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Army Reserve Chief: Have Reservists Do Homeland Missions

By Donna Miles, American Forces Press Service



WASHINGTON, April 6, 2011 - The Army Reserve's top officer made the case today for legislative changes that would allow his troops to respond to homeland disasters or attacks when federal military capabilities are needed.

Army Reserve Chief Lt. Gen. Jack C. Stultz made clear during a roundtable discussion at the Heritage Foundation here that he has no interest in undermining state governors' authority or stepping on the toes of the National Guard that currently provides homeland support under their state governors' orders.

But in light of budget constraints and vast improvements in the Army Reserve's readiness and capabilities during the past decade, Stultz said it doesn't make sense to be able to use these capabilities only during overseas missions.

"The primary focus of the Title 10 reserve has always been on the expeditionary," he said. "We have been saying for some time is: 'We should be playing a role in the homeland.' But it is going to require legislative change."

Current law, he said, allows an involuntary call-up of the Title 10 reserve for a homeland mission only for crises involving weapons of mass destruction.

In the event of natural disasters such as hurricanes or floods or an outright attack on the homeland, local first responders -- police, firefighters and emergency medical technicians -- are likely to be the first on the scene, Stultz said.

State governors also have authority to mobilize their National Guard forces if needed.

"But at the point where that governor, that state says, 'We need federal assistance now. This is beyond our capability,'" Stultz said. Current law, he added, requires the active component to be employed as the default federal force.

Testifying March 30 before the House Appropriation Com-

mittee's Defense Subcommittee, Stultz used his home state of Florida as an example of how the current law requires that federal assistance be provided during a homeland emergency.

"It makes no sense to me when Hurricane Andrew hits and we have to have federal response, that the 82nd Airborne comes from Fort Bragg, North Carolina," in light of vast Army Reserve resources already in Florida, he told the panel.

"The Army Reserve has an engineer battalion sitting in Miami with scrapers, with bucket-loaders, with bulldozers, with dump trucks ... I've got [military police] units in Ocala and Tampa and Fort Lauderdale... I've got hospital units in the south Florida area, Jacksonville and Tampa area... I've got a [medical evacuation] unit ... with Blackhawk helicopters sitting in Clearwater, Florida. And I've got transporters, trucks sitting around the state," he said.

These units are made up of "citizens of Florida ... who want to help, and yet we don't have the authority," he said.

"Now, we do not want to try to take the job of the National Guard," Stultz said. The National Guard, he told the House panel, responds "magnificently" when called to the scene.

"What we're saying is when the federal response is needed," he continued, "currently you go to the active force, when you have Title 10 Reserves sitting there inside the state that are ready, available, and in a lot of cases, more capable."

Stultz told reporters today the Army Reserve's makeup, which includes a major percentage of the Army's medical, engineering and transportation units, makes it the more logistical federal choice.

"The capabilities that you really need for the homeland response reside in our force much more than they reside in the active Army," he said.

Stultz' concept isn't new. Legislative changes needed to use the Army Reserve stateside have been proposed at least twice on Capitol Hill, only to get push-back from governors and others who Stultz said didn't fully understand the intent.

"They are looking at it as the federal government trying to usurp the state," he said. "This is not about the federal government taking over the state's authority. This is not about the state having the authority to call up the federal reserve [forces], either. This is about when the state requires federal assistance, what force

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do we employ?

“Do we employ that active force that comes from Fort Bragg with a bunch of infantry soldiers,” the general continued, “or do we employ the Army Reserves who happen to be present within the state with the capability [needed]?”

Stultz said he’s seeing more openness today to legislative change. Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates and the administration are interested, he said. Paul N. Stockton, assistant secretary of defense for homeland defense and Americas’ security affairs; and Richard Reed, special assistant to the president for homeland security, are exploring the issue.

And in a promising development, Stultz said the National Governors’ Association has expressed an interest in moving the measure forward.

“I don’t think it is going to happen overnight,” Stultz said of legislative change. “But I think you have both sides now, from the state and federal level, saying, ‘Why aren’t we doing this? What is getting in the way?’”

Dempsey Discusses Range of Army Issues

By Jim Garamone, American Forces Press Service



WASHINGTON, April 14, 2011 - The Army could provide a follow-on force in Iraq if asked, the service’s new chief of Staff said here yesterday.

