COVER PHOTOS

Top: Soldiers assigned to Task Force South, New Jersey National Guard, assist a Long Beach Islander onto a M939 5-ton 6x6 truck during relief operations Oct. 31, 2012. The New Jersey National Guard is working with Long Beach Island civilian authorities in the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy.

Center: Family members visit the grave of a loved one at State Memorial Day ceremony at the Brig. Gen. William C. Doyle Veterans Memorial Cemetery in North Hanover Township, N.J. May 26, 2012.

Bottom: Master Sgt. Dean B. Burlew, sustainment services, 177th Fighter Wing, New Jersey Air National Guard, hugs his children after returning from a six-month deployment in support of Operation Enduring Freedom on April 18, 2012.

(Air National Guard photos by Master Sgt. Mark C. Olsen/Released)
Thank you for the opportunity to appear before this committee today to discuss the Fiscal Year 2014 budget for the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs.

Let me begin by saying that this past year has been one of the most rewarding of my 30-year military career because of the amazing people I have the privilege to lead at the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs and the New Jersey National Guard.

From caring for our state’s veterans to safeguarding our communities and protecting America’s interests abroad, I have seen members of Team DMA VA accomplish seemingly impossible tasks under some of the most difficult circumstances imaginable.

You have already met one of those people, Air National Guard Tech. Sgt. Michael Sears, who on September 29, 2012, put his mission and the lives of his fellow Airmen before his own safety during a deployment to Afghanistan. The narrative of his heroic acts on that day runs for more than four pages. To summarize, he defused two bombs, ran repeatedly through enemy fire to provide first aid to a wounded comrade and directed a counterattack against nearly a dozen insurgents. Put another way, he saved a lot of lives. Tech. Sgt. Sears been awarded the Purple Heart for his wounds and a Bronze Star for his valor. I don’t think it would be too much of a stretch to call him a hero – an American hero and a New Jersey hero.

As we sit here today, Soldiers and Airmen of the New Jersey Army and Air National Guard are deployed around the globe protecting America’s interests. I would submit that last fall, when the rains, winds and relentless tidal surges of Super Storm Sandy cut a path of destruction across New Jersey, the people of the Garden State were fortunate to have nearly 2,300 men and women like Tech. Sgt. Michael Sears mobilized and ready to protect their neighbors and communities.

There was no shortage of heroes among the Soldiers and Airmen who conducted 175 missions over a 150-mile swath of New Jersey from Cape May to Warren County.

When Sandy’s fury sent a wall of water from the Hackensack River into the Bergen County towns of Moonachie and Little Ferry, Army National Guard
trops arrived in less than 30 minutes and began carrying residents to safety.

The National Guard remained on duty in response to Sandy until Jan. 10. In that time, its Citizen Soldiers and Airmen logged 37,250 man days; rescued more than 7,000 people and their pets; assisted in the shelter of more than 2,500 displaced citizens; delivered more than 25,000 meals; provided more than 250 hours of helicopter support; and dispensed more than 250,000 gallons of fuel.

Nearly 150 of the Hometown Heroes who responded to Sandy suffered damage, some of it severe, to their own homes.

It was an unprecedented storm and a Herculean response on the part of the National Guard. Although we can all be proud of the sacrifices and successes of our Soldiers and Airmen during Sandy, it didn’t happen by accident.

It involved planning, including the establishment of a Contingency Dual Status Command that allowed Active Duty military forces and equipment
for the training of units; procurement of organizational equipment, supplies, and repair parts; services, including equipment maintenance; and activities in connection with military support to civil authorities.

This reduction impacts the funding needed to train Soldiers in their military jobs and could lower New Jersey’s high qualification readiness status, which stands at 94 percent. Other cascading effects of the loss of this money include shortages of ammunition and reduced use of vehicles.

A $400,000 cut – or 20 percent – of the Army Guard’s recruiting and retention budget means the loss of nine civilian contractors who handle marketing and other administrative duties and the reassignment of field recruiters to handle those tasks. National Guard leaders are working to ensure that the state remains at 100 percent strength to retain the current force structure.

The New Jersey Air National Guard faces a 10 percent cut in O&M funding – from $100 million to $90 million – in FY 2013.

The Army National Guard faces a 16.1 percent reduction, or $12.1 million loss in non-exempt Operation and Maintenance (O&M) discretionary funding from FY 2012 to FY 2013. That’s the appropriation that pays to join the National Guard Task Force under Governor Christie’s control.

The New Jersey National Guard’s robust response to Sandy hinged upon having a well-equipped force that stands at full strength and is filled with Airmen and Soldiers who are trained in their military jobs.

