

WARRIOR MEDIC

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An Army Reserve Medical Command Publication



Obama: Health Care Reform Won't Impact VA, Tricare

By Donna Miles
American Forces Press Service



WASHINGTON, Aug. 4, 2009 - In ongoing discussions about health-care reform, President Barack Obama offered assurance today to those receiving medical care through Tricare or

the Department of Veterans Affairs: Your benefits are safe.

Eligibility for health care under VA or Tricare "will not be affected by our efforts at broader health-care reform," Obama told military reporters at the White House today.

Obama said he also made that point clear after today's meeting with the American Legion's national commander, Dave Rehbein, and executive director, Peter Gaytan.

"I want to make sure that message gets out to our veterans," the president said. "I think it's very important to get the message out: If you are in the VA system and are happy with your care, great. We have no intention of changing your eligibility."

While a new, national program won't force anyone to change health-care systems, Obama said it could offer benefits or geographic convenience that might

make some veterans elect to join it. A national program "will actually give them more choices, more flexibility," he said.

Obama cited problems in U.S. health-care delivery systems, which he said cost more than other countries' programs and too often deliver less.

The VA "has probably made more progress than most systems out there in increasing quality" during the past 25 years, and could help shed light on better ways of delivering health care, he said.

But the cost of delivering that care is high even at VA, and Tricare consumes a big piece of the Defense Department's budget, he said.

With the fiscal 2010 budget reflecting the largest VA funding increase in 30 years, Obama told American Legion leaders he is committed to ensuring that VA provides America's veterans the highest-quality health care possible.

Meanwhile, he told reporters VA will increase its outreach to more veterans to make sure they're aware of their medical benefits and other entitlements.

"Although there are hundreds of thousands of veterans who are using our services, we know there are hundreds of thousands more who may not know that benefits are available," he said.

"And we are working really hard to make sure that every single veteran? not just our active force, but also National Guard and reservists, are aware of the

benefits that are available to them.

"Guiding them through that process, we think, is extraordinarily important."

GI Bill Transferability Set to Begin

By Army Sgt. 1st Class Michael J. Carden
American Forces Press Service



WASHINGTON, July 31, 2009 - With the Post-9/11 GI Bill's option to transfer unused educational benefits to eligible family members taking effect August 1st, it's no surprise that

more than 25,000 servicemembers have pre-applied, a Pentagon official said today.

The wave of applicants has far exceeded the Defense and Veterans Affairs departments' expectations, said Bob Clark, the Pentagon's assistant director for accessions policy.

What's even more impressive is that the Defense Department's Web site for requesting the benefit has been live only since June 29, he added.

"We've seen, roughly, a thousand applications a day for the past week or so, and we expect that to continue," Clark said. "Transferability of these educational benefits has been one of the most requested provisions by family support groups, family advocacy groups and the

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troops out in the field and fleet."

The site, www.dmdc.osd.mil/TEB/, is accessible using a common access card, Defense Department self-service user identification or a Defense Finance and Accounting Service personal identification number. Spouses and family members must be enrolled under their servicemember sponsor in the Defense Eligibility Enrollment Reporting System, also known as DEERS, to be eligible for the transfer benefit. Military members also can link to the site through www.defenselink.mil/gibill.

With the Post-9/11 GI Bill, servicemembers are eligible for 36 months of educational benefits -- the equivalent of four nine-month academic years. To qualify for the transfer benefit, servicemembers must have six years of service on active duty or in the Selected Reserve on or after Aug. 1 and commit to an additional four years of service.

Servicemembers have the option to use or transfer as much of their benefits as they want to, and they can revoke or redesignate who receives the benefit at any time, Clark said.

He added that servicemembers can add and change names only while on active duty, and not after separating or retiring from active-duty service.

The unused benefits can be transferred to a spouse, two children or any combination, he said. But children cannot start using the benefit until they're 18 or have a high school diploma or equivalent. Clark noted that children enrolled in DEERS lose their military benefits at age 21 unless they are full-time students.

Only eligible dependents' names will appear on the registration Web site, he explained. Once servicemembers register on the site and designate who the benefits will be transferred to, the application will be processed through their appropriate service branch.

After the service verifies eligibility to transfer the benefits, the application will be forwarded and processed again through VA. And finally, when the selected dependent decides to use the benefit, he or she must go to the Department of Veterans Affairs Web site and fill out an online application to request a certificate of eligibility, Clark said.

The certificate then can be taken to the school to be processed by its Veterans Affairs representative and used to request tuition, payment for books and the living stipend, which varies by institution and location, he continued.

Of the 25,000 who've already applied, more than 15,000 have been approved, and of those, 5,500 dependents already have requested certificates to start their education.

"It has been a very fast, long run-up to

the first of August, which is upon us. I see this as a wonderful opportunity for our veterans, our servicemembers, in particular, the families of our career members to give them the opportunity to further their education and reach their dreams," Clark said.

Most servicemembers who have at least six years of military service as of Aug. 1 and agree to serve an additional four years qualify, he said. Department officials have proposed measures to support servicemembers who have at least 10 years of active service but can't serve the additional four because of service or department policy. They would, however, have to serve the maximum time allowed before separating from the military, he said.

Another provision will cover servicemembers who will reach the 20-year service mark, making them retirement-eligible, between Aug. 1, 2009, and Aug. 1, 2013.

Clark explained how servicemembers who complete 20 years of service will be able to transfer the benefits:

- Those eligible for retirement on Aug. 1, 2009, will be eligible to transfer their benefits with no additional service requirement.
- Those with an approved retirement date after Aug. 1, 2009, and before July 1, 2010, will qualify with no additional service.
- Those eligible for retirement after Aug. 1, 2009, but before Aug. 1, 2010, will qualify with one additional year of service after approval to transfer their Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits.
- Those eligible for retirement between Aug. 1, 2010, and July 31, 2011, will qualify with two additional years of service after approval to transfer.
- Those eligible to retire between Aug. 1, 2011, and July 31, 2012, will qualify with three additional years of service after approval to transfer.

Related Sites:

Post 9/11 GI Bill Transfer Application,

www.dmdc.osd.mil/TEB/

Post 9/11 GI Bill, www.gibill.va.gov

VA to Provide Emergency Checks to Students Awaiting Benefits



American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, Sept. 28, 2009 - Checks for up to \$3,000 soon will be available to students who have applied for

Veterans Affairs educational benefits and

who have not yet received their government payment.

The checks will be distributed to eligible students at VA regional benefits offices across the country starting Oct. 2, VA Secretary Eric K. Shinseki announced Sept. 25.

"Students should be focusing on their studies, not worrying about financial difficulties," Shinseki said. "Education creates life-expanding opportunities for our veterans."

Starting Oct. 2, students can go to one of VA's 57 regional benefit offices with photo identification, a course schedule and an eligibility certificate to request advance payment of their housing and book allowance. Because some students don't live near one of those offices, officials said, VA expects to send representatives to schools with large veteran-student bodies to work with veteran service groups in helping students with transportation needs.

A list of VA regional offices is available at <http://www.vba.va.gov/VBA/benefits/offices.asp>.

"I'm asking our people to get out their road maps and determine how we can reach the largest number of college students who can't reach us," said Patrick Dunne, VA's undersecretary for benefits. "Not everyone has a car. Not everyone can walk to a VA benefits office."

Although VA officials said they don't know how many students will request emergency funds, about 25,000 claims are pending that may result in payments to students.

The funds VA will give to students now are advance payments of the earned benefits for housing and books, and will be deducted from future education payments. VA officials said students should know that after this special payment, they can expect to receive education payments on the normal schedule: the beginning of the month following the period for which they are reimbursed.

"This is an extraordinary action we're taking," Shinseki said. "But it's necessary, because we recognize the hardships some of our veterans face."

More than 27,500 students already have received benefits for housing or books under the new Post-9/11 GI Bill, or their schools have received their tuition payments, officials said.

Related Sites:

Department of Veterans Affairs,

<http://www.va.gov>

List of VA Regional Offices

www.vba.va.gov/VBA/benefits/offices.asp

Partnership Opens Door for Army Reserve, Guard Construction Jobs



By Donna Miles
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, July 2, 2009 - A partnership forged today with the Helmets to Hardhats organization promises to translate into construction careers for reserve-component soldiers.

Helmets to Hardhats officially joined the Army Reserve's Employer Partnership Initiative during a Pentagon signing ceremony today. The arrangement will open the door for the Army Guard and Army Reserve to share the same talent pool with about 80,000 civilian employers in the construction industry.

Army Reserve Chief Lt. Gen. Jack C. Stultz, who launched the Employer Partnership Initiative in April 2008, said today's ceremony took the effort to a new level in two ways. It will create a pathway to apprenticeships and training programs leading to a broad range of construction jobs ? all through an organization that "has been a great friend to the military," he said.

For the first time, the partnership also will include the Army National Guard. Stultz called the new partnership agreement a first step toward eventually broadening the program to include every service's reserve components.

