



**‘If Congress can’t cut \$80 million for race drivers and bass fishing how is it ever going to make the really tough cuts?’**

**R**EP. BETTY MCCOLLUM, D-Minn., says she doesn’t hate NASCAR and Indy racing. And her record in Congress indicates that she is a strong supporter of the military, especially the National Guard.

But she is fundamentally opposed to the latter paying the former for promotion, even as the Army Guard has enjoyed some of its best recruiting years in history while associated with American motorsports’ most popular driver, Dale Earnhardt Jr.

McCollum and Rep. Jack Kingston, R-Ga., sponsored an amendment to the fiscal 2013 defense authorization bill in July that would have removed all funds for professional sports sponsorships.

NGAUS opposed the amendment (sidebar, page 42) and found enough like-minded members of the House to defeat the measure.

But the vote was close, and McCollum has vowed to bring up the matter next year.

The issue is complex. Paying professional athletes million of dollars to promote the National Guard brand runs counter to traditional recruiting methods.

Guard marketing experts believe the approach starts the conversation with potential recruits. They point to recent recruiting numbers as evidence; McCollum wants more definitive proof, which is hard to come by.

She got with National Guard to answer a few questions on the matter. Her answers suggest this issue is nowhere near the finish line.

**Why are you adamantly opposed to the military sponsoring professional sports as a part of its efforts to attract potential recruits?**

Our country is facing a fiscal crisis with the federal government \$1 trillion in the hole this year alone. It is time to cut programs that don’t work, are too expensive or are a luxury in a time of tough choices and deep cuts. I can’t justify cutting poor kids off of the school lunch program, but then using tax dollars to pay a race driver \$26 million as a so-called recruitment tool. It’s a terrible use of tax dollars.

**You often cite the figures an officer at the National Guard Bureau provided a USA Today reporter back in May. The information does seem to bolster your case, but NGAUS and other organizations say the numbers are, at best, incomplete. Furthermore, they say, a better yardstick is to compare the difficulty the Army Guard had filling its ranks before it got into sponsoring motorsports in a big way and to its recruiting success in the years afterwards. What is your response to these arguments?**

The National Guard spokesperson stated that a \$26 million contract with a NASCAR racing team resulted in zero recruits. The U.S. Army announced it is dropping out of NASCAR because it is not an effective recruiting tool. Furthermore, the Pentagon is downsizing force size and facing deep budget cuts—\$500 billion over the next 10 years. Why is the

# Member, House Appropriations and Budget Committees

National Guard spending \$50 million a year in taxpayer funds—much of it borrowed from China—on racing teams and bass fishing tournaments? In my opinion this is an example of misplaced priorities and wasteful government spending.

**During floor debate in July, some of your House colleagues accused you and Representative Kingston of trying to “micro-manage” military recruiting. The Guard, especially, has been very successful in its recruiting the last few years. Why not just let Guard marketing experts continue to spend their limited resources as they deem appropriate?**

The Pentagon spends more than \$80 million a year on professional sports sponsorships for racing teams, bass fishing, ultimate fighting and other sports. I found it ironic and more than a little hypocritical to have Tea Party Republicans, who claim to be fiscally conservative, say that trying to save taxpayers \$80 million is “micro-managing.” When I can save a wasted tax dollar or re-invest it in a program with a proven return, that’s not micro-managing, that’s doing my job. The Pentagon has a \$600 billion budget that’s going to face tough cuts. If Congress can’t cut \$80 million for race drivers and bass fishing, how is it ever going to make the really tough cuts?

**The Guard is an all-volunteer force. It has to recruit. Its small budget eliminates television as an option. You have a background in retail sales. Where would you suggest the Guard puts its recruiting dollars?**

The most disturbing part of this entire debate is the desire to protect the National Guard’s NASCAR sponsorship or their bass fishing team while ignoring the crisis in military readiness we are facing. The Defense Department reports that 75 percent of all young people be-

tween the ages of 17 and 24 are unable to join the military because they either lack proper education, are physically unfit or have criminal records.

The response to this crisis is not to pay millions to put a sticker on a race car, but to get recruiters—proven, tested, honorable men and women—in front of young people who are our best, brightest and most interested in serving our nation. I can guarantee you, any American Legion baseball tournament, summer girls’ soccer league or 10K road race has a far higher percentage of potentially eligible recruits than the percentage sitting in the stands of a NASCAR race.