Iraq was just one of many topics Army Gen. Martin E. Dempsey took on during a 45-minute session with reporters in his office. He also touched on repeal of the “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” law, the future of the service and what the Army needs to do in an era of fiscal constraint.

Dempsey wears two hats as the uniformed leader of his service and as a member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. In the second position, the general said, he would recommend a continued mission in Iraq. Barring a request by the Iraqi government for a continued U.S. military presence, all U.S. forces are scheduled to be out of the country by the end of the year.

“If the Iraqis request support beyond the end of December, I would certainly say that a stable Iraq, long-term, would be of common interest to both of us,” he said.

It would be in American interests, he noted, for Iraq to remain on its current path and become even more stable. “Look at the neighbors, and see the troubles they are having,” he said.

The Army would find a way to do it if tasked to do so, Dempsey said, but many questions would need to be answered. First,

do the Iraqis want U.S. help? If they do, then what type of help – training and advising, counterterrorism assistance, airspace defense, border control, logistics or professional military education?

“There’s any number of things they could ask for, and then we’d have to decide what it would take to do it,” the general said.

As training continues to prepare the force for repeal of the law that bans gay men and lesbians from serving openly in the military, Dempsey said, he expects to make his recommendation in May. The repeal will take effect 60 days after the president, the secretary of defense and the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff certify that the military is ready for the change.

“I have to be comfortable based on the input from my commanders in the field that they believe the training and education has permeated the force to the point where ... I can provide advice to the secretary and the chairman on the issue of certification,” he said.

The Army has launched a study of the service and the profession of arms, Dempsey noted, something the service has done in the past, such as after Vietnam and at the end of the Cold War.

“It’s one of those times when there are signals that the force— after 10 years of war – is asking itself, ‘Who are we? What are we? Why are we? What is the role of the Army?’” he said.

Certain attributes define a profession, the general said. “You have to have an ethic – a series of behaviors. You have to be self-regulating. You have to develop your leaders. You have to commit to long-term development,” he said. “In many of those areas, we are doing extraordinarily well. But what I’ve found is that the force is embracing this effort.”

The study is part of a Training and Doctrine Command effort to answer those questions, he added. Dempsey commanded that organization in his last prior assignment.

As chief of staff, Dempsey said, his first priority is keeping faith with the young men and women deploying to Iraq and Afghanistan and wherever else they go, and this has to be seen against the background of fiscal constraint.

“Given the clear task at hand that the nation has to address its financial challenges, we are also looking at what does this Army need to be for the nation, not what does the Army need to be for the Army,” he said.

“The real art of being the chief of staff of the Army in support of the secretary of the Army and the secretary of defense is to take a look at across the budgets you will influence,” the general said. That goes out to fiscal 2020, he added, and the challenge is reconciling the very different pressures that exist in meeting the current demand,

winning the current fight and building the future force.

Reconnecting the Army’s divisions with their brigades is one of his aspirations in his new job, Dempsey said. Now, divisions deploy and often have brigades from different divisions.

“We grew the Army from 65 to 73 brigades because we needed it to manage the rotation on a 1-to-1 ratio,” he explained. “That also backed us into the structure where brigades are available not when their higher headquarters is available, but when they are available.”

While the modular system gives the service a degree of versatility that is helpful to the nation, Dempsey said, issues such as leader development and other human dimensions accrue. Still, he added, the modular force provides some second-order benefits.

“The heavy force has gotten much more comfortable working with the lighter force,” he said. “Special operations forces are much more comfortable working with general purpose forces, and so on. This isn’t all bad, but there are signals out to which we have to respond.

“And when the demand declines – which we anticipate it will at some point – you will find us inclined to reconnect leaders and mentors in a way that helps us get at these leader development issues,” he added.

Dempsey said he is concerned about hollowing out the force.

“The commitment I’ve made is whatever Army we build, it will be well-organized, well-trained and well-equipped,” he said. “That might mean it’s smaller than we like, but it’ll be able to do the job it’s asked to do.”

Avoiding a hollow force has much to do with maintaining the balance among personnel, operations and modernization, the general explained. “If you stray too far from this balance, you can hollow out the force,” he said.

Dempsey said he will take a look at all Army programs to ensure they are doing what they were meant to do.

