the combatant commanders and so when you look at Africa or at AFRICOM and SOUTHCOM, in many cases the majority of military personnel that go into Africa and South America are from the National Guard because we have so many partnerships. And when we look on the periphery of Russia and also Indo-PACOM, those will always be priorities. And because the states are usually paired with one or two countries, their focus never changes. They continue to look and work closely with a country, and once they accomplish one thing, they say what's next? So it's really helpful because it's enduring. They don't ever end is how we look at it. Sometimes they go into phases where say two states were partners, or a partner with a country for a long time and they bring a new state partner in. Sometimes their previous partner will come with them to that new partner to kind of share with them what they learned and the benefits to the program.

Moderator: Jeff Seldin, VOA.

DWG: A question about disinformation, specifically what types of disinformation campaigns are you concerned about for the National Guard? Are you being targeted by mostly foreign campaigns? And if so, what are you seeing? Or are you more worried right now about domestic campaigns? And how much of this is something that you can actually fight? And how much of it requires an [inaudible]?

General Hokanson: When we look at disinformation what we do is we rely on facts. When there's stuff out there, we always come back well, these are the facts that we know and we try never to speculate. It's like these are the facts and this is where they are. It's broad in many areas, but part of that is relying on you as well to help us tell the facts. This is the story and this is where we are. And then we find disinformation, is to basically address it with wherever it came from and highlight okay, this is not true or this is disinformation for the following reasons.

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Really, when you look across the 54, they do that every day. Obviously we usually drill one weekend a month and two weeks out of the year, but we do everything we can to make sure that our soldiers and airmen are getting the true facts, the true story, and if we do find it, we try and address it as soon as we can.

DWG: Have you found any [inaudible] where Guardsmen are being affected by disinformation campaigns or information campaigns? And if so can you explain how you, in that instance how you were able to combat it.

General Hokanson: I would just say not specifically, but a lot of times we get a lot of questions related to say the COVID vaccine and states like Alabama have set up a repository where soldier can ask questions. Hey, I've heard this, I've heard that, and then they can actually respond and use the chain of command to look at the facts.

Here's the question you asked and here are the facts as we know them. So we try to address it at every opportunity we can, but obviously with social media and not being with them the other 28 days of the month, we just rely on them to let us know and then us be able to address it at that time.

DWG: Is the relationship such that they are letting you know? That they are coming forward whether it's saying, this is [inaudible]? [Inaudible] they're in communities and therefore they share very likely some of the beliefs and ideologies of people in the communities they live in. If they believe one thing or another and not trust their commanders and not trust [inaudible].

General Hokanson: I don't see that really. Part of it is because we're such a close-knit organization and we've known each other really for a long time, and of course we bring a lot of new folks into the organization, but that's why we really rely on the facts and not speculating or not hypothesizing on what it is. If we stick to that, then they know that's what we're going to be telling them. And periodically we get stuff, hey I saw this and we'll have our folks take a look at it. Okay, if you peel the onion back and look at the actual original source, are you aware that's where the source came from? And in some cases they go oh, my gosh, I didn't do that work. So whenever we can we help them with that. But really we rely on the states at their level to do that.

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Moderator: Brian Everstine, Aviation Week.

DWG: Earlier this spring on the Hill you raised some concerns about the Air Force and TRANSCOM planning for C-130s, that essentially they don't really take into account for example General [inaudible] brought up flying in almost a battalion of troops for the duration, all came under C-130s. Have you seen any shift in that? I know the Mobility/Capability Requirements Study has been finished, not released but finished. How do you sort of shift on that front? And have you seen some positive momentum on the Hill?

General Hokanson: We're also waiting for the study and what we have asked, because in the past it didn't account for what we did in the homeland. That's flying to forest fires, to disasters, and moving troops in a timely manner. So it's supposed to be accounted for this year, and it will be interesting to see where it goes. I know right now we're scheduled to have one of our C-130s come offline, the unit in Mansfield, Ohio, and transferred to a different mission set. But we think the remaining aircraft is probably about what we need. But of course we need the data to support that so we'll watch very closely for that.

I know there are some proposals on the Hill right now to add 16 C-130Js to the National Guard and that would basically just be a one-for-one replacement for some of our older H models. But when we look at the need for tactical airlift and strategic airlift, we think it's really important that we get it right.