Helmets to Hardhats is a national program that connects National Guard, Reserve and transitioning active-duty members with career training and employment within 15 building and construction trades unions and nine leading construction contractor associations.

Darrell Roberts, a former sailor and National Guardsman who serves as the initiative's executive director, said the new partnership benefits civilian employers, too.

"It will help us get the word out [to members of the Reserve and Guard] about these quality careers in the construction industry," he said.

Meanwhile, he said, it will help employers tap into employees who "bring a can-do attitude and a sense of responsibility, who arrive on time, who understand the chain of command and who are there to work.

"They make great employees, and give 100 percent," Roberts continued. "Everybody I work with can't get enough of them."

Stultz called the new partnership with Hardhats to Helmets a natural fit because it takes advantage of the skill sets many soldiers already have ? and that employers are

looking for.

"Our vision in the Army Reserve is to become an organization that is looked upon as one of the premier organizations that develops talent and capability for America," he said.

The Employer Partnership initiative allows reserve-component soldiers to apply their civilian training and experience to their military jobs, Stultz said. "And we, in turn, will return them back to you with more confidence, more leadership, and hopefully, a better work ethic that you, in turn, get to take advantage of," he told the employer representatives.

Meanwhile, the partnerships help generate the employer support Stultz called critical to the reserve components' success.

"You really are providing this nation a strategy of how to maintain a well-trained and ready military for the future," he told the employer representatives. "I look forward to collaborating with our newest valued partner to achieve mutual goals to attract, develop and retain a quality workforce."

Army Maj. Gen. Raymond Carpenter, acting director of the Army National Guard, said he's excited about the opportunities the program will open up to Guard troops.

"The men and women of the Army National Guard and the U.S. Army Reserve are highly motivated, seasoned professionals, and some of the highest-caliber potential employees for private industry," Carpenter said. "This program is good for our soldiers, local communities and the nation."

Related Sites:

Employer Partnership Initiative

www.usar.army.mil/arweb/EPI/Pages/default.aspx

Helmets to Hardhats <[blockedhttp://helimetstohardhats.org/](http://helimetstohardhats.org/)>

Report Urges Timeline for Tobacco-free Military



By Jim Garamone
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, July 10, 2009 - The military has come a long way from the time when it

packaged cigarettes in with rations, but more must be done, according to an Institute of Medicine report.

The report, titled "Combating Tobacco in Military and Veteran Populations," calls for the Defense Department to set a timeline to eliminate smoking on military instal-

lations.

Officials from the Pentagon and Department of Veterans Affairs asked the institute to prepare the report in 2007. It was released June 28.

More than 30 percent of active-duty military members use tobacco products of some kind. "Of greater concern, the rate of tobacco use in the military has increased since 1998, threatening to reverse the steady decline of the last several decades," the report says. "Furthermore, smoking rates among military personnel returning from Iraq and Afghanistan may be 50 percent higher than rates among nondeployed military personnel."

The Defense Department and the services have worked hard to become tobacco-free. The services have banned use of tobacco products during basic training, the report said, and they have launched extensive public-education campaigns and commander training. "The committee recommends that [the Defense Department] establish a timeline to eliminate all tobacco use on military installations to protect the health of all military personnel, civilian employees, family members and visitors," the report says.

The committee, chaired by Stuart Bondurant, a professor of medicine and dean emeritus at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill --? found that "achieving a tobacco-free military begins by closing the pipeline of new tobacco users entering the military and by promoting cessation programs to ensure abstinence."

The committee recommends using a phased approach. The military academies and officer training programs should become tobacco-free first, followed by new enlisted recruits and finally all other active-duty personnel, the report says.

The Defense Department fully supports the goal of a tobacco-free military, said Pentagon spokeswoman Cynthia Smith, and officials believe it's achievable through development and execution of a comprehensive plan as recommended by the report. "However," she added, "achieving that goal will in part depend on coincident reductions of tobacco use in the civilian population."

The department has been at the forefront of tobacco-cessation efforts. Officials recently launched the "Quit Tobacco - Make Everyone Proud" campaign at <http://www.ucanquit2.org>. It targets young enlisted men and women who use tobacco. The Web site provides information, resources, interactive tools and practical help. Servicemembers who want to quit tobacco can get immediate help from a trained tobacco-cessation coach from 8:30 a.m. to 10 p.m. EST every day.

The report also recommends that the

Defense Department to stop selling tobacco products in military commissaries and exchanges, to prohibit tobacco use anywhere on military installations, and to treat tobacco use in the same way as other health-related behaviors, such as alcohol abuse and poor physical fitness.

Related Sites: Quit Tobacco - Make Everyone Proud campaign
www.ucanquit2.org

Officials Won't Ban Tobacco for Deployed Troops, Morrell Says



By Donna Miles
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, July 15, 2009 - Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates has made it clear he does

not plan to restrict tobacco use among troops in war zones, the Pentagon's press secretary said today.

Gates has yet to see a report commissioned by the Defense Department that proposes a ban on smoking in the military, Geoff Morrell said.

The National Academy of Sciences' Institute of Medicine completed the study last month, which reportedly recommends strict controls to limit new users from entering the military and to curtail use among those already serving.

The secretary is likely to consider some of the report's recommendations, but none that ban tobacco use among deployed forces, Morrell said.

"[Gates] has been very clear to me up front that one of the things he is not prepared to do is to restrict use of tobacco products in combat zones," he said.

"We are fighting two wars right now using a force that we are demanding more of than we ever have before," Morrell said. "They are under enormous stress and strain, and the secretary does not want to compound that stress by taking away one of the few outlets they may have to relieve that stress."

The secretary shares the concerns of those who prepared the report about the health and well-being of the force and understands the administration's goal of a smoke-free America, Morrell said.

"Obviously, it is not our preference to have a force that is using tobacco products," he said.

Morrell noted the enormous cost to the department in terms of health care. "By some estimates, it costs us nearly a billion dollars a year in tobacco-related health

problems," he said.

Related Sites: Report Urges Timeline for Tobacco-free Military
www.defenselink.mil/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=55085

Sesame Workshop Aims to Help Military Children, Keep Families Connected



By Samantha L. Quigley
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, July 16, 2009 - "Sesame Street" usually conjures visions of Muppets teach-

ing young children their letters and numbers, but they also teach life lessons to help military children cope with deployments, injuries, and now, loss.

The newest phase of Sesame Workshop's "Talk, Listen, Connect" initiative is aimed at helping children cope with the death of a loved one.

"Sesame Workshop is committed to providing our military families with the resources they deserve," said Gary E. Knell, president and CEO of Sesame Workshop. "We hope that 'Talk, Listen, Connect,' which reaches out to all families with young children, will continue to help families discover ways they can be resilient despite experiencing difficult transitions in their lives."

"Talk, Listen, Connect: Helping Families With Children Cope With the Death of a Loved One" will consist of bilingual, English and Spanish, multimedia materials for young children and adults starring the Sesame Street Muppets.

Sesame Workshop will produce and distribute materials at no cost through organizations that provide services to military families and the general public, including grief centers, social services, and other programs specifically addressing the needs of children and families coping with the death of an immediate family member. The kit materials also will be available online at www.sesamestreet.org/tlc.

The workshop also unveiled the Sesame Street Family Connections Web site and announced the creation of 35 "Sesame Rooms" during a news conference today at the Military Child Education Coalition's National Conference in Philadelphia.

The Sesame Street Family Connections Web site is a child-centered, online space that will keep military families connected across the globe.

With the help of their favorite Sesame Street friends, family members can compose

encouraging messages to each other, share artwork and videos, upload photos, and get answers to some questions they may have but didn't know how to ask.

"This rewarding opportunity to collaborate in launching such a creative Web site provides a vital tool in the recovery, resilience and reintegration toolbox that our military families need and deserve," said Army Brig. Gen. (Dr.) Loree K. Sutton, the director of the Defense Centers of Excellence for Psychological Health and Traumatic Brain Injury, who helped make today's announcement.

"Families and warriors will be able to stay connected and share in a safe and nurturing place, joined by their special Sesame Street friends," he said.

Additionally, Sesame Workshop, with the support of New York designer Jonathan Adler and several generous partners, will provide a rich and engaging set of materials to brighten up spaces it's calling "Sesame Rooms."

These rooms provide a much-needed, child-friendly place for military children to play.

Sesame Street will send a "room-in-a-box" to 35 locations across the United States, including military hospitals, libraries, child care centers and family support centers

"The Military Child Education Coalition is delighted to partner once again with Sesame Workshop on its initiatives that have been uniquely beneficial to military children and their families," said Patty Shinseki, a member of the MCEC Board of Directors, during the event.

"Elmo and his friends, Sesame's beloved characters with whom children connect so well, serve as conduits for dealing with the difficult issues in nurturing and sensitive ways," she said. "These valuable tools and resources for fostering resilience help children to thrive during the good times and challenging ones."