**What did you hear from your Guard constituents back in Minnesota on this issue?**

Here is one example, among hundreds, of citizen input via email: “Congresswoman, I totally agree with curtailing tax dollars for the NASCAR/NHRA. These fans are already patriots and have been forever. I served 31 years in the Army with 26 of those in the United States Army Recruiting Command. I know how to promote the Army in the civilian community and NASCAR is not it. These are wasted and I do mean wasted, dollars as far as sponsorship is concerned. NASCAR and NHRA sponsorship is nothing more than a playground for general officers and high-ranking civilians at the assistant secretary of the Army level.”

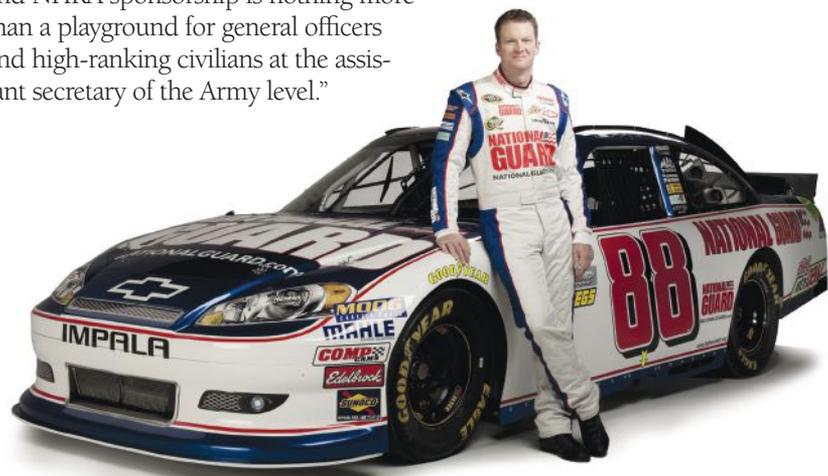
**Looking back, why do you think your opponents prevailed?**

We had over 200 members of Congress—Democrats and Republicans—voting to eliminate taxpayer-funded sponsorships of professional sports. I view that as a success. But I do hope voters this fall will ask members opposed to our amendment why they voted to cut cancer screenings for women or Meals on Wheels for seniors and instead protected millions in spending on race cars and bass fishing.

**What did you learn about the Guard during this process?**

The best recruitment the Guard can do is to continue to serve and perform on behalf of our communities and country with the high degree of professionalism, integrity and honor that have always been their hallmark. I am so honored to work closely with the Minnesota National Guard. Every member of the Guard is a recruiter, a role model and a living example of the citizen-soldier which makes all of us proud.

**Do you think you have gotten a bad rap during this debate? Put a**



**MEGASTAR** Dale Earnhardt Jr. drives the Army Guard-sponsored car in NASCAR’s Sprint Cup Series.

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# A Conversation with Rep. Betty McCollum, D-Minn.

## little differently, do you think your support of the Guard on other issues has gotten lost in the emotion of this issue?

No. Leadership is about making tough choices, particularly when we are facing such a difficult fiscal environment. In the grand scheme of things, this was a minor issue. We have National Guard members on deployment in harm's way and military families counting the days until their loved ones come home. They are the individuals and families I want to focus on.

## Do you plan to bring up pro-sports sponsorships next year?

The longer Congress procrastinates and fails to marshal the courage to make tough choices, the worse our

options will be. If the \$500 billion, 10-year cut to the Pentagon budget which is scheduled to take effect in the January 2013 sequester goes forward, I have a feeling the National Guard may eliminate this spending on its own. They will have to set priorities on what is the highest and best use of every tax dollar. I only wish they would start now.

## Is there any information or data that Guard officials could possibly provide that would change your view?

The National Guard had no data to provide. In an era of data-driven decision making, they are "driving blind" when it comes to spending \$26 million on NASCAR. That being said, if the private sector—like the multibil-

lion dollar defense companies—wanted to sponsor a military race team to promote military service and honor our veterans, I think it would be a terrific use of private dollars.

## Your reputation with the National Guard should not be defined by this issue. In what ways have you shown support for the Guard while in Congress?

As the daughter of a World War II disabled veteran, I am honored to work on behalf of those who have served our country. Throughout my time in Congress and the Minnesota State House, it has been a privilege to work with the Minnesota National Guard, its members, as well as members of other military branches and their families.

## Why NGAUS Supports Sports Sponsorships

By retired Maj. Gen. Gus L. Hargett Jr.

**F**IRST, I WANT to thank Rep. Betty McCollum, D-Minn., for taking the time to respond to our questions on this issue, and for the respect and high esteem she has for the National Guard.

NGAUS recognizes the need for tough decisions in this fiscal environment and understands that Congress is responsible for putting under the microscope any program using taxpayer money.

However, we must look at programs like the sponsorship of professional sports beyond solely the dollar amount to determine the true value of expenditure. We also need to consider the alternatives and the potential unintended consequences.