DWG: In the firefighting, obviously your MAFs are very busy and I [inaudible] the past two years. Do you see more of a modernization push for those? I know for example Nevada they're flying H models, they don't have the 2.5 upgrade. I don't think they have the [inaudible]. Do you see a need for modernizing [inaudible]?

General Hokanson: We really need the modernization for our warfight mission. If I can kind of just take a step back, that's another thing that we constantly have to try and share is the whole reason the National Guard exists is the combat reserve of the Army and the Air Force and we're manned, trained and equipped to fight our nation's wars. When you look at the states, probably 98 to 95 percent of their budget is federally funded. So in that respect we need the aircraft modernized so that they

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can be interoperable no matter where we ask them to go on the globe.

But specifically to wildfire fighting, it's the same thing. We've got to make sure that they're completely modernized so that they can perform the missions that they're being asked to do. When you look at firefighting another piece of that is the MAF system, it's a Mobile Airborne Firefighting system. It's basically a series of pallets they push in the back of a C-130. The Forest Service owns that. What we also need to do is continually upgrade those systems as well so they can perform as they need them really in the middle of the forest fires.

DWG: You talked about [inaudible] the warfight. How does that play into the decision for, for example, --

General Hokanson: Right.

DWG: -- I'm thinking Massachusetts is coming up on either F-15 [inaudible] or F-35, and those would have different priorities for a great peer fight obviously. How does that play into the thinking?

General Hokanson: In that case we're working very close with the Air Force because what we want to do is make sure that we modernize our entire fighter fleet. Our F-15Cs and Ds and some of our, they call them pre-block F-16s for those not familiar, they're a little bit older aircraft. And when you look at the F-151EX, it's a brand new version of the F-15, has significant capabilities and the F-35 is another fifth gen fighter.

So what we want to do is make sure that we have a pathway to modernization for each of our fighter squadrons because it's an incredible capability but it's also a capacity issue for our nation, to make sure that whatever we get asked to do, that we can do that.

If you look at the Air Guard particularly, roughly the National Guard is about a third of the cost of the active component, primarily because of our personnel costs. But when you look at the Air Guard, our fighter and lift and all of our other wings maintain almost the same readiness requirements as our active duty counterparts and our air bases are disbursed around the country. They're very inexpensive on a [comptroller] basis because we don't have a school, we don't have PXes, we don't have

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a lot of those other support structures that you have to pay for. And so we're able to run our air bases at a much lower cost. It also gives us dispersion throughout the country.

Moderator: Next question please?

DWG: I'm with [Foreign Ops] [inaudible].

I wanted to follow up on the question about the border, then I have another topic.

Are you going to factor in this sort of new politization of deployment of forces under their state governors for your overall national defense or crisis response? You now have governors that are saying no, we're going to send, whether or not the federal government is asking for, we're going to send despite them and say no. How do you prepare for a future where there's a disaster and governors say no, we're not sending our troops; or they say actually we're going to send them even though you don't want us there.

General Hokanson: We haven't seen that. And the governors and the adjutants general, I mean they're just an incredible group of people. They really work hard together. I'll just give you an example.

Louisiana this year we had Hurricane Ida hit. When it hit the 256th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, the largest unit in Louisiana, was deployed overseas. So every year we meet before all of our disaster seasons - well, they kind of run year-round now, but we just pick a date. So we identify, particularly on the Gulf states, who's going to be gone. Then states volunteer, hey, I can fill this role and that role.

So when you look at Hurricane Idea, the 256th was overseas. Folks came from all other states to help out. And in fact Louisiana at that same time had one of their helicopters in California fighting forest fires. So they all work together very closely with that.

The other thing that we look at is our federal mission takes precedence over everything. So if there's ever a federal mission deployment, that cannot be tampered with by anybody. We fence those units, they do their training, they deploy overseas. The remaining elements are what the governor can use as they see

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necessary within their state as they see necessary within their state.

So specifically, if you look at some of the border states, the governor under their authority as the commander-in-chief of their National Guard under state active duty where the state pays the funding, they can use them for that.

DWG: It seems like the nation is getting more divided, not less so, and there might be political decisions by governors in the future where they send in their forces. Are you having to plan around that? And maybe not for natural disaster but something that would be much less politically popular like a [inaudible].