The Defense Centers of Excellence for Psychological Health and Traumatic Brain Injury and several other organizations, including Military OneSource and the USO, have provided support for the "Talk, Listen, Connect" initiative.

Related Sites:

Defense Centers of Excellence for Psychological Health and Traumatic Brain Injury,

www.dcoe.health.mil

Military OneSource

www.militaryonesource.com

Sesame Workshop www.sesameworkshop.org/initiatives/emotion/tlc

Sesame Street Family Connections
SesameStreetFamilyConnections.org

Tricare Deputy Director Highlights New Programs



By Navy Lt. Jennifer Cragg
Special to American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, Aug. 4, 2009 - Tricare is enhancing its programs and services as part of an ongoing commitment to provide quality health care for military families, the new deputy director of Tricare Management Activity said.

One of Tricare's key initiatives is to enhance the contact beneficiaries and their family members have with their primary health care provider, Navy Rear Adm. Christine S. Hunter told "DotMilDocs" listeners July 30 on Pentagon Web Radio.

"The 'medical home' concept is an exciting way of looking at an individual's relationship with their primary care provider," she said.

The medical home concept emphasizes four health care pillars: accessibility, continuity, coordination and comprehensiveness. Hunter said that it takes the doctor-patient relationship to a new level.

"It creates an enhanced relationship with that health care provider to ensure access, continuity and trust," Hunter said. "We need to offer care that is coordinated and comprehensive. In order to do that, we will emphasize preventive care and wellness, ensuring that people are in a partnership with their provider that allows them to get the preventive care that they need, and manage any chronic medical conditions that they have."

Hunter also addressed Tricare programs, and how beneficiaries can make the best use of their benefits by highlighting four main goals of the Tricare health plan: providing beneficiaries and their families with access to the best health care, ensuring satisfaction with their health care, managing health care costs responsibly, and last, but most important, she said, maintaining military readiness.

Part of military readiness, Hunter said, is maintaining family readiness. "We see family readiness as an important part of overall readiness. Secretary of the Navy [Ray] Mabus recently said 'they who wait also serve' and we have a strong commitment to them," Hunter said.

Tricare also is providing to its beneficiaries access to a Web-based Tricare Assistance Program that will provide online counseling.

The program launched Aug. 1, Hunter said, and is for active-duty servicemembers and their families, people in the Transitional Assistance Management Program, and

selected reserve members who purchase Tricare Reserve Select and their eligible family members.

"The Tricare Assistance Program provides Web-based supportive counseling; you can dial in on your home webcam to talk to a counselor and get the assistance you need in the privacy and comfort of your own home," Hunter said.

The program enables visitors to obtain an unlimited number of sessions with the same counselor. "We think this will go a long way to making folks feel more comfortable and reducing stigma," she said.

Hunter also discussed electronic health records as a priority. One of the advantages of Tricare is the ability to keep track of the quality of health care beneficiaries receive through the use of electronic medical health records, she said.

She noted that Tricare is fully supportive of President Barack Obama's initiative to help manage health care in America through the use of electronic health records. These records provide long-term health information that can be used to predict trends.

"We think this really improves the quality of care because you don't have to waste valuable time during personal interactions repeating your past medical or family history," Hunter said.

Related Sites: "Dot Mil Docs" on Pentagon Web Radio,

www.blogtalkradio.com/stations/PentagonRadioNetwork/Dot-Mil-Docs
Tricare, www.tricare.mil

Pentagon Weighs Social Networking Benefits, Vulnerabilities



By John J. Krugel
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, Aug. 4, 2009 - A Defense Department review is weighing the benefits of social networking and other Web 2.0 platforms against potential security vulnerabilities they create.

In a memo issued last week, Deputy Defense Secretary William J. Lynn III directed a study of social media sites like Twitter, Facebook and YouTube in hopes of establishing a policy by October, Pentagon Spokesman Bryan Whitman told reporters today.

"We're addressing the challenges from a security standpoint, but also the impact and the value that they have to the department

to be able to communicate in a 21st century environment," Whitman said.

Per his deputy's memo, Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates is slated to receive a report on the threats and benefits of Web 2.0 tools before the end of the month. Both Gates and Navy Adm. Mike Mullen, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, have embraced the new technologies.

The Pentagon's chief information officer is taking the lead on the review, which was catalyzed by concerns raised at U.S. Strategic Command, Whitman said. Stratcom is responsible for overseeing the use of the "dot-mil" network.

In the meantime, there are no department-wide orders banning the use of social networking and other Web 2.0 applications, Whitman said, adding that standard local restrictions to such sites may occur due to bandwidth or security concerns.

"But as a department, we recognize the importance of taking a look at this issue because there are legitimate security concerns," he said.

In an interview with a blog site yesterday, Price Floyd, the principal deputy assistant secretary of defense for public affairs, emphasized the importance of maintaining operational security, or Opsec, in an era of Web-based social networking.

"Opsec is paramount. We will have procedures in place to deal with that," Floyd told Wired's "Danger Room." "The [Defense Department] is, in that sense, no different than any big company in America. What we can't do is let security concerns trump doing business. We have to do business. ... Companies in the private sector that have policies like us don't dare shut down their Web sites. They have to sell their products and ideas -- and this is how it's done.

"Opsec needs to catch up with this stuff. This is the modern equivalent of sending a letter home from the front lines," he added. "Opsec needs to be considered on this stuff, but the more our troops do this stuff, the better off we are."

Defense Department to Announce Balanced Social Media Policy



By Heather Forsgren Weaver
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, Sept. 23, 2009 - Defense Department officials plan to forward a social media policy to the department leadership within the next two weeks that will balance the pros and cons of social networking sites, the department's top public affairs

official said on National Public Radio's "Talk of the Nation" yesterday.

"I think there are two issues that need to be balanced," said Price Floyd, principal deputy assistant secretary of defense for public affairs. "No. 1, you need to recognize the benefits taking part in social networking sites and social networking media give you, as well as the risks involved. And I don't want in any way to shortchange the risks.

"I believe [the policy] ... will encourage the use of social networking because of the benefits that are there, but also understand and underscore the risks there," he added.

Social media generally refers to using Facebook, Twitter, MySpace and other interactive media tools to communicate with ever-expanding networks of family, friends and colleagues. Currently, Floyd said, the department does not have a policy on the use of social media.

"Right now there is no policy on working with or in social networking sites or media. It's currently under review," he said. "It's on course to be finished within about two weeks."

Introduced on NPR as the department's "social media guru," Floyd said not everyone in the department feels the same because they worry that operational security -- OPSEC -- will be violated.

"In the past, when a soldier, airman, [sailor] or Marine sent home a letter to their family or loved ones and had information in it that might have been sensitive, it could have been read by two or three people, and that was it," he explained.

"The problem now with social networking is that when you Twitter that information that might be sensitive ... or put it on your Facebook page, thousands of people see it immediately, and then thousands more could see it as it's forwarded on to others," he said. "The ramifications of making a mistake, of putting things that shouldn't be on there on those sites, are even greater than they used to be."

Noah Shactman, editor of Wired magazine's National Security Blog 'Danger Room,' was also a guest on the NPR program. He noted there are dozens of overlapping policies about what various branches of the military are allowed to do. The Marines, for example, recently banned Twitter and Facebook from its official networks, while the Army ordered that its networks be allowed access to the sites.

"That's just one example of how there's a lot of tension within the military about whether to use these sites or not, and that's why I think this review is very helpful," Shactman said.

The operational security concerns "might be a little overblown," Shactman

said, noting that a 2006 study revealed independent military blogs only had 28 security violations over the course of a year, while official military sites had more than 1,800 violations of those same security policies.

Floyd said he used his Twitter account to get feedback on the Marine policy ban when it was announced. Most people who responded said they wanted folks to have access, but "a large minority" said they understood there were security concerns.

"These people were on Twitter saying, 'Yes, this should be blocked,' so not everyone who uses social networking sites is in favor of having complete and open access," he said.

Many of the people who called into the NPR program spoke in favor of more regulation of social media sites, even as they pleaded for more constant access to their deployed loved ones.

One former soldier, Matt, who served two tours as an officer in Iraq, said using social media in Iraq earlier this decade was distracting to his troops.

"I've also heard comments from other commanders on the ground that they need to be focused on the fight, not what's going on at home," Floyd said. "But I've also heard lots of comments about how it was easier to reintegrate once they came back."

Mike, a noncommissioned officer who served a tour in Afghanistan and two tours in Iraq, said for his soldiers to have "seamless communication with their families was absolutely helpful to morale."

Kira called in to say she talks to her deployed boyfriend in Iraq via Skype, a free video chat service. She thanked Floyd for being able to use social networking, but she said she also recognizes the risks it poses.

"It might seem innocuous, but if the right pieces of information are put in the right order, then that can really put our troops in danger," she said. "I think [operational security] needs to be emphasized more within the military community."