The federal defense FY 2013 budget reductions created by Sequestration will challenge the National Guard’s ability to train and equip its forces and maintain its status as one of only a handful of states at 100 percent strength.
Flying hours for the 108th Wing – which is responsible for critical overseas refueling missions – and the 177th Fighter Wing – which flies Homeland Defense missions – may be reduced. As flying hours are reduced, pilot and crew proficiency may drop below the minimum requirements.

The cuts may impact the Air Guard’s ground operations as well.

The furloughs of secure communications experts will challenge the Command Post’s ability to communicate to support the 24/7 nature of the Alert Mission.

In addition to the loss of O&M funds, both the Army and Air National Guard will be challenged to manage full-time staffing with the furlough of nearly 1,000 uniformed military technicians.

The furloughs will lead to nearly 110,000 fewer work hours and the loss of nearly $5 million in wages.

The Department is taking every possible step to mitigate the loss of funds and maintain the readiness of the force.

And even after the cuts, the New Jersey National Guard remains a vital part of the Garden State economy.

The Department accounts for 1,800 full-time federal jobs through its full-time Military Support Force. The payroll will exceed $152 million, even after the cuts created by sequestration. An additional $75 million flows into the state’s economy through the pay earned by the state’s Citizen Soldiers and Citizen Airmen.

Between federal entitlements to New Jersey Veterans, direct federal support to the National Guard, military construction projects at National Guard facilities, federal money for VA construction funds at state facilities and other direct federal support of state programs through the Department, the total economic impact tops $1 billion. Put another way, for every dollar the state General Fund sends DMAVA, the Department returns more than $20 to the Garden State economy.

More than $100 million in federal dollars will flow to New Jersey to help the National Guard rebuild critical structures damaged by Sandy and build new structures that will enhance the level of preparedness. All of these
federal projects will create jobs for New Jerseyans.

The Department’s anticipated FEMA claim for the operational costs of Army and Air National Guard support for Super Storm Sandy totals nearly $8-million. The Department expects to receive FEMA reimbursement for 75 percent of those costs.

The Disaster Relief Appropriations Act of 2013 includes $24.2 million for military construction projects in New Jersey to replace facilities at the National Guard Training Center in Sea Girt damaged by Super Storm Sandy. Projects at Sea Girt include $5.2 million for cadre and instruction building, $5 million for a medical clinic and $3.5 million for a field maintenance shop. An additional construction project to rebuild the National Guard Militia Museum at Sea Girt is also under Department of Defense consideration.

The Disaster Relief Act also included $2.5 million in O&M funds to repair other Army National Guard facilities damaged by the storm. The New Jersey Air Guard received $4.9 million in additional O&M funding from the disaster appropriation bill of 2013 to perform roof repairs to buildings at Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst and at the 177th Fighter Wing in Egg Harbor Township.

One of the most significant new projects is a state-of-the art Army National Guard Aviation maintenance facility on Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst. Ground was broken in February on the $49 million project that will provide a 130,000 square-foot state-of-the-art aviation maintenance facility for the 150th Aviation Battalion and its fleet of UH-60 Blackhawks. The facility, which will be funded entirely with federal money, is scheduled for completion in September 2014.

Another major project will be the construction of a $34 million Regional Training Institute at the National Guard Training Center in Sea Girt. The 86,000 square-foot center will include an administration and classroom building and a student housing building. The additional space will enable the 254th Training Regiment, which is one of the premiere Army National Guard training units in the Northeastern United States, to expand its military training and leadership opportunities for Soldiers from around the region.

This leveraging of federal dollars to fund new projects and efforts to maximize income through federal reimbursement is a theme you will see across nearly every aspect of DMAVA’s operations.

Our commitment to fulfilling our core missions in the most efficient manner possible can be seen in the numbers. The Department’s proposed $94 million budget for Fiscal Year 2014 is a $197,000 reduction from the 2013 adjusted appropriation.

The Department has achieved these reductions by
increasing the number of federally-funded positions and through a workforce realignment that seeks to maximize workforce efficiencies without a reduction in services provided.

One of the hallmarks of the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs is its ability to form partnerships that allow it to maximize resources to accomplish its core missions.

For example, the strong relationship DMAVA maintains with Veterans organizations has led to these groups logging tens of thousands of volunteer hours at the department’s three Veterans Memorial Homes in Paramus, Menlo Park and Vineland. These volunteers have done everything from organizing bus trips to running bingo games to just being there to lend an ear to a fellow veteran.