General Hokanson: We fortunately haven't seen that yet. I have a phone call with the adjutants general every Thursday. And across the 50 states, three territories and DC, we share thoughts, questions and we try and resolve and identify anything that may potentially come up well in advance. And I think in those cases we would do everything we could to mitigate it, but like I said, I've never seen that and I hope we never do.

DWG: On a separate topic, the Pentagon is still kind of slowly rolling out its [inaudible] review, and one of the interesting [inaudible], how do you do [inaudible] for a Guard member who is either activated or not activated given state status or federal status, and how do you apply the rules to that member?

General Hokanson: I think the bottom line is extremism of any type is just not anything that's compatible with the armed forces. So what we look for is our fellow soldiers and airmen to identify anybody that might be leaning that way. And then because of the status that they're in, we usually will have local law enforcement to conduct an investigation and determine if there's legal issues that need to be dealt with and if not then the chain of command looks at it to see if there's military issues that need to be resolved and addressed.

But ultimately, as soon as we find that we want to make sure we address it right away. I look at it as a readiness issue, along with many other topics. If there's anybody that doesn't feel like they're treated with dignity and respect, it's not an environment they're going to want to be part of. I have to do everything we can in coordination with the 54 states and territories to make sure that we provide an environment where

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everybody feels like they're there to contribute and they don't worry about anything but doing their job.

DWG: But would there be a challenge [inaudible] a member of the Guard who is not on active status who was either participating or attended something or [inaudible] in the overall view, the policy looks like it's going to [inaudible] disciplinary.

General Hokanson: We have a lot of tools to do that, and they will do that, and I'm very confident the states are doing that as they identify this. But once again, they do work with local law enforcement first because if it's a legal issue where somebody's broken the law then we want to make sure that takes precedence. If that's the case, that will really determine the outcome for the military. If not, if it falls below that threshold we look very closely at our regulations policies and if they violate that then that's addressed right away.

Moderator: General, if I could, the tolerance theme is so important. It's front and center in the national debate. Can I ask you to share with the group the story you told me earlier, we were chatting before about the challenge of an apolitical, non-partisan group of men and women who are still drawn from a very polarized society and how you deal with that.

General Hokanson: In one of the cases in the state of Georgia, there was a large protest ongoing and they had basically set a curfew for 9 p.m. And because our Guardsmen actually live in these communities and know a lot of the political leaders and they're friends and neighbors, and many of them are schoolteachers or policemen or firemen, within their communities they're very well connected. In this case one of our senior leaders was there and there were protests ongoing in downtown and he walked in the midst of them and just said hey, I'm really glad you guys are here and we use the role that we're here to protect, not to police, and you can certainly execute all your first amendment rights and protest, and he was there. Then as it got closer to 9 o'clock he said hey folks, this is awesome you're out here today but at 9 o'clock there's a curfew, and at 9 o'clock I've got to go on the other side of the fence with all the other soldiers and airmen. So we would really appreciate it if you guys would go home and follow the curfew that's been established by the governor. And he found it was really helpful. He was out there walking, being part of that, making sure everybody was peaceful and safe. Then at 9 o'clock it's like hey guys, I've

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got to go. I've got to get on the other side of the fence. I hope you guys have a good evening. And when he climbed back over the fence everybody kind of went away.

What they realized is really his point, we're part of those communities, we understand their concerns, we want to make sure they can take full advantage of their rights, but at the end of the day we do want to make sure it's peaceful and no one gets hurt as a result.

DWG: You said you didn't see any issues with partisanship on deployment, but there is a billionaire from Tennessee, a Republican donor, that paid for a South Dakota deployment and it wasn't even a full company of soldiers. And South Dakota had a Title 10 deployment. So how do you not see that as a giant partisan concern? Governor Abbott is a political figure. He's deploying units with ten days' notice for a year mission, and there's been no press conference or anything to talk about why that's needed and sent these soldiers that seen like window dressing for his Twitter account.

So there have been deployments and the way the governor's using these Guard soldiers seems kind of out of the ordinary. So is there concern with partisan use of the Guard?

General Hokanson: When you look at the South Dakota specifically, when the governor - they do a request. One governor may ask through an [EMAC] for help. And what it is, in this case the state uses their fund to pay for that. Now the fund that they use to pay that usually comes from taxes or otherwise. In this case I think somebody made a donation to that fund, but it was not where the individual paid directly. My understanding is they gave money to South Dakota and they put it into an account --

DWG: I've talked to multiple state legislators who said there was no issue with the budget, they didn't need the money.