Floyd pointed out that some military commands have been using social media for years: Navy Adm. James G. Stavridis, commander of U.S. European Command and NATO's top military commander, launched his Facebook page and blogged while leading Southern Command.

Recruiters also are using social media to keep in touch with troops who have signed up but have yet to report for duty, Floyd said.

"I was at the Recruiting Command at Fort Knox, Kentucky, several weeks ago, and they're going to use Twitter to keep in touch with recruits before they show up," he said. "They also use Twitter to let their recruits know how they can earn credit towards promotion even before they show

up for their first day of duty."

Overall, Floyd said, he believes there is a general misunderstanding about social media.

"A lot of people think of it as a new way to get information out. So in that sense, when we went from blast faxing information to blast e-mailing, people were so excited you could push one button and reach so many people," he said. "And they believed that Web 2.0 is just the next extension of that. I believe that's just a fundamental misunderstanding of what Web 2.0 is all about."

It's not so much a way of getting more information out, he said, it's also a way of engaging the American people, and "in the case of the military, engaging internally with our internal audience of several million members of the Defense Department."

The department's newly revamped Web site, www.defense.gov, is designed to engage the public in discussion, Floyd stressed. He added that he is not concerned that things may be posted that haven't been strenuously scrubbed -- "things that may not be -- quote-unquote -- 'approved talking points' from public affairs."

"I actually welcome that sort of talk and chatter on the Web," he said. "I believe it shows a Pentagon that has multiple voices, and it gives a transparency to our decision-making process that I believe is good."

Web Site Features Jobs for Disabled Veterans



By Sharon Foster
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, July 15, 2009 - With more than 3,000 job openings, the creators of a new

Web portal are hoping to attract disabled veterans seeking employment.

"Our current project is to spread the word that we are here," said Diana Corso, executive director of disABLEDperson Inc., a nonprofit group aiming to reduce the unemployment rate of disabled veterans.

"We launched a couple of months ago," she said. "We have jobs on the site, but not that many resumes. We are hoping to attract many more applicants. These positions are from employers across the U.S."

DisABLEDperson.Inc. hosts the nationally based online job board called Job Opportunities for Disabled American Veterans. The site is free for disabled veterans to post their resumes and employers to post their jobs.

"We are trying to make it as easy as possible for [disabled veterans] and employ-

ers to come together," Corso said. "All positions are paid openings, some carrying benefits."

To post a resume, job seekers must first fill out an online registration. The resume will post on <http://www.JOFDAV.com> for three months. After three months, job seekers are given the option to repost their resume, to modify it or to leave it inactive.

Corso encourages job seekers not just to wait for employers to find them, but to browse through job openings that companies already have posted.

Current job openings on the Web site include accounting, administration and clerical, business development, information technology, research, restaurant and food service, science, collections, public relations and security. Other than job titles, postings specify geographic location, job category, career level, salary level and job description.

"This Web site has attracted employers that are proactively seeking to hire disabled American veterans," Corso said. "My desire is to find a way to get the word out about these openings to generate more disabled job seekers to fill the slots."

Customer Input Drives Moving Company Selection



By Army Sgt. 1st Class Michael J. Carden
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, Aug. 7, 2009

- The Defense Department is shifting the way it selects the civilian companies that move servicemembers and defense civilians to new duty stations by focusing on customer service rather than on cost.

Officials now rank companies' performance based in part on input from people they've moved. Servicemembers and defense civilians are asked to fill out a 12-question survey after the move is made.

The customer input gives military transportation offices a new measure for determining which movers are used and how often, said Air Force Lt. Col. Dan Bradley, deputy chief of staff for personal property for the Surface Deployment and Distribution Command at Scott Air Force Base, Ill.

"The survey was determined to be a way to get servicemember feedback on improving the quality of service they get from the mover," he said. "It came from a quality-of-life issue where people said they didn't like moving or the moving process, and [that] it was difficult and should be bet-

ter."

The survey is completed online. Customers receive an e-mail message with a link to the survey after their household goods are delivered at their new duty station. This input gives them a direct voice and an opportunity to improve their quality of service, Bradley said.

"Basing part of the transportation acquisition services on customer feedback forces moving companies who want to stay active in the program to focus on servicemembers," Bradley said.

The survey is one of three factors used to choose and rank moving companies. It's the cornerstone of the "best-value acquisition" program the Defense Department is shifting toward to better accommodate servicemembers, he said. Moving company rates and how well the company handles servicemember claims for lost or damaged items also determine which companies are used and how frequently.

Each survey is used for a year to determine the overall quality of the mover. Although the Defense Department has been collecting the data since November, Bradley said, participation in the survey hasn't been as high as he and personal property representatives would like. Only about 20 percent of military members who used military-contracted transportation companies have participated in the survey.

"It's absolutely key that the servicemembers take their time and fill out that [survey], which is quick -- it's only 12 questions," he said. "We just want to get a sense of [whether] it's a good mover or bad mover and go from there.

"As you can imagine, the moving industry wants to be evaluated on 100 percent of the surveys, not 20 percent," he continued. "They beat us up pretty well to get the survey-return rate up higher to establish a good basis of who's good and who's not."

Moving companies also review the surveys. Movers will be issued warning letters if they receive too many low ratings and survey scores. The more warning letters a moving company receives, the further down the list they move among preferred moving companies. Poorly ranked companies will be used less frequently, and eventually will be removed from the list all together, Bradley said.

"Servicemembers and [Defense Department] civilians now have a specific way to influence how many shipments a mover can get," he said. "If you're in the lowest [ranking] for long, you're eventually going out of business. But if movers are great, we want to reward them with more shipments, so other servicemembers can get a quality move as well."

Bradley acknowledged that most people dislike participating in surveys, but stressed the positive effect this particular survey can have on military members and civilian moving companies.

"Surveys are frustrating, but this one has an impact on your quality of life," he said.

The survey scores have been used to calculate mover rankings since November, but the survey itself has been available and collected since spring 2004. Defense employees who don't receive the e-mail prompting them to fill out the form can go to <http://www.move.mil/> to complete the survey.

Related Sites:

U.S. Transportation Command,
www.transcom.mil
Military Surface Deployment and Distribution Command,
www.sddc.army.mil
Defense Department Household Goods Portal,www.move.mil

Quick Hire of Military Spouses Starts in September



By Gerry J. Gilmore
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, Aug. 14, 2009

- Under a personnel rule that takes effect next month, some military spouses could be quickly hired for federal jobs without going through the usual competitive process.

The new hiring authority takes effect Sept. 11. The Office of Personal Management issued the authority's final regulatory guidelines Aug. 12. The guidelines are posted in the Federal Register under the title: "Noncompetitive Appointment of Certain Military Spouses."

The intended effect of the rule, according to documents listed in the Federal Register, "is to facilitate the entry of military spouses into the federal civil service as part of an effort to recruit and retain skilled and experienced members of the armed forces and to recognize and honor the service of members injured, disabled, or killed in connection with their service."

"Military spouse employment is a key to the quality of life of our military families," Kathleen Ott, director of talent acquisition, development and management in the Office of the Deputy Undersecretary of Defense for Civilian Personnel Policy, said yesterday during an interview with Pentagon Channel and American Forces Press Service

reporters.

The availability of jobs for military spouses contributes to the sustainment of the all-volunteer force, Ott said, citing a recent survey in which employed military spouses reported that their work income constitutes about 48 percent of total family income.

"But, it's really hard to keep a job if you have to move from station to station," Ott said. Federal employment, she said, offers military spouses a portable career with transferable benefits and worldwide presence.

"We thought, in order to help our military spouses continue their employment, it would be a good thing for us to facilitate their entry into the federal government," she said.

Eligible individuals, Ott said, include spouses of active-duty servicemembers who have been called on to relocate. This includes spouses of Guardsmen or reservists who've been called up for more than 180 days of active service other than training. Eligible spouses must be moving to another duty station accompanied by their servicemember husband or wife.

Spouses of former servicemembers listed as 100-percent disabled and separated or retired, as well as widows or widowers of servicemembers who died on active duty and who have not remarried also are eligible.

The new hiring authority does not constitute a hiring preference for eligible military spouses, according to OPM. "This authority is a noncompetitive hiring mechanism; it does not establish or constitute a hiring preference for eligible spouses, nor does it create an entitlement to a federal job for an eligible spouse," according to regulatory documents listed in the Federal Register.

Applicants still must meet specific job-qualification criteria listed for individual positions, according to OPM documents.

"This is not a preference. We firmly believe that our spouses can compete on their own merits," Ott said, noting that the new hiring rules provide military spouses with "a streamlined, facilitated means of obtaining federal employment."

Use of the new hiring authority "is completely at the discretion of hiring agencies," according to OPM documents, and "it is one of many hiring tools agencies may use to recruit needed individuals."

Spouses who complete three years of continuous satisfactory service will be converted from a career-conditional appointment to career appointment, Ott said.