While the veteran-to-veteran connection is priceless, these volunteers have saved more than 70,000 hours of staff manpower for a savings of $1.8 million in salaries. On top of that, these volunteers have also donated more than $410,000 in goods to the Homes and their residents, from radios to furniture to personal care items and durable medical care equipment.

Volunteers are truly a force multiplier for our organization.

The Department of Military and Veterans Affairs continues to be a leader among government agencies in the use of alternative energy to reduce costs and create a healthier planet.

Six current solar projects at facilities across the state will allow DMAVA to avoid approximately $250,000 in utility costs this year alone. Three more federally-funded projects are expected to be completed in the next year, raising the annual cost avoidance to nearly $400,000 – or $4 million over the next decade.

The Department of Military and Veterans Affairs is entrusted with caring for the state’s Veterans from the time they leave military service until the day they die.

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The Department’s network of 17 Veteran Service Officers are a major reason why federal VA benefits to New Jersey’s veterans rose 130 percent from FY 2002 to FY 2012. The total amount in compensation, including pensions, disability payments and education benefits rose from $42 million in 2002 to $97 million last year. It’s an increase made even more impressive by the fact that this took place over a decade when the state’s Veterans population, now at 441,000 fell by more than a quarter due to the loss of members of the World War II generation. The increase was made possible by DMAVA’s determined emphasis on expert training of the Veterans Service Officers to strengthen their outreach efforts and skills to bring the maximum amount of benefits to the greatest number of Veterans and their families.

In addition to bringing federal money directly to New Jersey’s Veterans, DMAVA continues to leverage federal dollars to enhance the services it provides directly.

Most recently, DMAVA received a $10.8 million grant from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs National Cemetery Administration in November 2012 to support the planned expansion of the Brig-
This grant will fund the “Section Z” crypt field and columbarium projects. This expansion will add 10,750 double-casket crypts for the field and 4,800 niches for the columbarium. The project, expected for completion around the end of this year will further enhance the appearance of one of the most beautiful veterans cemeteries in the nation.

The grant will also extend the life of the cemetery, which is also the busiest state-run veterans cemetery in the nation. The DMAVA cemetery staff conducted a record 3,112 burials for veterans and their spouses in 2012.

An influx of federal dollars over the past several years has also helped DMAVA address the needs of one of our most vulnerable population of Veterans – the homeless. Although no one who has ever served our nation should ever be without shelter, it is an unfortunate reality. In New Jersey, an estimated 5,000 to 6,000 Veterans are homeless on any given day. To address this need, DMAVA has taken aggressive steps over the past two years by nearly tripling the services provided to homeless Veterans through its time-tested transitional housing programs.

The number of beds at the Department’s long-running facility, Vet Haven South in Winslow Township, Gloucester County, doubled to 99 last year through a $5.9 million expansion partially funded by the VA. In September, operations began at Vet Haven North in Glen Gardner, Hunterdon County, and the facility is helping
is to prepare cadets for the GED exam and raise math and reading scores a minimum of two grade levels. The program has a return on investment unmatched among organizations that assist at-risk-youth. Four in five high school dropouts who enroll in Youth ChalleNGe earn a high school diploma and are prepared for the job market, or military service or to continue their education.

Since 2008, there have been 991 Youth ChalleNGe graduates and 79 percent earned their high school diploma. Upon graduation, 240 went on to continue their education, 162 entered the workforce and 26 joined the military. Those classes of Youth ChalleNGe cadets provided 64,926 hours of community service for government agencies and nonprofit organizations ranging from New Jersey Forestry Services to Monmouth Battlefield State Park to the New Jersey Community Food Bank of South Jersey. The monetary value of the services they provided was more than $450,000.

Over the past five years, the federal share of the costs to run Youth ChalleNGe has increased from 60 percent to 75 percent. In FY 2012, federal funding for Youth ChalleNGe was $3.5 million and the state share was $1.1 million.

It is incumbent upon the Department of Military and Veterans’ Affairs to ensure that as our National Guard members mobilize, deploy, demobilize and transition back to civilian life, their needs and the needs of their families continue to be addressed.

Through National Guard funding, we operate a statewide network of Family Assistance Centers. These centers support the families of deployed Soldiers and Airmen during unforeseen emergencies and financial hardships. Staff at the centers work in tandem with the dedicated volunteers at the 34 unit-affiliated Family Readiness Groups across the state. Our dedicated team of chaplains lends additional support.
The crown jewel of this effort is the on-site “Seven Seals” Joint Military and Family Assistance Center at the Bordentown Armory to serve military members from all the Reserve Components and their families from across the state. The program helps deployed troops make the transition from Soldier to Citizen. DMA V A secured $3 million in federal money to launch this effort. Those funds will also pay to operate the local family assistance center, which helps Soldiers and their families with deployment-related issues. The federal money paid for an interior renovation of the Bordentown Armory to create a new home for both programs, which launched earlier this year. Earlier this year, the Seven Seals center hosted a jobs fair for returning troops as part of an ongoing Department effort to lower New Jersey’s veterans’ unemployment rate. Another aspect of this effort has been to partner with the state Department of Labor and State Department of Education.

