

National Guard call-ups scare some city officials

By Hazel Trice Edney
Special to Sentinel-Voice

WASHINGTON (NNPA) — Lucenia Williams-Dunn, mayor of nearly all-Black Tuskegee, Ala., believes her city is among the most insecure in the nation. All 60 members of its local National Guard unit, the 214th Military Police Company, have been away for a year in Iraq. On top of that, Tuskegee sits between two military bases, that she feels could become terrorist targets.

"There's tension because we live between some major military depots," says Williams-Dunn, whose city is 98 percent Black. "Terrorism becomes a reality when you understand that Washington, D. C. has been putting out bulletins talking about Orange alert, Red alert and those kinds of things. I've also been preaching to my Congressman and other national leaders. They've got to begin to focus on the small rural towns because we are the least protected group of folk, the least protected jurisdiction."

Whether whole cities, rural or urban, families or individuals, people across the

nation are being impacted by the record number of National Guard soldiers deployed to Iraq. Currently there are more than 159,700 guard members in Iraq and Kuwait alone. They account for at least 40 percent of the U. S. military forces serving in those two adjoining countries.

Tuskegee is located between Maxwell-Gunter Air Force base in Alabama and Fort Benning Army Base in Georgia.

"So, we're kind of in the middle of all of this," the mayor said. "That gives us a little scary feeling."

Alabama National Guard Spokesman Col. Robert Horton says the 60 Tuskegee Guard members are a part of the 130-member 214th, headquartered in Alexandria City, Ala., that recently returned home after being on a mission to train the Iraqi police force and helped to establish Iraq's first military police academy. In total, approximately 3,400 guard members, (more than a third of Alabama's 11,600 National Guard troops), have been deployed to Iraq.

Mayor Williams-Dunn



Lucenia Williams-Dunn, mayor of Tuskegee, Ala., is worried about the effect of military call-ups on her city.

has reason to be concerned said Edwin Dorn, former undersecretary of defense for personnel and readiness in the Clinton Administration, but not for the reason she thinks.

"Terrorists tend to go after soft targets and highly symbolic targets. A military base, which tends to be very spread out, would probably not produce the kind of affect that a terrorist organization wants to produce," said Dorn, now dean of the Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs at the University of

Texas at Austin. "But, she is on to something else, which is that because police and firemen make up a large percentage of the Guard around the states, Tuskegee and a lot of other areas are less capable of dealing with any kind of disaster than they were before the Iraq invasion began."

Such circumstances get little empathy from the Guard itself.

"Quite obviously we know that any time the Guard is activated, it is a source of strife to a great many folks," said Maj. John M. Toniolli,

spokesman for the National Guard Bureau of Public Affairs in Arlington, Va. "It's not that we can look and necessarily go, 'Oh, we can't take people from there because it would hurt that whole town.' It's, 'We need this particular talent and (these) people have (that) talent. They are experts in their jobs. Otherwise, they wouldn't be in the Guard.'"

Alabama National Guard spokesman Norman Arnold said Tuskegee is in no danger.

"It's been trying and demanding for families," Arnold said. "We can respond across the state to any types of national emergencies as quickly and efficiently, I think, that we have in the past."

During the Vietnam era, men joined the National Guard to avoid going to war. The military draft was discontinued in 1973, easing the interest in joining the Guard.

Enlistees in the National Guard and all other armed forces are voluntary. Many signed up for various reasons, including patriotism, educational benefits or because they have certain skills training

not expecting that they would be called to active duty, certainly not in Iraq and Afghanistan.

But they guessed wrong. Many of those activated are people in their 40s and 50s — long past their prime fighting age. Consequently, family units are being affected when one of its members are called to active duty.

Sgt. First Class Daniel Hawkins, 42, of the 1297 Combat Support Battalion of the Maryland Army National Guard is one whose family is affected. He is preparing for deployment for the first time in his nearly 25-year military career. He will be leaving for Iraq on Sept. 9.

An accountant by trade, Hawkins, 42, has worked behind a desk on personnel issues and human resources management in the Guard for the past 15 years. He volunteered for deployment to Saudi Arabia in Operation Desert Storm, but was not picked because his administrative skills were needed in Maryland. He isn't as fortunate this time around.

"You couldn't have inter-
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STEVEN HORSFORD'S

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1. Attract new businesses that offer vital services to our community like grocery stores, dry cleaners, and coffee shops.
2. Bring better paying jobs to the community by attracting new industries like manufacturing, health, and technology to West Las Vegas.

3. Open a technical high school in West Las Vegas so teenagers can learn the skills they need to move into high paying careers like construction, healthcare and technology.
4. Increase funding for the Enterprise Community to provide minority owned businesses with the capital they need to open new businesses and create new jobs.
5. Increase services for seniors including affordable housing, accessible healthcare.
6. Support funding for after-school programs to expose young people to positive activities like tutoring, mentoring, and career exploration.
7. Create an office of Minority Health to address minority health care issues including diabetes, high blood pressure, HIV/AIDS, and teen pregnancy.
8. Increase the minimum wage so workers can earn more money and better provide for themselves and their families.
9. Pass a state lottery to fund public education so every child has textbooks and the supplies they need to learn.
10. Restore ex-offenders' right to vote.

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