Personnel officials do not anticipate that the new military-spouse hiring authority

would adversely affect the hiring of military veterans into the federal government, Ott said.

Military spouses can find out about federal job opportunities through OPM's USAJobs Web site, Ott said.

The new hiring authority "sends a very important message to our military families that their sacrifice is recognized by the federal government, and that they recognize that having a career opportunity is really critical for their family's well being," said Barbara Thompson, director of the Pentagon's Office of Family Policy/Children and Youth.

More than 77 percent of military spouses have indicated in surveys that they are interested in establishing careers, Thompson said. Other data, she added, indicates that military spouses are, overall, more highly educated than their civilian counterparts.

"I think it's a win-win situation that the federal government is accessing a pool of spouses who have the same levels of commitment and caring and service to the nation," Thompson said.

The department's Military Spouse Career Advancement Account, also known as MyCAA, provides employment, career, education/training, counseling and financial assistance for spouses of active-duty military and activated Guard and reserve members worldwide, she said.

President George W. Bush issued an executive order establishing guidelines for the hiring authority in September 2008, but implementation of the order was delayed while it was reviewed by the Obama administration.

Related Sites: Federal Register,

<http://www.gpoaccess.gov/fr/>

USAJOBS , www.usajobs.gov

MyCAA

<https://aiportal.acc.af.mil/mycaa/default.aspx>

Group Finds Foster Homes for Deployed Troops' Pets



By Army Sgt. Will Hill
Special to American Forces Press Service

CAMP ATTERBURY JOINT
MANEUVER TRAINING
CENTER, Ind, Aug. 20, 2009 -

Many programs help military members' families during a deployment, but what

about their four-legged friends?

Guardian Angels for Soldier's Pet, a nonprofit organization made up of all volunteers, locates foster homes for the pets of servicemembers who are deployed, training or experiencing an emergency or financial hardship.

Linda Spurlin-Dominik, the group's chief executive officer, said the group was formed in January 2005 after the founders learned that troops across the country had pets that needed a loving and safe home while their owners were deployed to Iraq, Afghanistan and other designated combat areas.

"Soldiers had no options with their pets and had to turn over their pet's ownership to shelters and rescue groups across the country," Spurlin-Dominik said. The organization now has about 800 potential foster homes and 55 foster pets, she added.

Additionally, the group lends support for emergency services such as transportation, boarding and veterinarian care, Spurlin-Dominik said.

Jamie Shively, vice president of Guardian Angels for Soldier's Pet and the Indiana state coordinator, said the group has every kind of pet.

"We have a majority of dogs and cats, but we have helped horses and birds," Shively said. "Servicemembers consider their pets as kids or best friends, so to be able to assist them by getting their pets into a foster home so they do not have to surrender them to a shelter or a rescue organization is just absolutely great."

Army Sgt. Donietta McPowell, a Frankfort, Ky., native training here with B Company, 2nd Battalion, 147th Aviation Regiment, said she would have used the program if her parents had been unable to provide a home for her pet.

"I had no idea programs like that existed. I will inform all my [follow soldiers] back home," McPowell said.

Army Chief Warrant Officer 2 Travis Rogers, a maintenance test pilot, also with the 147th Aviation Regiment, said he also would use the services if he had no one to turn to. "If I was single, I would differently have used the program," he said.

Servicemembers, veterans or their families who need a safe home for their pets can request services either through the group's Web site, <http://www.guardianangelsforsoldierspet.org>, or by calling 501-325-1591 to begin the process.

Once the owner is registered and a foster home has been selected, Spurlin-Dominik said, a written agreement is prepared for the pet owner, the foster home and a representative approved by the group to help reach agreement on the cost and

duration of the pet's stay with the foster home.

"The organization does not charge any fees, but the military pet owner will be responsible for any veterinarian bills and food cost for the pet, which would basically be the same if they were not deployed," she explained, adding that some foster homes do not charge for pet food.

Once an agreement has been made, the foster home will take custody of the pets until the servicemember returns home.

Related Sites:

Guardian Angels for Soldier's Pet
www.guardianangelsforsoldierspet.org

'Family Matters' Blog Offers Support to Military Families



American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, Aug. 7, 2009 - American Forces Press Service has launched a military blog called "Family Matters" dedicated to helping military families deal with the challenges and situations unique to a military lifestyle. The blog features tips from experts, useful resources and timely responses to comments and questions. Upcoming topics include back-to-school tips, education benefits, dealing with deployments, childcare and more. Read "Family Matters" at <http://afps.dodlive.mil/category/family-matters/>.

VA Simplifies Compensation Rules for Post-traumatic Stress



American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, Aug. 24, 2009 - The Veterans Affairs Department is taking steps to help veterans seeking compensation for post-traumatic stress disorder, VA Secretary Eric K. Shinseki announced today.

"The hidden wounds of war are being addressed vigorously and comprehensively by this administration as we move VA forward in its transformation to the 21st century," Shinseki said.

VA is publishing a proposed regulation today in the Federal Register to make it easier for a veteran to claim service connection for PTSD by reducing the evidence needed if the stressor claimed is related to fear of

hostile military or terrorist activity. Comments on the proposed rule will be accepted over the next 60 days, and a final regulation will be published after consideration of all comments received, VA officials said.

Under the new rule, VA would not require corroboration of a stressor related to fear of hostile military or terrorist activity if a VA psychiatrist or psychologist confirms that the stressful experience recalled by a veteran adequately supports a diagnosis of PTSD and the veteran's symptoms are related to the claimed stressor.

Previously, claims adjudicators were required to corroborate that a noncombat veteran actually experienced a stressor related to hostile military activity. This rule would simplify the development that is required for these cases, officials explained.

PTSD is a recognized anxiety disorder that can follow seeing or experiencing an event that involves actual or threatened death or serious injury to which a person responds with intense fear, helplessness or horror, and is not uncommon in war. Feelings of fear, confusion or anger often subside, officials noted, but if the feelings don't go away or get worse, a veteran may have PTSD.

VA is bolstering its mental health capacity to serve combat veterans, adding thousands of new professionals in the last four years. The department also has established a toll-free suicide prevention helpline -- 1-800-273-TALK -- and has a Web site available for online chat in the evenings at <http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org/Veterans/>.

Defense Department Launches Weekly News Podcast



By Judith Snyderman Special to American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, Sept. 8, 2009 - Defense Department officials have launched "AFPS News," a weekly audio podcast of stories from American Forces Press Service.

"American Forces Press Service news and feature articles are a vital source of information to troops, their family members and the American public," said Linda Kozaryn, director of eProducts for the Defense Media Activity.

"The podcasts give AFPS another outlet for our stories, which traditionally have been available only in print and on the Web," she said. "We are excited to reach a

broadcast audience via this new media tool."

AFPS, formerly a feature-article service mailed to military installation newspaper editors, has grown into a real-time news operation, posting more than 3,000 articles annually on the Defense Department's Web site. In addition to covering the activities of top Defense Department leaders, it provides timely information on matters important to servicemembers and their families while showcasing the work being done around the world by the nation's men and women in uniform.

To listen to the AFPS podcast, visit the Pentagon Channel's room on iTunes or visit <http://www.pentagonchannel.mil>. <blocked<http://www.pentagonchannel.mil>> Defense Department officials have launched "AFPS News," a weekly audio podcast of stories from American Forces Press Service, and click on the podcasts section. It's also available on BlogTalkRadio at <http://www.blogtalkradio.com/AFPS> <blocked<http://www.blogtalkradio.com/AFPS>> .

Visitors to Defense.gov, a new portal launched in August, can listen to the AFPS podcasts by choosing the Podcasts tab, then clicking on the AFPS link in the audio podcasts section. They also may subscribe to receive automatic updates of the show each Thursday. The Defense.gov portal provides a handy link to some 28 audio and video podcast programs from a tab in its left column.

"The podcast offers a convenient new way to get a weekly roundup of coverage from AFPS ? it's quick, and it's portable," said Brian Natwick, acting director of the Defense Media Activity's emerging media directorate and general manager of the Pentagon Channel.

Each podcast features five to 10 minutes of news capsules, highlighting AFPS stories related to defense operations and troops around the world, including Iraq and Afghanistan - along with coverage of health, environmental, technological and legislative issues.

Defense.gov embraces social media sites such as YouTube, Facebook and Twitter, and has a new feature called "We Want to Hear From You," which gives users the opportunity to ask questions of Defense Department leaders, vote on policy issues they want explained and explore frequently asked questions and answers.

Podcasting is a method of publishing audio and video broadcasts via the Internet, allowing users to subscribe to a feed of new files. Many content providers offer podcast feeds at no cost that deliver audio or video broadcasts to the user's desktop. Users can replay these files on the computer or load them onto an MP3 player or other portable

device. The word "podcasting" combines the words "iPod" and "broadcasting," but the term can be misleading, since neither podcasting nor replaying podcasts requires an iPod or any portable music player.

