

BY GARY CLARK

DOUBLE DUTY

Legislators who also serve in the military often find a new way of looking at representative democracy.

For South Carolina Representative James E. Smith Jr., service to his country took on additional meaning after Sept. 11, 2001.

Smith, who had been a state legislator and military lawyer, visited Ground Zero in New York and was so moved by what he saw that he resigned his officer's commission several years later and joined the infantry—at age 37. He eventually served in remote areas of Afghanistan training local anti-terrorist police.

For Illinois Representative Jim Watson, service to country also took an extraordinary turn. After serving in the U.S. Marines from 1985 to 1991, Watson re-enlisted in 2007, paid his own way to train with a Marine reserve unit, and eventually found himself advising the Al-Anbar Provincial Council in Iraq about democracy and proper legislative procedures.

“To see what they went through to build some type of democracy changed my opinion” about legislative service, Watson says. “It made you value it a lot more.”

Smith, whose family has a long history of military service, agrees. “My colleagues see there are some changes” in his approach to politics in the South Carolina legislature. “I don't sweat the small stuff as much as I used to.”

Smith and Watson are among a small group of state legislators who also serve in their state's National Guard or Reserve units. And a number of them have served in Iraq or Afghanistan.

A series of annual surveys taken by Hawaii Representative K. Mark Takai since 2006 have attempted to quantify these lawmaker-soldiers. Takai's latest survey, released in August 2008, found 73 state legislators who also serve in Reserve or National Guard units, with 35 having been deployed to another country.

The dual public service roles played by these legislators, in some cases, have had a profound impact on them personally, and on their views of both military and legislative service. Others see their military service as another civic duty and an important part of their lives.

Gary Clark has been a newspaper reporter and editor for more than 35 years. He served in the Marine Corps in Vietnam in 1968-69.



Captain James Smith, a member of the South Carolina House, stands with one of the Afghan policemen he trained during his deployment.

For Missouri Representative Jason Brown, the risks of dual service were made crystal clear in October 2006 when he was shot in the lung while on patrol near Baghdad. After a brief convalescence in Missouri, he returned to Iraq to complete his military deployment. The lawmaker still serves in the Missouri legislature.

Colorado Representative Joe Rice, a 42-year-old who joined the military at 17 and was deployed to Iraq for the fourth time this past summer, says his military service has helped him as a legislator.

“You certainly keep things in better per-

spective,” he says.

Takai, who was deployed this past summer as base operations officer for Camp Patriot in Kuwait, said legislators who also serve in the military see things from a different perspective.

“We are advocates,” Takai says. “We're advocates for the military and, more important, for the families of those who are serving in harm's way.”

'A PROFOUND IMPACT'

Takai's survey determined that 36 legislatures have at least one member in the mili-

LAWMAKERS AND MILITARY RULES

Hawaii Representative K. Mark Takai, in his latest survey of state legislators who also serve in the military, noted that there are no federal laws prohibiting state lawmakers from serving on active duty with the military, but there are rules dealing with what official actions lawmakers can perform while on active duty.

The Department of Defense early last year amended rules covering reserve military personnel and whether they can serve as elected officials while under military deployment. The new directive prohibits a full-time military service member on active duty from holding or exercising functions of state office.

But members of the reserve who are deployed for less than 270 days are allowed to hold and exercise civic functions as long as there is no interference with their military duties.

For those called to active duty for more than 270 days, members can hold a civil office, but cannot exercise the functions of a civil office.

Takai's surveys, conducted with assistance from the National Conference of State Legislatures, led to the creation of the National Network of Legislators in the Military, which Takai chairs.

The purpose of the network is to provide information and guidance to lawmakers who will be activated or deployed, to share "best practices" and model legislation, and to provide an opportunity for organizations supporting the military to work with the network's members.