The Soldiers and Airmen returning now are the focus of one of the most comprehensive efforts ever undertaken to support troops as they make the transition from warrior back to parent, spouse, student, employee and member of their community.

From the moment they step off the plane from a deployment, Soldiers and Airmen are the focus of a reconstitution process designed to reconnect them with their families, smooth the return to their civilian jobs, address any financial concerns that have arisen during their absence, educate them about the benefits to which they are now entitled, and ensure that their physical, mental and spiritual needs are being met.

The National Guard Bureau has recognized DMA V A’s effort to assist Soldiers and Airmen transition to federal mobilization to traditional service as one of the nation’s “best practices.”

Following the initial reconstitution process, Guard members participate in the Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program to address their needs at 30-, 60- and 90-day intervals. We recognize that the mental health of our returning heroes is paramount. In the first three months after their return, they are screened no less than three times for post-traumatic stress disorder, traumatic brain injuries and any other mental health or emotional issues.

A major focus of re-integration over the past year has been to ensure that deployed Soldiers and Airmen are able to rejoin the civilian job market. To that end, DMA V A has partnered with the New Jersey Employer Support for the Guard and Reserve to assist Veterans at job fairs across the state.

DMA V A continues to see a substantial increase in

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**Images:**
- The Soldiers of the 119th Combat Sustainment Support Battalion, became the first full unit to be reconstituted through the newly developed New Jersey National Guard Family Assistance Center in Bordentown, N.J., Jan. 11, 2012. The centrally located facility is designed as a one-stop location by maximizing personnel, resources and funding by establishing a combined military and family readiness center capable of providing full-spectrum assistance to servicemembers and their families. (NJDMAVA photo by Mark C. Olsen)

- A recently returned Soldier makes contact with a potential employer at a Job Fair at the New Jersey National Guard Family Assistance Center in Bordentown, N.J. March 9, 2012. (NJDMAVA photo by Mark C. Olsen)

- Sgt. 1st Class Victor M. Lopez waves as Soldiers of the 117th Combat Sustainment Support Battalion, New Jersey Army National Guard, were welcomed home by family, friends and New Jersey National Guard leadership from a nearly year-long deployment to Afghanistan in support of Operation Enduring Freedom at the Armory at West Trenton, N.J., Jan. 20, 2013. (Air National Guard photo by Master Sgt. Mark C. Olsen)
the number of Veterans seeking treatment for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Over the past three years, the demand for PTSD counseling has increased by 15 percent, with 18,845 sessions in FY 2012.

I am proud to report that New Jersey is committed to providing them a helping hand and remains one of only seven states that provides additional mental health services for its veterans and is the only state to assist their families as well. A cornerstone of this effort is our toll free, 24-hour Veterans Helpline. The Helpline has offered a lifeline to service members returning from Iraq and Afghanistan as well as those suffering ill effects from service in earlier conflicts. Calls to the Helpline continue to increase, each year, with one of the largest increases from FY 2011 to FY 2012, when 3,386 calls were logged, a 54 percent increase from the year before.

Although the DMAVA faces challenges brought on by sequestration, we are an organization that has shown an ability to rise to challenges. This will be no different. The Department will never lose sight of our core missions: Fielding and equipping highly-trained military forces that are prepared to defend the Homeland and our national interests and supporting the Veterans of New Jersey and their families.

Thank you for the opportunity to make this presentation before your distinguished committee. My staff and I will be happy to answer any of your questions.

Hiring our Heroes, a job fair sponsored by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and geared toward hiring United States military veterans and their family members, was held at the Sun National Bank Center in Trenton, N.J., Sept. 12, 2012. More than 130 companies participated in the event. (NJDMAVA photo by Mark C. Olsen)

Sgt. 1st Class Darrin Turner, center, New Jersey Army National Guard, and 1st Lt. Ergent Gremi, Albanian Army, observe Artillery Coy 4/2/111th Capital Division, Afghan National Army, as they conduct crew drills on a Russian made D-30 artillery weapon system. The training is part of a nine-week program for both Afghan field artillery Coys, who fall under the 111th Capital Division. (Army National Guard photo/Released)