The weekly podcast of AFPS articles is a production of the Defense Media Activity's emerging media directorate, established in October 2006 to educate Defense Department organizations about new media tools and applications, encourage their use throughout the department, and to communicate department leadership's messages and priorities more effectively with the public.

Related Sites:

American Forces Press Service Podcast

www.blogtalkradio.com/AFPS

Defense.gov, www.Defense.gov

The Pentagon Channel

www.pentagonchannel.mil

Task Group Recommends Reconstruction of Civilian Personnel System



By Jim Garamone
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, July 16, 2009
- A Defense Business Board task group has recommended

reconstruction of the National Security Personnel System.

Rudy DeLeon, the chairman of the group and former deputy defense secretary, said NSPS, a pay-for-performance system, tried to do "too much, too quickly," and his group recommended the moratorium on converting general schedule jobs to NSPS continue.

About 205,000 of the 865,000 Defense Department civilians are in NSPS. The full Defense Business Board will review the task group's recommendations and will prepare a report for Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates.

The first recommendation is to reconstruct the system. "Reconstruction is a level of effort and sophistication more than just fixes," DeLeon said. "It's going to require a significant amount of diagnosis before you come in with reconstruction."

DeLeon said an effective pay-for-performance system requires commitments in time, money and effort.

"A supportive culture requires leadership commitment, open communication, transparency and employee trust of supervisors and leaders," he said.

A pay-for-performance system needs to evolve, he said. "Trying to do something too

quickly, too ambitiously, may not produce the desired result," he said.

The overall conclusions are that the pay-pool process is overly complex and lacks transparency. Also, payout formulas are confusing. The task group heard repeatedly that pay band 2 is too broad, and reassignments within the pay bands fluctuate from organization to organization.

The group also believes that NSPS has lessened the bonds of trust between first-level supervisors and employees. "Re-establishing the [Defense Department] commitment to collaborating with employees and manager associations is essential," DeLeon said.

The task group also made recommendations for the general schedule system. "Overall, the department needs to design a collaborative process for [Defense Department] managers and employees to design and implement a pay-for-performance system," he said. "Bargaining unit employees and the employees need to start from scratch in terms of any alternatives for the GS system."

The group recommended replacing the current general schedule classification system.

DeLeon said the personnel system has to be changed. "Never has the federal workforce, particularly in [the Defense Department], been as important as it is right now," he said. "After a period of using contracting out, we've come back to an understanding of how critical the federal workforce is in terms of the national security mission of the United States."

Related Sites:

National Security Personnel System,

www.cpms.osd.mil/nsps/index.html

Yellow Ribbon Program Provides Support Services



By Army Lt. Col. Matt Leonard
Special to American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, Aug. 17, 2009
- The Yellow Ribbon Program is "off and running," said the

program's deputy executive director, James "Scotty" Scott.

The program's goal is to prepare servicemembers and their families for mobilization, sustain families during mobilization, and reintegrate soldiers with their families, communities and employers upon redeployment.

During the first nine months of fiscal 2009, reserve components have hosted more than 1,367 Yellow Ribbon events across the 54 U.S. states and territories. Through these events, more than 133,000 reservists and their family members have received valuable training and information about support services available to them before, during and after mobilization.

In addition to helping families understand their benefits and entitlements as they transition in and out of active-duty status, the program also links people to services such as referrals and counseling through Military OneSource, Veterans Affairs Vet Centers, Tricare, and other state and local programs.

Ultimately, deployment support and military family programs are the responsibility of each unit commander. However, the program assists commanders by actively surveying the best practices from the military services, and combining those to form a joint program that servicemembers and their families can rely on for assistance and support regardless of service, component or location.

"The Yellow Ribbon Program represents an increasingly valuable resource that commanders are able to integrate into their overall deployment support, readiness and support program," said Dennis M. McCarthy, the assistant secretary of defense for Reserve Affairs.

Meanwhile, the newly formed Yellow Ribbon Advisory Board has conducted its second meeting in the Pentagon. In addition to Defense Department representatives, leaders from the reserve components and the Departments of Labor and Veterans Affairs were in attendance.

The advisory board's mission is to provide independent advice regarding the program to the undersecretary of defense for personnel and readiness. Along with recommending improvements for delivery of services, the board is required to submit a report to the Senate and House Armed Services committees at least once a year.

The board is completing its initial report to Congress, which is due in early September. It also is in the process of finalizing a department instruction, which will provide Yellow Ribbon guidance to the individual reserve components.

Related Sites:

Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program Reaches Milestone,

www.defenselink.mil/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=53708>

White House Launches Virtual Town Hall for Deployed Troops



By Donna Miles
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, Sept. 1, 2009 - The White House launched an interactive, virtual town hall

meeting yesterday that enables troops deployed within U.S. Central Command to pose their questions and get direct feedback from the commander in chief.

"During my time in office, I've learned that there is no substitute for hearing directly from the men and women who are serving abroad," Obama said in a video posted on the Military OneSource site promoting the Web-based town hall.

Military OneSource is hosting the effort, a collaboration between the White House and Pentagon.

Troops can submit their questions through Sept. 25 by video and text in a variety of ways. They can send them through a link on the Military OneSource Web site at <http://townhall.militaryonesource.com>, or they can e-mail questions to townhall@militaryonesource.com, anonymously.

They also can take advantage of video sessions Armed Forces Network plans to set up throughout the Centcom theater to ensure troops get the chance to ask their questions.

Centcom officials posted the president's video on the command's Web site to encourage servicemembers to take part in the town hall. Participants will vote on the questions submitted, and Obama, along with Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates, will answer the top five to 10. The video responses will be featured on the Military OneSource site and broadcast in the theater on AFN, officials said.

Obama called the Internet-based forum a great opportunity to hear directly from the force to ensure his administration's programs are aligned with their needs. Officials said the virtual town hall sessions will also ensure troops and their families know about the wealth of resources available to them through Military OneSource.

"You are carrying out the complex missions of the 21st century. You are bearing the greatest responsibility for America's security," Obama said in his promotional video. "And we must always ensure that we are hearing from you, and communicating clearly with you. That's what this new tool lets us do."

Similar initiatives are under way at the Pentagon, where both Gates and Navy

Adm. Mike Mullen, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, have launched similar town hall sessions.

The new Defense Department home page that went live last month features a prominently placed "Ask the Secretary" section. Anyone visiting <http://www.defense.gov> can submit a question to Gates.

Questions will be accepted for two weeks, then participants in the town hall will have another two weeks to vote on the questions submitted. The secretary will answer the five to 10 questions that top the list.

Meanwhile, Mullen launched an "Ask the Chairman" venue Aug. 18 that enabled anyone, military or not, to pose a question to him <http://www.youtube.com/dodvclips> by Aug. 31.

Mullen will watch questions submitted by YouTube viewers, then respond in a podcast, officials said.

Related Sites:

Troop Town Hall on Military OneSource, <http://townhall.militaryonesource.com>

Military OneSource www.militaryonesource.com

'Virtual Installations' May Be Key to Gold Star Outreach



By Donna Miles
American Forces Press Service

ROCHESTER, N.Y., Sept. 14, 2009 - Army Strong

Community Centers like the one that officially opened here over the weekend are dedicated to serving families who live far from the closest military base.

But they also can help the Army in its efforts to stay in touch with and provide better support for Gold Star families -- those who have lost loved ones in combat.

That's the conclusion Army Reserve Chief Lt. Gen. Jack C. Stultz said he made before the Sept. 12 ribbon-cutting ceremony here, when he met with the parents of three local servicemembers killed in Iraq.

Stultz acknowledged the families' sacrifice during his official remarks at the ceremony, calling the new "virtual installation" here a way for the Army to live up to its warrior ethos as it reaches out to families of the fallen.

"Our warrior ethos is that we will never leave a fallen comrade," he said. "But we will also never leave a fallen comrade's fami-

ly. That's why we are here."

Maintaining contact with these families hasn't always been easy, Stultz acknowledged, particularly because spouses typically move away from the base where their loved one was stationed. But he said he plans to propose the new centers as the key to the issue that Army Chief of Staff Gen. George W. Casey Jr. has been seeking.

"One of the messages I am going to go back to General Casey with is, I may have a solution," Stultz told American Forces Press Service. "Our Army Community Strong Centers can be part of your support network for your Gold Star families in the community."

The Rochester Army Strong Community Center is the first community-based center of its kind. It's resourced and staffed to deliver military families the information, services and support they'd have to drive to a major military base to find. Stultz and his wife, Laura, who championed the idea to fill a gap she experienced personally during his various deployments, hope to see the centers become as commonplace as local post offices.

The concept initially was meant to support families of deployed Army reservists. But Stultz said it's already proving valuable here for families of active-duty soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines as well.

Three Gold Star families told him at the center's official ribbon cutting this weekend that they see it as a resource for them, too. "When I talked to them about what we are doing here, tears literally rolled down their faces," Stultz said. "They said, 'That's what we really need. We need somewhere we can go.'"