Recruiting for our all-volunteer force isn't what it used to be. We learned a few years ago that this generation doesn't respond to traditional recruiting methods. Even

television advertising—if the Guard could afford it—no longer carries the payoff it once did in reaching the most qualified potential recruits.

But the Guard has been successful in recent years meeting its targets for quality recruits. It uses sports because it knows there are limited dollars to meet its goals, and sports are the most cost-effective way to reach a large target audience.

There is probably not one recruit that enlisted solely because he or she saw National Guard on the side of a race car. But those words create impressions that start the conversation. And the results while the Guard has been associated with pro sports speak for themselves.

Had the Kingston-McCollum amendment been successful, odds are the Guard would have been constrained in its recruiting ability in the future.

Likewise, the Guard would have lost other value-added partnerships

that are an outgrowth of these sponsorships, such as important technology sharing, education opportunities, unemployment assistance, suicide prevention programs and even promotion of the patriotic spirit.

For instance, with the Guard facing unemployment rates as high as 20 percent, the value added by programs such as Panther Racing's Boss Lift and Hiring Our Heroes becomes even more valuable and beneficial.

Based solely on the respect Panther Racing has for the Guard, cultivated by the sponsorship, the company developed and expanded these programs to connect returning Guardsmen with employers and invite prospective employers to race sites so they could be informed about the challenges caused by military unemployment.

Ultimately, these sponsorships have become a positive reciprocal relationship providing serious bang

# Member, House Appropriations and Budget Committees

I serve on the Committee on Appropriations subcommittee on Military Construction, Veterans Affairs and Related Agencies, which is responsible for ensuring that the Department of Defense and the Department of Veterans Affairs are adequately funded. Although we have faced major budget pressures and the threat of a government shutdown, my subcommittee has remained dedicated to ensuring that our veterans, members of the military and the agencies that help them would not be affected.

Working with the entire Minnesota delegation, we resolved inequities relating to the Post Deployment/Mobilization Respite Absence Program, which ensures all service members returning from overseas, including the Minnesota National Guard's Red Bulls, receive the full benefits they were promised.

After more than 2,000 of Minnesota's soldiers had already been mobilized for war, the Department of Defense reduced the amount of leave that service members can receive under this program. I am an original co-sponsor of legislation, H.R. 4045, that rectifies this mistake by exempting service members, like the Red Bulls.

In addition to my legislative work, my St. Paul office has assisted many Minnesota members of the military and veterans to receive the resources and support they need. I remain dedicated to ensuring that our members of the military and veterans receive the benefits they deserve, such as job training, education benefits, housing assistance, mental health support and more.

Working in partnership with the Minnesota National Guard, we invested in vital infrastructure,

including the renovation of the East Side and Jackson Street armories, and development of the Arden Hills Army Training Site that are critical to building and maintaining a competent ready force.

Our nation is grateful for the continued service of our citizen-soldiers. Supporting our men and women in uniform means not only equipping our active-duty service members with the resources they need to return home safely, but also fulfilling America's responsibility to its veterans and their families.

Those who serve our country should not have to worry that our commitment to them will waver. From my position on the House appropriations committee, I look forward to continuing my advocacy on behalf of service members and their families. 🇺🇸

for the buck while educating the public on what the Guard does and the challenges Guardsmen face.

Why change something that has been a successful national platform?

The link between military recruiting and motorsports specifically is temporary. For the Guard, the results and national exposure prove that it's a match for its audience and potential recruits today. It may not be so in the future, when other approaches provide a better payoff.

That is what makes for good stewardship of taxpayers' dollars.

And that is the point. If Congress doesn't allow military marketing experts to do their job in evaluating return on investment and deciding where to put scarce recruiting dollars, we may inevitably spend more money on less effective programs.

The Defense Department is already taking steps to address this fiscal environment. As a result of a decision made long before Congress took up the issue, marketing budgets for professional sports will be cut 30 percent next year.

The Guard itself is going beyond other services, reducing its budget by 40 percent. This only further illustrates that the Guard is able to internally prioritize spending hard-earned taxpayer dollars in the most efficient and responsible ways.

Throughout this whole debate, the biggest takeaway is that Congress values the integrity, professionalism and service the Guard provides to the nation.

We all want the Guard to succeed in recruiting and retaining the best fighting force. We simply disagree on how that's done.

We continue to applaud lawmakers like McCollum for asking the tough questions about how and where scarce defense

dollars are spent, as well as providing us the opportunity to discuss this issue face to face.

We look forward to working together in the future on other critical issues affecting the National Guard and Guard families. 🇺🇸

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**RISEING STAR**  
JR Hildebrand  
drives the  
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