“We’ve been extraordinarily well supported over the last 10 years,” he said. “The people of the United States have given us what we need.” But programs can proliferate and morph, he added, and he thinks some may be redundant or not producing the outcomes needed.

“The challenge we face is to take a look at these programs holistically and then rack and stack them – prioritize them, determine the resources we have, and then make sure we have the resources for the ones that are producing the results,” he said.

The Army is challenged, Dempsey acknowledged. Soldiers feel very good about what they are doing now, he said, but they are confused about the fiscal crisis and what

forces are needed for the future.

"All this is routine and historical, but to them it's new," he said. "I'm 59 years old, and I've heard this four times in my career. What I've got to do is help them see their way through that. Part of my themes I'm working on, with the great help of the secretary of the Army, is to issue between now and the Army birthday a document that articulates some of that and calm the nerves of the force.

"The Army has been around for 235 years, and though it doesn't always look the same from decade to decade, it always provides the things the nation needs when it needs it," he continued. "I personally think the Army ought to think of itself as an organization that will adapt about every five to seven years. It's not just about new equipment, but new organizations and structures."

The younger generation embraces adaptation and change better than older generations, he said, "and I'm going to test that theory."

Green Initiatives Support Energy-Savings Concept

By Donna Miles, American Forces Press Service



WASHINGTON, April 13, 2011 - Last week's groundbreaking for a new solar micro grid at Fort Hunter Liggett, Calif., is the latest example of a military "going green" — saving environmental resources and taxpayer dollars, too.

The 1-megawatt facility, to become operational later this year, will provide one-third of the power for the nation's largest Army Reserve training post, and ultimately it will save \$1 million in energy costs annually, Addison D. "Tad" Davis IV, command executive officer for U.S. Army Reserve Command at Fort Bragg, N.C., told American Forces Press Service.

Taking advantage of the post's 292 annual days of sunshine, the facility's two grids, each stretching about 40 feet by 1,200 feet over an existing parking lot, will shade vehicles below while generating renewable solar energy.

"This is pretty exciting stuff, when you think about the fact that we are able to do this and generate that much energy for this installation," Davis said.

And if the Army decides to expand the initiative into its second and third phases, it could enable Fort Hunter Liggett to become one of the Defense Department's first "net-zero energy installations," meaning it produces as much energy as it uses, he said.

Davis said he's seen the military make huge strides in energy conservation. A

decade ago, as Fort Bragg's garrison commander, he introduced the Army's first installation-wide sustainability program.

Costs largely drove that decision. "As the installation commander for the largest populated military installation in the world here at Fort Bragg, I had the checkbook, and I had to pay the energy bill and the water bill every month," he said.

It didn't take long to recognize that conserving resources saved money that could be used for infrastructure upgrades and new facilities. "So it was the economics of this that really got me excited about sustainability," Davis said.

Fort Bragg's early sustainability programs addressed the broad scope of issues, from how energy, water, wastewater and solid and hazardous waste was managed to how new buildings were constructed. The result, Davis said, was more effective and efficient use of resources, reduced consumption and, as a result, cost savings that could be applied to other projects.

The concept caught on quickly, expanding to more than 30 Army installations, including posts in Germany, Alaska and Hawaii. Now, the Army hopes to take it a step further with net-zero energy, waste and water initiatives. Several pilot programs are expected to be announced during next week's Earth Day observance.

These sustainability initiatives support what Davis called the Army's "triple bottom line" that incorporates mission, environment and community.

"Obviously, the mission is most important to us -- to be able to provide our soldiers, civilians and family members for worldwide deployments and be able to go forth and conduct missions and return home safe and sound," he said.

That mission focus is accompanied with the responsibility to be a good steward of the environment, Davis said.

"This is looking at our resources and taking deliberate steps to address our consumption and reducing our impact on the environment," he explained.

It also involves working as partners with communities -- those directly on the installation as well as beyond its gates -- to pursue environmental goals. Davis pointed to the example of the Sustainable Sandhills Initiative, which was established in 2003 and brings together Fort Bragg, neighboring Pope Air Force Base and eight surrounding counties to support regional conservation programs and initiatives.

Those experiences have proven valuable in Davis' current post as CEO for the Army Reserve, with responsibility for its 1,200 facilities worldwide.