Keith and Mary Ellen Schramm of Greece, N.Y.; Dan and Rita Hasenauer of Hilton, N.Y.; and Rob Lyons of Brighton, N.Y., all share the tragedy of losing a loved one in combat. And all live hundreds, even thousands of miles, from the units where their sons were based.

Marine Corps Lance Cpl. Brian K. Schramm, 22, died Oct. 15, 2004, in Iraq's Babil province. He was assigned to the 2nd Marine Expeditionary Force's 2nd Marine Division at Camp Lejeune, N.C.

Twenty-one-year-old Army Pfc. Jason D. Hasenauer died near Kandahar, Afghanistan, on Dec. 28, 2005, when his Humvee accidentally rolled over during a patrol. Hasenauer was assigned to the 82nd Airborne Division's 504th Parachute Regiment at Fort Bragg, N.C.

Army 1st Lt. James N. Lyons, 28, died Sept. 27, 2006, in Baghdad, after enemy forces attacked his mounted patrol. He was assigned to the 4th Infantry Division's 12th Infantry Regiment at Fort Hood, Texas.

The Lyons, Schramms and Hasenauers all reported great support from their casualty assistance officers after their sons were killed. What they said they're lacking now is a way to stay tied to the military their sons died serving, and to get information and help when they need it.

Until now, they said, they've relied mainly on each other.

Lyons told Stultz he doesn't know anyone at Fort Hood, his late son's post, hasn't talked by phone to anyone there, and doesn't know who he would call if he wanted to. He traveled there on his own to visit the memorials to his son and other Fort Hood soldiers killed in the wars.

Dan Hasenauer shared with American Forces Press Service that he told Stultz he sought counseling to deal with the grief of losing his son. But he never felt comfortable with the counselor, who didn't understand the military or what he was going through.

The Schramms tried one session of family counseling through the Department of Veterans Affairs, but said they didn't find it helpful for their three children: one was bitterly angry over his brother's death, and the other two "shut right down," Mary Ellen Schramm said.

"One place that seems to be lacking was support for siblings, especially teenagers," her husband said. "They are a hard group to get to. But they take it as hard as the parents do."

In addition to the intense emotional aspects of their losses, two of the families said they struggled with other procedural and policy roadblocks.

Jason Hasenauer and James Lyons both planned to marry when they returned from their deployments. Hasenauer's fiancée gave birth three weeks before he was killed, leaving her to navigate the military health care system for their daughter on her own and without the benefit of a military identification card. Lyons had to call his son's fiancée to break the news of his death and complained that she was "almost invisible" to the Army because she wasn't his wife.

While not knowing exactly how much the new Army Strong Community Center will be able to address their specific issues, the families agreed they're happy there's now a new resource in their community where they can turn for understanding and caring support.

"From what we have heard, the bases have good resources. But if you're not at a base, or once you have left a base, you lose any connection you had," Schramm said. "That's why something like this center here is so valuable. It fills a big gap."

But Stultz said he was particularly inspired by one parent's motivation to

reconnect with the military through the new Army Strong Community Center.

"One of the mothers said, 'We have a Gold Star group here and we want to help soldiers, but we don't know where to go,'" Stultz said. "She said, 'I lost my son, but I still want to give back.' Now, that's pretty inspiring."

Related Articles:

'Virtual Installation' Brings Support to Military Families

<blockedhttp://www.defenselink.mil//news/newsarticle.aspx?id=55822>

Traumatic Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance: helping heroes in times of need



What is it?

Traumatic Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance (TSGLI) provides financial support to traumatically injured Soldiers and their Families. Qualifying Soldiers receive a tax-free payment between \$25,000 and \$100,000 per traumatic event based on the injury. The TSGLI benefit is not intended to serve as income replacement and will not affect other compensation determinations.

Traumatic injuries covered by TSGLI are defined as severe trauma from an external force that is physical in nature. Examples include: loss of sight, paralysis, limb salvage, facial reconstruction, severe burns or loss of activities of daily living (ADL) functions due to traumatic brain injuries or other traumatic injuries, which focus on the Soldier's need for assistance.

TSGLI is a congressionally mandated program that began on Dec. 1, 2005. All Soldiers from that point forward who elected Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance (SGLI) pay an additional \$1 for TSGLI, no matter what the level of SGLI coverage. In addition, Soldiers who incurred qualifying traumatic injuries from Oct. 7, 2001, through Nov. 30, 2005, while on orders overseas in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) or Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) or in a combat zone are covered retroactively by TSGLI, regardless of whether they had SGLI at the time of their injury.

Officials Seek to Raise Awareness of Special Needs Programs



By Samantha L. Quigley
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, July 22, 2009 - Pentagon officials want all military families with special needs to be enrolled in the Defense Department's Exceptional Family Member program.

Though more than 90,000 military dependents are enrolled in the program, many families with special needs probably aren't enrolled, said Rebecca Posante, communication director for the Pentagon's Office of Military Community and Family Policy said.

The program requires servicemembers to identify dependents with special medical or educational needs and documents the services they require, Posante said. Reasons may vary for families who haven't enrolled, she added, but one reason is heard more than any other.

"People think it affects their career progression, but the [program] records are not in the promotional paperwork at all," she said. "We're trying to tell people, 'If we know about you ahead of time, then they'll take that into consideration and try to find an assignment that has your [specialty], but also where they can meet your needs.'"

Many servicemembers think being part of the program will limit their assignment possibilities, Posante said, when in fact, most families can go anywhere. An Exceptional Family Member Program working group is hoping to address these issues, she said.

The working group's main task since its establishment in April is a five-year campaign to raise awareness of the programs available to families with special needs and the challenges they face, Posante said. One such challenge involves state Medicaid waivers, which help special needs families cover expenses for things such as adult day care and expendable items not covered by Tricare or most other insurance.

"Each of the states has this Medicaid waiver component, but unfortunately, the waiting lists for these waivers are years long," said Isabel Hodge, Special Needs Family Support Program manager. "We're at a disadvantage as military families, because we never live in a state long enough to be able to move up the waiting list."

Many programs and resources available to special needs families are available on the Exceptional Family Member Program's Web site, which is a part of the Defense

Department's Military Homefront site at <http://militaryhomefront.dod.mil>. It includes a downloadable tool kit for parents with children 3 and under, and a social networking feature so special needs families can share questions, concerns and information.

In addition, the "Plan My Move" Web site, also part of the Military Homefront site, offers tips for families with special needs who are preparing to move to a new duty station. Answering a few simple questions -- including "Do you have a family member with special needs?" -- will generate a calendar with helpful hints about when to accomplish specific tasks and where to look for assistance.

Defense Department officials plan to hold a joint Exceptional Family Member Program seminar with "Improving the Quality of Life for Military Families with Special Needs" as its theme in November. The training is targeted to service providers and will provide opportunities for them to explore ways to better serve military families with special needs as well as to understand some of the obstacles.

Related Sites:

Exceptional Family Member Program,
www.militaryhomefront.dod.mil/portal/page/mhf/MHF/MHF_HOME_1?section_id=20.40.500.570.0.0.0.0

Military Community and Family Policy Office,

www.defenselink.mil/prhome/mcfc.html

Plan My Move,

<http://apps.mhf.dod.mil/pls/psgprod/f?p=107:1:461836081766109>

Military Homefront,

militaryhomefront.dod.mil

Servicemembers Can Weather Financial Storm

By **Samantha L. Quigley**
American Forces Press Service

CHICAGO, Sept. 24, 2009 - Servicemembers and their families can weather the "perfect storm" of credit, savings and banking crises; bailouts; market instability; and foreclosures, if they stay financially prepared, the Pentagon's personal finance director said here recently.

Dave Julian urged those attending the Defense Department Joint Family Readiness Conference here earlier this month to save more than the average American.

"Back before [the recession], the aver-

age American spent \$1.22 for every dollar they made," Julian said. "If you put that in real dollars, you make \$30,000 a year, you're spending close to \$37,000.

"The bottom line is, that's the average American and we can't have our servicemembers and families ... afford to be average," he added. "Their work is far too important. They mean too much to us to let them fall into those kinds of traps that are out there that snare most Americans."

A recent report published in the American Psychological Association said money is a "top source of stress for adults," he said.

Many people don't understand how credit affects their lives, and lead to unhealthy coping behaviors, a loss of sleep, strained personal and professional relationships and other long- and short-term health effects, Julian said.

Studies also have linked financial stress as a factor in suicides, he said.

"The Army did say in 2006, [in] 11 percent of the suicides they had, finances were a known stressor," Julian said.

Being financially ready, which includes having good credit, can save a person at least \$250,000 in interest over the course of a lifetime, Julian said.

While that kind of savings should be a good incentive, servicemembers have a greater motivator: mission readiness.

Financial readiness begets mission readiness, Julian said.

If a servicemember has bad credit or a bankruptcy or glaring signs of financial unpreparedness, they also jeopardize any security clearance they may have and, consequently, mission readiness.