This year's survey has been completed and will be published later in the year when Takai returns from Kuwait.

tary, and 28 legislators had been activated for long-term duty, considered more than 139 days. Of the 73 legislators serving in the military in 2008, 46 were Republicans and 27 were Democrats.

"There's urgency on the part of my colleagues who serve in the military to provide as much as we can," Takai says.

For Smith, that urgency kicked in after his visit to Ground Zero. "It had a profound impact on me," he says.

He and his family talked about it often in the following years. "I prayed about it a lot," Smith says.

He decided his service as a military lawyer wasn't enough. His prayers eventually led him down a different path. "We decided I could better serve in the infantry," he says.

A four-star general told Smith that the process required him to resign his officer's commission and take basic infantry training. In May 2007, Smith, by then a captain, was deployed to Afghanistan for a year as part of a team that advised and trained Afghan police in remote areas of the country.

"We were the first mentor team to do that," Smith says.

"We made great friends. We had phenomenal experiences," he adds. "I lived and slept with them every day. The relationships we built with them were very, very important. I wanted them to know me mainly as a father

and husband—as they were."

Smith became very close to one of his interpreters, and still talks to him by phone occasionally.

"He'd take a bullet for me," Smith says.

Smith also found that his colleagues back in the South Carolina legislature were very supportive. They passed a rule that allowed him to vote by proxy, although his vote could be discounted if it would determine the ultimate outcome of a bill.

"I would regularly call in," he says.

TEACHING DEMOCRACY

Watson, a Republican, had similar experiences with colleagues in the Illinois General Assembly while he was deployed to Iraq in 2007 and 2008.

While he was accused by an opponent of abandoning his district, other colleagues helped.

"I had Democrats who toured my district and held office hours" while he was away, he says. Another colleague toured his district when it was hit by flooding and offered to help residents.

Watson served in the Marines from 1985-1991, including in Operation Desert Storm, but later decided he wanted to join up again.

"It took about a year to get back in," Watson says. "My unit was in California, and I paid my way to get there for drills."

He landed a spot in a civil affairs unit. "It was a good fit," he says.

"I knew what I could do, and bring to the table. And I knew what needed to be done there."

Staff Sergeant Watson became the chief liaison to the Al-Anbar Provincial Council in one of the most violent areas of Iraq. The provincial council often met in Baghdad because of the security situation in the province.

Members of the council initially had no idea what democracy was. The council didn't have bylaws, didn't take attendance and didn't record votes. "They were Sunnis to begin with, and they felt the central government, which was dominated by Shiites, hated them."

Being a legislator helped. "It gave me more credibility," he says. "The fact that I was a legislator who took time off, they wondered why in the world I would do that."

Despite the difficulties and dangers in Iraq, Watson said Illinois politics is hardball, with loads of partisanship, wheeling and dealing and, of course, the scandal that led to the removal in January of former Governor Rod Blagojevich.

"It's one thing to be part of a focused unit with a mission. Then, to come back here and see this element of chaos—it's been a challenge," he says.

But the experience in Iraq has helped him in the legislature, he says.

"It made me better. It made me respect others," Watson says. "I guess I'm less inclined to play those [partisan] games. I'm more likely to say the answer is in between. Some people in my party get a little upset about that."

FOUR TOURS IN IRAQ

Rice, from Colorado, has been deployed to Bosnia once and four times to Iraq, including this past summer. He was chief of public affairs for the Multi-National Security Transition Command-Iraq, and spent most of his time preparing Iraqis for the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Iraqi cities.

"Most of us have been here before," Rice says. "Things always change, but this is my fourth time in Baghdad. My ramp-up time did not have to be extensive."

Rice is proud that his four tours to Iraq have allowed him to make friends and contacts there, which has helped the Denver region, through Sister Cities International, to

LAWMAKERS IN THE MILITARY



REPRESENTATIVE
JAMES E. SMITH JR.
SOUTH CAROLINA

Age: 42

Legislative career: Smith has been in the House since 1996. A lawyer, Smith serves on the Judiciary Committee. He has served as assistant minority leader, chief minority whip and minority leader.

