

Office of the Governor

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NEWS RELEASE

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NJ Air National Guard Activated for Kosovo Conflict Governor Announces Loan Program For Affected Small Businesses

Gov. Christie Whitman issued the following statement regarding the activation of 108th air refueling wing of the NJ Air National Guard from McGuire Air Force Base:

"We've learned today that the 108th air refueling wing of the NJ Air National Guard, stationed at McGuire Air Force Base, has been activated for service in the Kosovo conflict.

"This is a difficult time for these Guard members and they should know that our thoughts and prayers are with them and their families. On behalf of all New Jerseyans, I want to offer our support for the men and women who are risking their lives to defend freedom. We are immensely proud of their role in the effort to end the ethnic cleansing that is occurring in Kosovo and we are looking forward to welcoming them back home."

Gov. Whitman also announced today the formation of a loan program to assist small businesses in which the entrepreneur and/or a key employee are being asked to serve as part of the Kosovo conflict.

The Commerce and Economic Growth Commission will set up a \$1,000,000 loan pool at the NJ Economic Development Authority (EDA). The pool will be funded through a \$200,000 investment from the Commerce Commission to the EDA to write down interest rates, \$400,000 from the Commission toward the revolving loan fund in addition to \$400,000 from the EDA.

EDA expects to be able to provide 10-year loans at 0% interest. The proceeds of the loan could be used to hire personnel, buy inventory and/or goods in order to assist the business through the transition period.

The Commerce Commission will provide more details of the program, including application procedures, within the next few weeks.

Last month, Gov. Whitman signed an executive order to protect the salary and benefits of state employees who serve in the military reserves and National Guard who may be deployed to the Kosovo crisis.

State employees who are called to active duty receive full pay for 90 days, and then are entitled only to their military pay. The executive order signed by Gov. Whitman guarantees those employees their full pay for the duration of their assignment to active duty. The state will pay the difference between the employees' full salary and military pay. The order also provides those employees

with full seniority and benefits upon their return as well as state employee health benefits, life insurance, and pension coverage during their active duty service.

At the time she signed the executive order, Gov. Whitman encouraged private industry to also support employees who may be called to active duty.