"We in the Army Reserve are inextricably linked to the communities, because our reserve centers are there in the communities," he said. "So the thought is, if we can

get this [sustainability effort] distributed to as many of our facilities as possible, it will help us economically, it will help us to be good stewards of the taxpayer dollar, but it will also connect us to the communities — many of which are trying to do much of the same thing we are doing."

Evidence of a sustainability mind set is cropping up throughout the Army Reserve. It's seen in a photovoltaic solar panel system on the roof of the 99th Regional Support Command headquarters at Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, N.J.; a geothermal initiative at Fort Devens, Mass.; and in renovations of older buildings to make them more efficient.

One of the most exciting new developments, Davis said, is a new reserve center being built at Las Cruces, N.M., to the most stringent Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design standards.

"This is a really big deal," he said of the plans that will achieve either gold- or platinum-level LEED certification and exceed the silver certification the Army requires for all new buildings. "It is a huge accomplishment, by any stretch, to have a building able to meet [those] criteria," Davis said.

While the Army Reserve builds state-of-the-art facilities and renovates older ones to make them more energy- and resource-efficient, its members are identifying new ways of doing business that promote conservation. New temperature-control systems enable users to heat and cool entire facilities during high-occupancy weekend periods, but only parts of those buildings during weekdays, when they're minimally manned. New energy, water and natural gas meters are being installed to encourage conservation. Hybrid vehicles are being put to use at the Army Reserve's larger training centers, and a new emphasis has been put on buying recyclable and reusable products.

Meanwhile, the Army Reserve has joined "big Army" in expanding this focus to the operational force.

"We're trying to look at how we can apply some of these lessons learned to our forward-deployed forces, enable the mission to continue, but reduce the reliance on fossil fuel" to run generators and provide other critical support, Davis said, citing solar or wind power as possible options.

"When you boil it down to what we are trying to accomplish, we are trying to build green, buy green, go green," he said. "From the big-picture perspective, this is obviously something that is very important to the military."

Policy Aims to Better Identify, Treat Concussions

By Donna Miles, American Forces Press Service



WASHINGTON, April 1, 2011 - A memorandum that took effect throughout the Defense Department in June is expected to have a major impact on efforts to identify and treat traumatic

brain injuries in the combat theater faster and more systematically, medical officials reported at the recent Armed Forces Public Health Conference in Hampton, Va.

The directive memo, which sets policy and management guidelines concerning TBI in deployed settings, relies for the first time on events, rather than personal reporting, to trigger a chain of institutional responses, Army Maj. Sarah Goldman, the Army's TBI program manager, told an audience of health care professionals.

"This is an absolutely revolutionary policy," Goldman said. "This is really the first time in traumatic brain injury care, and certainly in the Department of Defense traumatic brain injury care, that we have an event-driven protocol. What that means is that you don't have to rely on service members to raise their hand and say, 'I am having some problems' after they have been involved in an event."

Instead, the new policy lays out a response whenever a service member experiences something that could cause TBI.

"This is an event-driven policy," Goldman said. "So, for example, if the service member hits their head or is somewhere near a blast, they have to get checked out, they have to get treated and they have to get reported. There also is mandatory downtime."

DOD officials have long struggled to find ways to more quickly identify and treat what has become a signature — and often invisible — combat injury. TBIs often result from bullet blasts, vehicle accidents that cause a jolt to the head or exposure to a blast. The most common symptoms are loss of consciousness, memory loss, alteration of consciousness and other neurological problems.

Moderate and severe TBI is relatively easy to recognize, Navy Cmdr. (Dr.) David Tarantino, director for clinical programs at Headquarters Marine Corps, told the group. What's far more challenging, he said, is recognizing the 80 percent of TBI patients whose conditions are mild — meaning they have suffered a concussion.

"In layman's terms, you feel dizzy, confused, see stars and have some alteration of consciousness," Tarantino said. Other symptoms, he said, include disorientation, headache, balance difficulties, sleep disturbances, nausea and vomiting.

Not diagnosing a service member with mild TBI can have serious operational impact, Tarantino said.

"You have difficulty following instructions, poor marksmanship, slow reaction time and decreased concentration. All of those have an impact on the battlefield," he said. "If someone has a concussion, you don't want to give them a weapon and send them right back to the front lines. That can do a lot of harm."

It's the same principle the National Football League uses to protect its players, Tarantino said. "You don't want to have your quarterback in on a final drive if he has been knocked loopy," he said. "It's a similar kind of thing."

