

State, feds weigh help for troops

Bills would grant tax breaks for firms, workers.

BY BILL ORBEN | ASSOCIATE MANAGING EDITOR

ORLANDO — Michael Waldrop, an Orlando construction company executive, could become the face associated with a proposed amendment to the Florida Constitution to grant property tax relief for U.S. military reservists.



Waldrop

The McCree Designed & Built Right vice president also could become ammunition for those who want the U.S. Congress to grant more tax credits and

incentives for businesses that continue to pay part of the salaries of employees serving overseas in the reserves.

Waldrop, a former captain in the Army, was called back to active duty and assigned in January 2006 to train a unit of the Afghan army in Afghanistan. He returned to Orlando two months ago and resumed his job with McCree July 16.



PHOTO COURTESY OF MICHAEL WALDROP

McCree Vice President Michael Waldrop, second from left, returned home from Afghanistan two months ago.

While overseas, he exchanged e-mails with state Rep. Frank Attkisson, R-Kissimmee, revealing that he and his wife were unsure how they'd be able to pay their property tax bill. "That's the last thing that they need to be worried about," Attkisson says, of reservists on active duty.

In response, Attkisson says he's working with state Sen. Carey Baker, R-Eustis, on a bill that would waive property taxes during the period reservists serve overseas.

Attkisson had hoped to move the measure through the Legislature in previous sessions this year, but the tax

relief would require an amendment to the state Constitution.

He's disappointed the measure wasn't approved during the June special session on tax reform, but says it has popular support and is confident he'll

RESERVES: Mica says Congress could pass measure sometime this fall

Continued from page 1

get the measure on the ballot the next time the Legislature meets. "If it doesn't get done next time, we should all be thrown out of office," says Attkisson.

Baker, a first sergeant in the Army National Guard who served a year in Iraq while a member of the state House in 2003, believes the tougher sell will be getting lawmakers behind the measure.

The tax reform package the Legislature approved earlier this year and the uncertainty of the vote in January on additional tax reform measures likely will create reluctance on the part of some legislators, he says.

"If it made it to the ballot, it would be a slam-dunk," says Baker, who believes the measure could be on the ballot in the fall.

Vets group lobbies Congress

Meanwhile, area veterans groups have pushed for federal incentives for firms that pay part of the salaries of reservists while serving overseas.

U.S. Sen. Bill Nelson is co-sponsor of a bill that would give small businesses a credit if they pay the difference between a reservist's salary and the amount the work-

er makes in his civilian job. The business would receive a credit of 20 percent of that amount.

Richard McCree, president and CEO of McCree, says his firm paid Waldrop the difference between his reserve pay and the amount he earned with the company, but adds that some businesses may need a government incentive to do the same.

Providing relief for companies that employ reservists is a goal of Orlando resident Neil Euilano, chairman of Memorial Park and a former chairman of the Central Florida Veterans Association. "This is not a Republican or Democratic issue at all," he says. "It's an economic issue that can be resolved."

U.S. Rep. John Mica, R-Florida, who admits Congress has been slow to meet the needs of small businesses and reservists, also believes tax incentives or direct compensation could be the answer.

He says he's confident Congress will provide some relief by the fall. "There is no question that we need to do a better job supporting the reservists."

BILL ORBEN can be reached at (407) 241-2891 or via e-mail at borben@bizjournals.com.



PHOTO BY JIM CARCHIDI

McCree President Richard McCree (left) and Vice President of Development Michael Waldrop

Nearly two-year detour in career path

BY BILL ORBEN | ASSOCIATE MANAGING EDITOR

Michael Waldrop and his bosses at McCree Designed & Built Right thought he was on the road to a new career path with the company.

The plan was to move the vice president of business development from the marketing side of the business to the division that oversees construction and management of the company.

But those plans took a nearly two-year detour when the Army sent him to train a unit of the Afghan army.

Waldrop, who had been out of the military for about six years, was told to re-

port for active duty by November 2005. Waldrop got that deadline extended until January 2006, giving him and his employer about three months to prepare for his departure.

Within the first 60 days of being in Afghanistan, Waldrop was wounded by a piece of shrapnel. After three weeks, he was back on the front lines.

Waldrop came home in June and returned to work at McCree in July.

He believes his experience taught him to put things in perspective. "If you have to reschedule a meeting or miss an appointment, it's not going to be the end of the world."



Mica