

Nat'l Guard honors Duckwork; former Tuscolian keynotes

SPRINGFIELD, Illinois – The National Guard Association of Illinois honored U.S. Senator Tammy Duckworth as the NGAI Legislator of the Year during its annual banquet and awards ceremony at the Wyncham Springfield City Centre, Springfield, Illinois, May 20.

"I'm so honored to receive this award from an association that has meant so much to me since I joined the Illinois National Guard so many years ago," Duckworth said via a pre-recorded message. "As your senator, I work hard to make sure our service members, veterans and families have the support they deserve."

Duckworth, who serves on the Senate Armed Services Committee and is the chairman of the Airland sub-committee, said she is proud some of her provisions were included in the 2022 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA).

"One of the provisions included requires the Air Force to maintain a sufficient fleet of C-130s to ensure there is inventory to carry out critical missions both domestically and overseas," Duckworth said. "This will ensure the 182nd Airlift Wing's, based in Peoria, mission will remain for years to come. It also means that our National Guard units across the country, in Illinois and in Peoria have the ability to re-

spond to new emergencies and domestic missions."

She said this will also protect the jobs of 1,250 Airmen and approximately 370 full-time employees in Illinois.

Another provision included in the NDAA addresses the scourge of military hunger among service members.

"As someone whose family relied on public nutrition programs after my father lost his job and who served in uniform most of my adult life, I'm so glad we're working on policies so our service members and families have enough to eat," she said. "But our work is not done. I'm working with the leaders of the Illinois National Guard on further improvements."

Duckworth, the first female double amputee of Operation Iraqi Freedom, thanked the members of the Illinois National Guard for the great work they have done in supporting and defending the citizens of this country around the world and within the state of Illinois.

"For the past two years, the Illinois National Guard has been at the forefront of responding to calls for assistance from the state of Illinois to support the COVID-19 response efforts," said Duckworth, who retired as a lieutenant colonel in the Illinois Army National Guard. "Deployments continue around the world and the Sol-

diers and Airmen of the Illinois National Guard have responded and performed with professionalism."

Duckworth said with the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the role of the ILNG remains critical for the region.

"The State Partnership Program with Poland has been a success for decades," she said. "It is even more important for the region now that Putin is threatening the region."

Maj. Gen. Rich Neely, the Adjutant General of Illinois and Commander of the Illinois National Guard said Duckworth's work as a U.S. Senator supporting service members, veterans and families is the reason she was selected as the NGAI Legislator of the Year.

"She gets it. She has worn the same uniform as we do. She has served in the same formations," Neely said. "It makes my job as TAG a lot easier when I walk in a room and explain our issues at hand to someone who has worn the uniform."

The NGAI also announced Erin Nilles as a recipient of a \$2,500 scholarship. Nilles, daughter of Illinois Air National Guard Master Sgt. Joshua Nilles and his wife, Marcella, of Venedy, Illinois, will attend Southern Illinois University-Carbondale and major in dental hygiene. Nilles is a technician with the 126th Maintenance Group at Scott Air Force Base.

"Thank you for this scholarship," Nilles said. "This will help me on my path to become a dental hygienist."

Former U.S. Congressman and retired major general William L. Enyart, a former Tuscola resident who served as the 37th Adjutant General of Illinois, delivered the keynote address.

"Senator Duckworth wanted me to express to you the very great honor she feels being named the NGAI Legislator of the Year," Enyart said. "Having one of our own serving on the Senate Armed Services Committee is of critical importance to us. Her selection is a well-earned honor for her. She is truly an advocate for the National Guard, Illinois and national security."

Enyart talked about the connection between the Illinois National Guard and the Ukrainian military. "There has been mention of the Illinois National Guard training the Ukrainian military recently and maybe a word or two about the California National Guard training the Ukrainian military. But we were there at the beginning," he said. "The Illinois National Guard's support to Ukraine begin in the last century when we sent a platoon size element to Ukraine in 1999. That was our beginning with Ukraine."

Enyart explained that the State Partnership Program

with Ukraine's neighboring country Poland began in 1993 and at times supported Ukraine and assisted the California National Guard with their SPP with Ukraine.

"With our training and assistance, Poland and Ukraine in the late 1990s formed the Polish Ukrainian Peace Force Battalion," Enyart said. "Those same units saw service in Kosovo with Soldiers from the Illinois Army National Guard's 106th Aviation Regiment in 2008-2009."

Enyart said the Ukrainian Soldiers and officers were becoming well acquainted with the Illinois National Guard by that time.

"When I visited the Illinois National Guard Soldiers in November 2008 in Kosovo, it was the Polish and Ukrainian Soldiers who took me on patrol in a 12 inch snowstorm," he said. "Even before the 2008 deployment, the Illinois National Guard sent battalion size units to NATO Peace Shield exercises in Yavoriv, Ukraine in 2000 and 2001. Yes, Yavoriv, the same city which was hit recently by Russian cruise missiles."

Enyart stressed the training assistance did not end in 2001. "In 2005, we sent an element to act as observers and controllers for NATO war games that took place at the then-new Ukrainian War College," he said. "It was a chal-

lenge in the early days."

He told the audience the Soldiers from Headquarters Headquarters Company, 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team, which deployed to Ukraine in 2020 continued to build on the foundation the ILNG has laid for the past 23 years.

"The Pentagon thought Putin's grand land grab would succeed in very short order and most believed Ukrainian's military would collapse under an armored assault," he said. "But Ukrainians have shown what well-trained and well-led Soldiers can do in defending their homeland from an autocratic aggressor."

Enyart said the training, mentoring and fellowship the Illinois National Guard has provided the Ukrainian military has played a critical role in the successful defense of their homeland.

"This story is like a lot of untold stories. Few may know what we did, but we know," Enyart said. "You do the things that you do every day. Guardsmen do those not for fame but for pride. Pride in defending freedom and democracy, pride in protecting our neighbors from flood, fire and hurricane, and pride in knowing we are always ready, always there. Thank you for the untold story that we in the Illinois National Guard live every day."

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