But as the NFL and military are learning together, there's another reason to identify and treat mild TBI as quickly as possible. Not only is it the best way to ensure a full recovery; it's also the best way to prevent more severe issues if the patient gets another concussion before the first one heals.

Studies on athletes show that a history of three concussions increases their risk of chronic problems three-fold, Tarantino said. "We are starting to see from NFL players what the cumulative, long-term effects are," he said, including early Alzheimer's disease and chronic traumatic encephalopathy, a progressive degenerative disease.

"This is an issue we are concerned about and trying to prevent" in U.S. service members, Tarantino said. "We have a lot of guys exposed [to blasts] many times. So the question is: 'How do we make sure that they get the proper rest and care and treatment before they get exposed again?'"

Goldman called the new DOD memorandum a major step in the right direction. Developed by scientific experts from around the country, "it represents what we understand is the best science to date to manage concussion," she said.

"As the science continues to evolve, we certainly will be updating this policy," she said. The first policy update is expected later this year, when the memo becomes a permanent DOD instruction.

The new memo requires commanders to ensure all service members involved in potentially concussive events receive a medical evaluation, even if they have no apparent injuries. It also authorizes commanders to refer a soldier, sailor, airmen or Marine under their charge who appears to be showing symptoms for evaluation.

It also mandates that all cases of TBI be documented into an electronic medical record. This, Goldman said, will provide a registry for the Defense Department and a tool to inform commanders whose units are about to redeploy.

Air Force Maj. (Dr.) Laura Baugh, the Air Force TBI program manager, called this leadership responsibility a key part of the

new policy. "It requires leaders to recognize service members who have been involved in an event that could cause a concussion and to ensure they get a medical evaluation, and requires them to track these service members in the electronic database," she said.

"Not only does this ensure service members get the follow-on care they need down the road," she said. "It also helps [DOD] understand the true incidence of this problem in the theater."

The policy establishes new protocols for service members with recurrent TBIs.

"If there is a service member who has sustained three or more concussions within a 12-month period, they are getting a four-hour neuropsychological battery," Baugh said, including vestibular and functional testing.

"They get the entire 'works,'" Goldman said.

"Don't get me wrong. Certainly the ones who experienced just one event also are getting checked out," Goldman continued. "But I will tell you, it is a much more intensive evaluation for service members involved in the recurrent concussion protocol."

The memo revises the military acute concussion evaluation screening test, introducing a three-part score that includes patient history and results of cognitive screening and a neurological screening exam, she said.

In terms of patient care, it mandates two of the best-known treatments for mild TBI: rest and education.

Troops suffering mild TBI require at least 24 hours of rest before returning to duty, and often more as they receive their medical evaluations, Tarantino said. Ideally, that rest is offered in a "reduced-stimulus environment" — a place that's cool, quiet and comfortable and allows patients to rest and catch up on lost sleep, he said.

Often service members need to be moved to find these conditions, he recognized. "It's pretty hard at a forward operating base getting shelled or [under] mortar fire, or where there's no air conditioning or it's noisy or loud or uncomfortable," he said. "That, in itself, might be a reason to move the patient back to get rest."

Tarantino cited the Marines' Concussion Restoration Care Center at Camp Leatherneck, Afghanistan, as a new approach to providing this respite in the combat theater. It offers comprehensive, interdisciplinary concussion care that includes sports medicine, occupational therapy, physical therapy and even acupuncture that he said "has proven very popular with the Marines and, at least anecdotally, very effective."

The center tends to treat some of the more severe concussions, offering care that typically lasts about 14 days. However, 95 percent of its patients return to full duty,

Tarantino reported.

As the military works to improve the way it diagnoses and treats mild TBI, it's also focusing more heavily on educating service members about TBI. The education effort begins during the pre-deployment cycle and continues in the combat theater and on redeployment home. "The best treatment is education, providing information, counseling and instructions about common symptoms and expected outcomes," Tarantino said.

Goldman said she's enthusiastic about the potential of the new policy to help the military better identify and treat mild TBI and to ensure service members have the best chance of a full recovery.

"I just can't overemphasize just how revolutionary this policy is," she said. "We are really looking forward to the long-term results to see how this impacts long-term outcomes."