General Hokanson: That's a governor's decision that they're able to do that.

DWG: -- ask them to do that. That was the question.

General Hokanson: I'm sorry?

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DWG: Texas didn't ask them for that. She just decided -

General Hokanson: I believe there was a conversation between the governors beforehand. And I don't know that there was an EMAC or not to your point but --

DWG: There was. I called [inaudible].

General Hokanson: All right.

DWG: An addition point, where [inaudible] can raise private owners if they go pay for --

General Hokanson: No.

DWG: But that's what happened. That happening [inaudible]. You're saying there hasn't been a partisan issue that you've seen, but like that's almost a cartoonistic example of partisanship use of the Guard. And like Terah said, that sets the stage for - there's no laws to prevent billionaires from doing anything they want with the Guard as long as they donate a bunch of money to [inaudible].

General Hokanson: Ultimately the Guard funds are in the command and control of the governor, and the governor's got to answer to that. So for them, that's their decision and that's how the National Guard is set up. We don't want to see that at all. The governors, that's their, to them, they have to answer to that.

DWG: How involved are you with the border mission? It seems like the Guard's just like this kid with custody issues.

General Hokanson: In this case, we're a force provider. We provide forces on the Title 10 side, we get a request from Northern Command and they say we need the following number of personnel. We do look at very close detail in what they're going to ask them to do. If we don't believe it's military related we'll let them know and then they'll decide basically this is what we need. In this case a request from DHS and CBP. So that comes through NORTHCOM. Then we provide the assigned forces for NORTHCOM and they put them in coordination with the Customs & Border Patrol.

DWG: So as of right now --

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Moderator: Sorry, we need to move on, please. We can come back to you if there's time, but it's only fair.

DWG: Hi, [inaudible].

Before the pandemic there was some talk about simplifying Title 10 statuses, and one would think that with sending [inaudible] troops to the border and to drive school buses and do the COVID stuff, that would be more important than ever. Is it still being worked on actively, or is that something that people [inaudible]?

General Hokanson: There's been a lot of work done and we call it Duty Status Reform. What we've found is there's 28 statuses that people could be in. What we wanted to do is simplify it so that we didn't have soldiers and airmen and marines working side by side and each one was getting different benefits.

So by reducing this to eight, I think is where they're at right now, the intent would be that you would have like benefits for people doing like jobs.

Now it's not in this year's legislative priorities but I believe it will be coming up next year. They did a lot of significant work with the National Guard and Reserve and active components to help simplify that.

DWG: It's just a delayed dream.

General Hokanson: It is a dream, but all the work has been done to get there. Now we just need to get the congressional support to make it happen.

DWG: So that requires legislation.

General Hokanson: It does require legislation, yes, to do that.

DWG: Also on another related issue, the Army's new email system is not coming out [inaudible].

General Hokanson: We've been working through that. There were some issues initially. We seem to be getting over that, but I think the key there is we want to make sure that all of our networks are safe. It is a process when you talk about a million people being involved and close to a million different accounts. So we're working through it. Things seem to be working. But

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we'll see how it works in the end.

DWG: How is this impacting soldiers' ability to send in their vaccination status?

General Hokanson: I don't think it's impacting that at all because we do that at the lowest level. So many times it's during a drill weekend where the folks bring in their vaccination cards, or the units coordinating it. So that shouldn't be impacted at all.

Moderator: Please.

DWG: A space question for you. When you testified on the Hill in the spring you said the [inaudible] of a Space Guard was among your top priorities. The House NDAA included a program to create a Space Guard over I think [inaudible] or whatever the bill [inaudible].

I believe you had said you were working with the Air Force on a plan for a Space Guard. The White House obviously opposes that provision of the NDAA saying that what is currently in place is what they want to do moving forward. Best use of the resources.

I'm just curious where do things stand overall in the building as far as a Space Guard and if the Guard, Air Force, Space Force and OSD on the same page on that?

General Hokanson: Obviously, as you mentioned, the administration's come out with their position. For me as my role, my number one priority has always been our people and taking care of them. And folks may not realize, but the National Guard's been performing space missions for over 25 years. We have units in seven states and one territory. So to me, I want to make sure that they can continue to serve how they've asked to serve and then also be in the National Guard. So we're watching very closely to see where it goes within the Congress, what the NDAA will set aside. Until then, we just have to continue to keep doing that mission because a lot of the missions that we do are really critical to the Space Force. So for me I want to make sure that long term we take care of our people, we continue to perform our mission until a determination is made on how that mission will continue and in what status.