Military career: He served eight years as a JAG officer in the South Carolina Army National Guard, then resigned and re-enlisted to pursue a career as an infantry officer. He is currently a captain. Smith served in Afghanistan from May 2007 until May 2008. He was chief of a small combat adviser team that trained local police forces in remote areas in the southern part of the country.

Personal: Smith and his wife, Kirkland, have four children.



REPRESENTATIVE
JIM WATSON
ILLINOIS

Age: 44

Legislative career: Watson is serving his fourth term in the legislature and is a member of the Veterans Affairs Committee. He is one of only a few Republicans to chair

a House committee, the Access to Federal Funds Committee, which oversees the state's use of federal stimulus funds. Watson has taught high school and college, and has 10 years of business experience.

Military career: He is a former member of the U.S. Marine Corps and Marine Corps Reserve, serving from 1985 to 1991, and again from 2007-2008. He is currently a member of the Individual Ready Reserve. Watson is a veteran of the first Gulf War and, as a staff sergeant, was deployed to Iraq in 2007 and 2008 as a member of the 1st Marine Expeditionary Force's Governance Cell.

Personal life: Watson is the father of three children. He and his wife, Lisa, live in Jacksonville.



REPRESENTATIVE
K. MARK TAKAI
HAWAII

Age: 42

Legislative career: Takai is in his eighth term and is coordinator of the Hawaii Legislature's Military Appreciation Package, a group of laws that provide tuition and other assistance to those serving in the military. Takai is a member of the Committee on Education and the Committee on Higher Education. He also served as vice speaker of the House in 2005 and 2006. Takai has a master's degree in public health.

Military career: He was commissioned a lieutenant in the Hawaii National Guard in 1999. He was activated for six months in

2005, but remained in Hawaii as the Army National Guard Deputy State Surgeon. Takai is a major and was deployed this year from February to August, serving as base operations officer at Camp Patriot in Kuwait. Takai is also chairman of the National Network of Legislators in the Military, and has been coordinator since 2004 of the Hawaii Medal of Honor, an award given to the families of those with Hawaii connections who were killed in action during Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom.

Personal life: Takai and his wife, Sami, have two children.



REPRESENTATIVE
JOE RICE
COLORADO

Age: 42

Legislative career: Rice is in his second term and is chairman of the Business Affairs and Labor Committee and a member of the Committee on Job Creation and Economic Growth. He is a business consultant and a board member of Sister Cities International.

Military career: Rice has served in the military since the age of 17, most recently as a colonel in the Army Reserve. He has been deployed to Bosnia once and to Iraq four times, most recently this summer for a six-month tour as a civil affairs officer stationed in Baghdad, providing information to Iraqi media and officials about the June 30 withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraq cities.

Personal life: Rice and his wife, Kendall, have three children.

participate in a dozen cultural exchanges.

But the pressure of repeated deployments can be tough on individuals, their families, and the jobs and friends they leave behind.

Although Rice's three kids are still fairly young, he admits that deployments were tougher as his children got older. He also acknowledged the sacrifice of those who fought in earlier conflicts where deployments lasted for years.

"Every generation has its challenges, and

this is ours," he says.

Takai's survey found nine legislators among the 73 serving in the military who had been deployed more than once during their legislative careers. John Boccieri, a former Ohio lawmaker who is now a congressman, was deployed five times, as was Rice.

Takai said he truly believes that those serving in the military are working toward peace.

"I really believe that world peace will not be accomplished without peace in the Mid-

dle East," Takai says. "And I believe we are working toward that peace. I believe we play a significant role in sharing with our Arab friends what we and the United States are all about."

Rice agrees. "You are able to do something that matters and, hopefully, in a good way." ■

CHECK OUT the military regulations governing elected officials in uniform at www.ncsl.org/magazine.