Servicemembers aren't immune to economic trends, but unlike much of the general population, servicemembers have some resources and protections, Julian said.

"If you take a look at what we provide or what servicemembers and their families have access to, it really can help them avoid some of those pitfalls that are out there," he added. "We have counselors in our family readiness center ... we have command financial specialists embedded in the units.

"We've got online resources like Military OneSource ... if they don't feel comfortable walking into the family center or they don't live near a base," he said.

Other resources include Military Saves, Military Homefront's "Personal Financial Readiness" section. The department also works with other financial readiness partners like In Charge Institute, FINRA Investor Education Program, the Better Business Bureau Military Line and the Federal Trade Commission, among others.

Through these resources, servicemem-

bers can learn how to start down the road to financial success and what tools are available to help them along the way.

The Thrift Savings Plan is one of those tools. It's the government's 401k-style plan, which allows pre-tax contributions up to \$16,500 and a combat zone tax exclusion up to \$49,000, including bonuses and combat pay this year.

Any tax-exempt contributions made to Thrift Savings Plan accounts are not taxable, even after withdrawal, Julian said.

The Family Smoking Prevention and Tobacco Control Act, signed into law June 22, beefed up TSP, adding a Roth 401k contribution option, auto enrollment for civilian employees, survivor benefits for TSP accounts and a mutual fund investment option.

Another savings option for servicemembers is the Savings Deposit Program. It's available to those serving in a designated combat zone. The account guarantees an automatic 10 percent return up to 10,000, but the interest is taxable.

Servicemembers also are able to take advantage of some protections against a bad economy, Julian said.

These include the Nelson-Talent Amendment, part of the Defense Reauthorization Bill of 2007, which caps interest rates for all loans to servicemembers and their dependents at 36 percent. It was an attempt to curb the practice of payday lenders targeting military personnel.

A 2008 report to Congress said the amendment was having the desired effect, Julian said.

Military Sentinel is another way servicemembers can protect their financial security. It's a partnership between the Defense Department and the Federal Trade Commission where servicemembers can report scams and register complaints.

The site is accessible to more than 500 law enforcement agencies and judge advocate generals, Julian said.

Like civilians, servicemembers also can "freeze" their credit by calling one of the three consumer credit agencies. It's good for at least a year unless the decision is reversed, and unlike civilians, it doesn't cost military members anything.

"[This] means that no one else while you're ... on active duty ... can open up or take out any lines of credit in your name without your permission or the person you designated to be your agent," Julian said. "Your identity cannot be stolen if this [is in effect]."

"Ten million people a year get their identities stolen, and a lot of people are preying on military now," he added.

Servicemembers also may be protected

from eviction while on active duty under the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act, which was expanded in 2003. It also provides a servicemember who receives permanent change of station orders or who is deployed to a new location for 90 days or more the right to terminate a housing lease.

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 expanded the Homeowners Assistance Program to include wounded warriors and surviving spouses. It also could help some affected by Base Realignment and Closure 05, and those facing a permanent change of station that have been affected by the mortgage crisis.

With all the resources and opportunities available to them, the bottom line is any servicemember can achieve or maintain a state of financial readiness, Julian said.

"Our families are very proud," he said. "They like to pick themselves up by their bootstraps, but hopefully I got them at least aware that, 'Hey, there are resources out there. I can reach out.'"

Related Sites:

Military Community and Family Policy

www.defenselink.mil/prhome/mcftp.html

Military OneSource

www.militaryonesource.com/home.aspx?MROle=&Branch=&Component=>

Military Saves

www.militarysaves.org

Military Homefront

www.militaryhomefront.dod.mil

In Charge Institute

www.inchargefoundation.org/>

FINRA Investor Education Program

<http://www.finrafoundation.org>

Better Business Bureau Military Line

<http://bbb.org/military>

Thrift Savings Plan

www.tsp.gov

Servicemembers Civil Relief Act

www.hud.gov/offices/cpd/about/hudvet/library/scra.cfm

Defense Department to Start H1N1 Flu Vaccinations

By Jim Garamone
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, Sept. 1, 2009 - All military personnel will be vaccinated against the H1N1 flu virus, and the vaccine will be available to all military family members who want it, a Defense Department health affairs official said today.

The H1N1 vaccination program will

begin in early October, said Army Lt. Col. (Dr.) Wayne Hachey, director of preventive medicine for Defense Department health affairs.

The vaccine, which has been licensed by the Food and Drug Administration, will be mandatory for uniformed personnel, the colonel said. "What we want to do is target those people who are at highest risk for transmission," he said.

Health-care workers, deploying troops, those serving on ships and submarines, and new accessions are at the top of the list. "Any place where we take a lot of people, squash them all together and get them nice and close and put them under stressful conditions will get the vaccine first," he said.

The department will use the usual seasonal flu vaccine distribution chain for the H1N1, Hachey said, noting that while the mass H1N1 vaccinations are new to the general population, the process for vaccinating against seasonal flu is old hat for the Defense Department. "We've been doing this for decades," the colonel said. "The system is tried and true."

The department initially will receive 1 million doses of the H1N1 vaccine, and another 1.7 million doses later in October.

Officials don't know yet whether people will need one dose or two, Hachey said. "The assumption right now is that people will need two doses, 21 days apart," he said. "That may change."

FDA officials still are studying H1N1 and the vaccine, and the results should be known by the end of the month.

Seasonal flu vaccine already is available, and the Defense Department will begin giving those shots shortly, Hachey said. "That has been our message to immunizers: to try and get as many people as they can immunized against the seasonal flu early," he said.

Guidelines for giving priority to family members will follow those for the general population, Hachey said. The Department of Health and Human Services is buying millions of doses of the vaccine.

"Installations are going to register with each state as an immunizer," Hachey said. "They will tell how many people they care for. This includes dependents, retirees and so on."

The Centers for Disease Control will place the order and will ship the vaccine where needed. Family members will have multiple opportunities to get the vaccine, whether at Defense Department medical facilities or off post, Hachey said.

The CDC has established target groups for those at greatest risk for transmitting or being affected by the H1N1. They include pregnant women, health-care workers, those younger than 25 or older than 65, and those with pre-existing health conditions.

Hachey said previous plans are serving the Defense Department well. "We have been preparing for pandemic flu because of its potential impact on the mission," he said.

The symptoms of the H1N1 flu are almost the same as the seasonal flu: fever, sore throat, runny nose, nausea, muscle aches and feeling rundown. The 2009 H1N1 virus, formerly known as swine flu, is a pandemic virus, according to the World Health Organization. U.S. officials call the virus "troubling" and urge communities across the United States to take actions to mitigate the effects of it. The federal government is urging states and municipalities to begin preparing now for the fall flu season.

President Barack Obama addressed the H1N1 pandemic following a White House meeting today.

"As I said when we saw the first cases of this virus back in the spring, I don't want anybody to be alarmed, but I do want everybody to be prepared," he said. "We know that we usually get a second, larger wave of these flu viruses in the fall, and so response plans have been put in place across all levels of government."

But government cannot do it all, and the American people have a responsibility to stop the spread of the disease, Obama said. "We need families and businesses to ensure that they have plans in place if a family member, a child or a co-worker contracts the flu and needs to stay home," he said.

"And most importantly, we need everyone to get informed about individual risk factors, and we need everyone to take the common-sense steps that we know can make a difference," the president said. "Stay home if you're sick. Wash your hands frequently. Cover your sneezes with your sleeve, not your hands. And take all the necessary precautions to stay healthy. I know it sounds simple, but it's important and it works."

The H1N1 is a never-before-seen combination of human, swine and avian flu viruses, officials said. First detected in Mexico in February, it quickly spread around the world. According to July WHO statistics, there have been 94,512 H1N1 cases worldwide, and 429 people have died from it. In the United States, 33,902 contracted H1N1, and 170 have died.

Related Sites:

Special Report: H1N1 Flu

http://www.defenselink.mil/home/features/2009/0509_h1n1/>

Defense Department Health Affairs

<http://www.health.mil>

Stop the Spread of Germs

Tell your health care provider immediately if you have any of these symptoms: fever, headache, tiredness, dry cough, sore throat, nasal congestion or body aches

Cover Coughs and Sneezes



- ▶ Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze
- or
- ▶ Cough or sneeze into your upper sleeve, not your hands



- ▶ Drop your used tissue in a waste basket

If Asked, Wear a Mask



- ▶ Secure ties behind head or place elastic bands behind ears
- ▶ Fit flexible band at top of mask to bridge of nose
- ▶ Fit mask snug to face and below chin

Clean Your Hands



- ▶ Wash with soap and water for at least 15-20 seconds
- or
- ▶ Clean with alcohol-based hand cleaner



Especially:

- ▶ After using the restroom
- ▶ After sneezing or blowing nose
- ▶ Before touching food
- ▶ Before touching your eyes, mouth or nose



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<http://usachppm.apgea.army.mil>