DWG: The Guard seems to be the most public in pushing for a

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Space Guard [inaudible]. Do you think there are philosophical differences between the Guard Bureau and the Space Guard and perhaps the Air Force/Space Force, where [inaudible] go a little slower on this?

General Hokanson: I think we all realize that the capability that the National Guard does today is critical and we can't stop doing it. I think all of us are trying to figure out how we can continue to provide what our nation needs I the best way that we can, and if you look at Guardsmen and women, many of them have civilian jobs that are also in this industry and they joined those units for a reason and they want to continue to serve. So we will work with them and find the best solution to go forward. If we don't create a Space National Guard they will remain in the Air National Guard until a decision is made long term what the Space Force reserve component will look like.

Moderator: Gina, please.

DWG: You recently published your priorities. Not surprising, people, readiness, reform and modernization, maybe not in that order. Could you talk about reform, please, and give some examples of what you mean by that?

General Hokanson: If you look at my predecessor, a great officer, he used innovation and I kind of look at it as more of a reform. And the reason I mention this is there are a lot of things that we do we can do better. If you look at COVID, prior to COVID I actually was working on a plan to telework 10 percent of our work force. After COVID we were teleworking 90 percent of our work force. So what we're trying to do when we look at this is, you know, you can always modernize and buy new equipment, but what I was trying to do is make sure that our processes, the way we do things are modernized as well. There are ways we can reduce the bureaucracy and speed things to getting done, then we want to do that.

So a couple of programs. Number one is looking at, as you're probably all aware, it's expensive to live in the National Capitol Region. In some cases we have Guard soldiers whose spouses have really good jobs in the state where they live, or they may be caring for a parent or a relative, or their children may be in a really good school that they don't want to leave so they don't have the opportunity to serve at the national level. So the program we're trying to look at is to allow them to do a

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Title 10 federal mission whether they are in Wisconsin, Iowa or Idaho and stay in their community, perform a function that you don't need to be physically here to do, and then contribute, but then that gives them that national level experience but they don't have to uproot their family or leave a situation that would prevent them from going.

DWG: What's the timeline on that?

General Hokanson: We've got what we call an Operational Planning Team that's been working on that for a couple of months right now. What we have to do is look at the legalities of being in a Title 10 status in a Title 32 position. So we're hoping to have an answer I'd say January/February timeframe.

DWG: Okay, and this is 10 percent of people who have these national level jobs?

General Hokanson: Yes.

DWG: About how many people is that?

General Hokanson: That would be about --

DWG: Army and/or Air Force.

General Hokanson: Army and Air, probably about 10 percent would be 200.

DWG: Two hundred people?

General Hokanson: Right.

DWG: Okay.

General Hokanson: That's the start. Ideally when you look at today's competitive environment for employment, I think that's the first step. And if there's things that we don't need folks to physically be here to do, I'll continue to push that number as high as we can get it.

DWG: I'm [Brandy], I'm the Defense [Inaudible] correspondent.

Sticking on the modernization topic for a second, I'm curious to hear a little bit more about how the Guard's relationship with

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data is evolving and how the Guard is using data as [inaudible].

General Hokanson: Interestingly, we just hired our first data officer because what we realized is there's so much data out there that we may not be taking the best advantage of or utilizing it to help us do our job better. So we took the step to recently hire someone to help us manage all of the data that we have. And also to help - this kind of goes back to reform as well, find out those things that we're doing that there's a better way to do it, and also help identify those things that we just don't need to do anymore because they're no longer relevant.

So I'm actually really excited to meet them and work with them on how we manage our data.

DWG: [Inaudible]?

General Hokanson: I cannot at this time.

DWG: Do you have any new cases that come out in your mind in maybe the last year [inaudible] this data?

General Hokanson: I think in many cases we're trying to use the data to help be predictive whenever possible. So if you look at, like wildfires for an example, there's a lot of information out there and the ability to sift through it and really share in this case with the Forest Service of CalFire or the local fire departments so they can better manage all the data that they're getting to understand what's actually happening on the ground will help us reduce the number of people we need to put on fires.

