

## **MTA Layoffs: Bus drivers fighting in Iraq War get rude "Welcome Home"™**

Two city bus drivers who were sent to war in Iraq and Afghanistan are getting pink slips instead of yellow ribbons.

Sgts. Alvin Taylor and Andy (Angel) Moreno, bus drivers called up to serve overseas, are set to lose their civilian jobs this weekend as part of massive transit budget cuts.

"The way Transit is laying off these two individuals who are fighting for their country is totally unpatriotic and unethical," charged Frank Austin, a division chairman with Local 100 of the Transport Workers Union.

Taylor, 55, of Midwood, Brooklyn, is serving with the Army Reserve in Kandahar, Afghanistan, where he provides security for military convoys.

"Every time you leave the bases, your life is on the line," Taylor told the Daily News by phone from Kandahar. "You could be hit by an IED, attacked by insurgents, come under small arms fire. It's very tense over here."

Taylor, hired in October, drove Brooklyn's B46 line. He was sent to Afghanistan in February - his second tour of duty in recent years, having served in Iraq earlier.

He said he told bus managers when he was being trained that he was going to be deployed overseas.

"I was guaranteed [by supervisors] my job would be there when I got back," he said. The military has long been a part of his life. A native of Trinidad and Tobago, he joined the Army Reserves in 1989 as "payback to Uncle Sam for allowing me to stay in the country legally," he said.

"I got my green card, citizenship, everything."

Federal law guarantees most non-fulltime members of the military are entitled to return to their civilian jobs after deployment. The law is meant to protect workers from being punished for military absences.

But the law doesn't offer protection to workers whose jobs are eliminated when a company downsizes, according to Mathew Tully, an Albany-based lawyer and expert on the law.

The Metropolitan Transportation Authority is laying off hundreds of bus drivers and slashing service, part of the authority's plan to close a large budget gap. Under terms of the contract with the TWU, employees with the least amount of time on the job are at the top of the layoff list.

The transit agency could open a legal can of worms if it tries to skip over the citizen soldiers and lay off other drivers with more seniority, Tully said.

Moreno, 37, a father of five from the Bronx, is serving in Iraq with the National Guard after becoming a Bx55 bus driver last year.

His sister, a veteran bus driver, urged him to take the job. Moreno's unit left for Kuwait two weeks ago and he was unreachable. But his sister is worried about his future at home.

"Now he has a lot to worry about, knowing he's not going to have a job to support his family when he gets back," said Kissis Moreno, 40.

TWU Local 100 President John Samuelsen said it's "despicable" for the MTA to layoff the two drivers. "They should honor their military service and not lay them off," he said.

A NYC Transit spokesperson confirmed Moreno and Taylor are on the list of workers set to be laid off this weekend, but said the agency is "reviewing the current situation."