

Honorable Representatives,

I appreciate the opportunity to testify before your committee today. My name is Jennifer Waggoner and I am a military spouse and a former Family Readiness Group Coordinator with the Oregon Army National Guard. My husband Tom recently returned from a tour of duty in Iraq with the 41st Brigade Combat Team. The purpose of my testimony today is to impress upon you the importance of our Soldiers having internet access while they are deployed and to illustrate the added expense these Soldiers incur for this necessary tool. Here are some examples of internet usage by Oregon Soldiers while deployed:

Communication with Family and Friends

Face Book: Many Soldiers keep in touch with their family and friends by posting on social media sites like Face Book or MySpace. It bridges the distance and makes the Soldiers feel closer to home if they are included in the everyday lives of those closest to them.

Skype: Telephone access overseas is very limited and can be quite expensive. Skype is a low or no cost alternative the Soldiers and their families use to talk or video chat. My husband and I used Skype while we opened presents on Christmas morning so he could see the kids and their reactions.

Yahoo Messenger: This text messaging application allowed me to chat with Tom no matter the time difference as I was able to access his messages from my Smartphone.

Communication with Employers

E-mails/Blogs: Especially in the National Guard, it is important that Citizen Soldiers maintain communication with their employers to make the reintegration process as smooth as possible.

Distance Learning

Community Colleges: Many Soldiers like to make use of their free time utilizing their GI Bill Benefits to continue their education with various State

Colleges. Without internet access, these industrious Soldiers would not be able to continue their education while they are in theater.

Army Correspondence Courses/Non-Commissioned Officer Education System (NCOES): Additionally, the army offers many courses available through their web portals so Soldiers can continue with their professional education in order to become better leaders.

On-line Banking

Bill Pay: Our Soldiers need to pay their bills and on-line bill paying applications with their financial institutions allow them to stay current with mortgages, utility payments, tuition and many other recurring payments.

MyPay.gov: The Army requires Soldiers to have their pay electronically submitted to their banks. Their advice of payment or Leave and Earning Statement (LES) is accessed through MyPay.gov.

Identity Theft: Being able to access their account on-line is often the only way to check if there has been identify theft on the Soldier's financial accounts or credit reports.

Current News and Events

Home Town Newspapers/TV/Radio Stations: Soldiers like to keep up to date with what is going on in their communities back home. With streaming video/audio, Soldiers can listen or view local news or radio broadcasts. Also, many periodicals offer on-line versions.

Communication among teammates

Changes to Meetings: My husband and his teammates would use Skype to communicate internal updates/changes to mission related meetings and other notifications within their housing compounds.

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