One of the things that we do, fire mapping and other things like that to provide additional data to them so they can sift through and go this is where the smoke is but the actual fire and the hot spots are here. So that's one example that we've really leveraged in California and Colorado over the past couple of years.

Moderator: Jim.

DWG: You touched on how the disaster season seems to just extend all year long. You do have thousands of people overseas. You've got thousands of people doing the COVID mission, doing the border mission, doing all sorts of things in the States.

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The National Guard has been sort of rode hard and put away wet now in many cases. Are you seeing a fall off in people wanting to serve in the Guard? Are you worried that that could happen?

General Hokanson: We watch this very closely and I'm always worried about that. I guess the one statistic I would share is, normally we have our recruiting goal for the year and the fiscal year ends September 30th and we usually meet it September 26th, 27th, 28th, you know. [Laughter]. This year we actually met it in May which is one of the earliest times we've ever done that. And on the Air Guard, they were able to meet theirs in September. That was the Army Guard and they've never met it that early that I'm aware of. So I'm always concerned about that.

But I go back to when I was down in Louisiana, I was down in a ward in downtown New Orleans and there was a unit from Kansas that was there. There were two soldiers and I was talking to them, and this is the first time they had left the state of Kansas as a Guardsman. And even with a mask on you could just see the smile on their face. They were so happy to be doing something, to making a difference. I think that's the one thing that we really sell folks is you can serve your country, and many of them - like today we've got 20,000 overseas supporting our combatant commanders. But many others do a lot of things here at home. It's the sense of service that we try and show them, that they can make a difference either at the community, in another state or overseas. And a lot of them really want to do that. That's why I came into the Guard.

So we do watch that closely and we try and find really at the lowest level - and this is the familiarity within the National Guard is in those communities that are really busy. Or say they're coming out of COVID and their job is coming back and they've been back to work. We look at our first line leaders to find that balance to where they can balance their civilian career, their military career in the Guard and their family. We know we all have to lean on one or another throughout the course of our career, but if our leaders can help them balance and know hey, in this case Jim really needs to get back to work but Mary's available, she can come down and fill that role. We do that the best we can. So we don't get to the point where somebody really has to make a choice and pick two of the three.

DWG: Just to go back to [inaudible]. [Inaudible] yesterday about the [inaudible] Model 60. Can you talk a little bit about

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where things stand with the 60 modernization? Mike in the short term, Victor long term. Do you need to accelerate what you've got?

General Hokanson: We're happy with what we have right now. Actually I'm supposed to go up and fly the Victor to see, it's a very good platform. And when we look at the future of Army Aviation, the Army pretty soon will make a decision on Future Vertical Lift which would really be a significant capability jump for the Army. So for us, what we're trying to do is make sure that the current systems that we have continue to be modernized, meet the capability and capacity that we need to meet our readiness objectives, but then also look for ways we can look towards the future and fielding whatever Future Vertical Lift looks like.

DWG: How active is the Guard in helping set requirements for FVL?

General Hokanson: One of our officers works in the Future Vertical Lift team and we also have a two star general officer at Futures Command as well. So we're very involved in that prospect. Because we're a significant part of Army Aviation. We've got 12 aviation brigades in the National Guard. So a very significant role.

DWG: I want to go back to the billionaire [inaudible] question. California's a good example. The wildfire season is getting more intense, getting longer. You do an extraordinary amount of planning ahead of time. These assets are in Washington, Oregon, tankers, [inaudible], et cetera. Let's say that a billionaire decided they were going to fund a unit going to wherever, Texas or wherever and they take the tankers. Are they state assets or federal assets?

General Hokanson: Federal assets.

DWG: So all of the like high water trucks and things belong to -
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General Hokanson: The federal government.

DWG: Okay.

General Hokanson: All the equipment is federally purchased and

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like I said, 98 percent - depending on the state. Some as low as 95, is federally funded.

DWG: So if they started to take them with them you could say no?

General Hokanson: Yeah, I believe so, at any time.

DWG: About the state partnership program and the efforts to help each other. Have there been any COVID specific programs between state sand other countries? Helping set up mass vaccinations, or field hospitals or anything where the lessons learned here are brought over there?

