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OUR NATIONAL GUARD-A GLOBAL NEIGHBOR

Our Mississippians in uniform serve in locations throughout the world. In the past year, members of the Mississippi Army and Air National Guard served in Kuwait, Korea, Central and South America, Bosnia, Germany and other parts of Europe. Their dedication to our great nation and the state of Mississippi is evidenced by their service overseas and here at home.

These Guard men and women are our neighbors in communities throughout the state. They come from all walks of life--doctors, lawyers, mechanics, police officers and many other occupations. What sets them apart from others is their commitment to our nation's defense, their willingness to wear the uniform and serve.

But the Guard goes beyond just being a good neighbor at home. The Mississippi National Guard has now become a global partner with the South American country of Bolivia. Under the State Partnership Program, an initiative sponsored by the National Guard Bureau in Washington, Mississippi has joined 30 other states that have entered into partnerships with various countries in Europe and Latin America.

The goal of the program is to demonstrate, through the example of the citizen-soldier, the role of the military in a democratic society. An organized military under civilian leadership is part of the core of our democracy, and the partnership program is designed to emphasize that philosophy. The program also allows the Mississippi Guard to provide assistance to the Bolivian military in the form of military education such as leadership skills and professional development.

One unique aspect of the State Partnership Program is that other state agencies in Mississippi have the opportunity to become involved. Many Latin American countries, including Bolivia, are ravaged each year by natural disasters such as tropical storms and floods. I can think of no better agency than the Mississippi Emergency Management Agency (MEMA) to provide assistance to Bolivia in the organization of their national civil defense. As the Guard assists MEMA during state emergencies here in Mississippi, so could the Bolivian military during emergencies in that country. Through information exchanges from MEMA and other state agencies, Mississippi can create a lasting impact in a country that sincerely desires such assistance.

Major General James H Lipscomb III, the Adjutant General of Mississippi, will lead a delegation to South America next week to visit Bolivian government and military officials. His staff, along with representatives from the Mississippi Emergency Management Agency and the Mississippi Development Authority, will have a great opportunity to strengthen the relationship with Bolivia and Mississippi, and to continue to help build the democratic foundation in that part of the world.

My congratulations to Gen. Lipscomb and all members of the Mississippi National Guard. While you continue to serve our state and nation, you are also true ambassadors for the state of Mississippi. We are fortunate to have you as neighbors here at home and abroad.