General Hokanson: Yes. In many cases we have shared everything that we've learned here. And in many cases when you look at the role of the National Guard, and I know this has been a while ago, but if you go back to March 5, 2020, we sent a helicopter out off the coast of California to the Grand Princess cruise ship and we actually screened our personnel. Who's got a family? Who doesn't? Because we had no idea what they were going into. When they came back they were really some of the first people that were quarantined.

When you look at that and then the fact that we were next in long term care facilities and we were doing testing, and after the vaccination we've done 13 million vaccinations right now. All along the way we have shared with our state partners what we have learned specifically if they've asked. And in many cases we volunteered.

The State of Utah has a partnership with Nepal. They actually had a training mission where they actually brought some supplies to Nepal as well.

So what we do is we work very closely with them. If they have a need or if they have questions at all, we do everything we can to share what we've learned so we can help facilitate their response within their individual countries.

Moderator: One last question before I give the General the floor to wrap up.

DWG: Who are the [inaudible] four stars [inaudible]? Are you part of a study? Or is it a marketing campaign?

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General Hokanson: To us it's to help just monitor things.

DWG: But it's been specifically four stars. That's why I'm asking. Like why did they pick these guys --

General Hokanson: In my case we actually have them for the office so we can monitor our health, particularly at the start of COVID, they were trying to look for any indication that might determine if somebody is getting sick or not. It also tells you if you got any sleep or not, which is very helpful because we never get enough.

DWG: [Inaudible] from the data?

DWG: Does it have your location? Does it track your location?

General Hokanson: No, I don't believe it tracks our location. And it's, I've just used it personally for me to track if I'm getting enough sleep, if there's --

DWG: So you're not part of a Pentagon study.

General Hokanson: No.

Moderator: I see a great movie screenplay here.

[Multiple voices].

DWG: Have you heard any interest from VHA or [inaudible] to collect this information if there are multiple officers in the Pentagon that --

General Hokanson: Not that I'm aware of.

DWG: Can we get the results of your - [Laughter].

[Multiple voices].

General Hokanson: It usually says you need more sleep. That's the common theme we all get.

DWG: Do you have to wear it in secured areas and [inaudible] and stuff like that?

General Hokanson: No.

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DWG: How do you spell it?

General Hokanson: It's O-U-R-A.

DWG: How did your last ACFT go?

General Hokanson: Good, actually.

DWG: -- situps --

General Hokanson: I actually did 20. I scored just over 500.

Moderator: General, this has been extremely educational. [Laughter]. I have to go check out the OURA ring now. I thought it was like aura.

We thank you for your time, thank you for your service, sharing your wisdom, and the floor is yours for the final couple of minutes if you have any wrap-up thoughts to share with us, sir.

General Hokanson: Thank you, Thom. And first of all, thanks for the opportunity to come visit with you. My predecessor said one of the things he'd really hoped was he could do a better job of telling the Guard story. And when you look at what they've done over the past year and a half, it's really incredible what we've asked them to do.

If you go back to Labor Day of last year, the multitude of things that we did, we had 64,000 folks deployed across the globe. 20,000 in 34 different nations. We had 3500 supporting hurricanes. We had 1500 doing civil disturbance. We did a really technical rescue in Alaska. We were fighting wildfires. In fact it was that same weekend we had helicopters, because they had the latest equipment and technology they flew through the fire to rescue 240 people. And that's just stuff that we do.

Today that number's 53,000. I'm very fortunate to be part of an organization where people stand up and they want to make a difference every day. For us to get the support that we have not only at the federal level in terms of modernization and personnel, but the relationship we have with our communities working together to really mitigate everything that we can so that we can get our lives back to whatever the new normal is.

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But aside from that, the other thing I would say is obviously tomorrow is Veterans Day. If you look over the past 20 years, we've had a million Guardsmen deploy overseas. So we've had a million veterans that have come through the Guard in the last 20 years. To me it's not only recognizing them and all the other veterans for our nation, but also I'd ask you to take a moment to think about the families. They don't carry the title of veteran, but in many ways they carry the burden of that. My wife and kids have seen me leave for years at a time and they've still kept doing all those things, took care of us, made sure that we could do those things.

We celebrate the veterans and recognize them, but I'd ask that you don't forget the families and the parents, the brothers and the sisters and friends that makes our ability to serve our nation possible.

Moderator: Great. I always end on time, which it is. General, thanks to you, thanks to your staff, and to all the correspondents. Thank you for joining us.

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