VA Budget Request Signals Commitment to Vets

By Donna Miles, American Forces Press Service



WASHINGTON, April 4, 2011 - President Barack Obama's \$132 billion 2012 budget request for the Veterans Affairs Department demonstrates that despite a tight fiscal environment, the United States stands by its commitment

to men and women who have served in uniform, Deputy VA Secretary W. Scott Gould told American Forces Press Service.

Deputy Veterans Affairs Secretary W. Scott Gould speaks at opening ceremonies for the 25th National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic in Snowmass Village, Colo., March 27, 2011. Gould said VA's fiscal 2012 budget request aims to improve the delivery of services and benefits to veterans while improving the systems that make VA more efficient and effective. VA photo by Jeff Bowen

(Click photo for screen-resolution image);high-resolution image available.

"It says that VA and veterans are the president's top priority," Gould said during an interview in Snowmass Village, Colo., last week at the 25th National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic.

Gould said the budget request reflects a renewed commitment to VA's charter as President Abraham Lincoln enunciated it in his second inaugural address: "to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow and his orphan."

"If you look at our fiscal year 2010 budget, it was the largest in 30 years," Gould said. "It was followed by another roughly 7 and a half percent in 2011, and now we have another 3 and a half percent on top of that. So it is a striking level of investment by the administration."

Gould cautioned, however, that VA can't take this commitment for granted. "We are working really hard to make sure we use every dollar wisely," he said.

The fiscal 2012 budget request supports VA's five-year strategic plan, with priority goals to:

- End veteran homelessness by 2015, with \$940 million in the fiscal 2012 request for programs to reduce and prevent homelessness among veterans and their families;

- Implement a paperless claims-processing system by 2012, a major step toward eliminating the disability claims backlog so no veteran has to wait more than 125 days for a decision;

- Build and deploy an automated Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits system to speed tuition and housing payments for all eligible veterans;

- Create the next-generation electronic record system that begins when service members enlist in the military and remains with them through retirement or after they return to civilian life;

- Improve the quality, access and value of mental health care provided, with \$6.2 million in the fiscal 2012 request for mental health programs, including \$68 million for suicide prevention; and

- Deploy a new management program to improve client access to VA services and benefits by June 2012.

"We have a very bold strategy," Gould said. "And we are very focused on making sure that we get the resources to support it in a way that ties the budget to this strategic strategy."

Much of VA's focus is on making the organizational changes and systems improvements required for it to function more efficiently and effectively, Gould said.

"We want to invest in the people, their training and the systems that make our organization more intelligent, more able to deliver on the promise of these priorities and the overall strategy," he explained.

VA is working to transform into Secretary Eric K. Shinseki's vision of a veteran-centric, results-driven, forward-looking organization, Gould said.

This, Gould said, involves new management systems that ensure accountability as well as maximum efficiency and effectiveness, while eliminating waste and improving the delivery of high-quality and timely veterans benefits and services. Toward that end, VA is seeking nearly \$3.2 billion for fiscal 2012 to maintain and improve its information technology systems.

Gould reported progress already made on the IT front. "Two years ago, only 20 percent of projects were on time, on budget and to technical standards," he said. "Today, 80 percent are."

Similar improvements are bearing fruit in how VA manages its human resources. "Two years ago when we started hiring people, it took us 108 days," Gould said. "Now we have it down to 76, and will achieve a goal by the year's end of 60 days, the private-sector standard."

Another improvement uses strategic sourcing, with VA's separate operating units pooling their buying power to get the best price for their goods and services. Previously, the department's separate operating units did their buying separately.

In addition, VA adopted a strategic capital investment plan that improves the way it manages its capital infrastructure — 6,500 buildings nationwide, with a replacement value of \$87 billion.

"Two years ago, there was no integrated process for evaluating where you would invest your next dollar in that physical infrastructure," Gould said. Today, VA makes a business case for every proposal, pools these proposals, then evaluates and prioritizes them to identify the best use of its infrastructure funding.

"So now we can go to the secretary and say, 'For the limited dollars we have, here is the best investment we can make to improve the security and safety of our veterans and improve quality and access,'" Gould said.

Gould noted an adage in the health care realm: health care is 85 percent business systems and 15 percent medicine.

The VA's health-care providers, who make up the country's largest direct-care health system, receive consistently high marks in the quality of care they provide, he said. In fact, he added, many are on par with their counterparts at the nation's most prestigious hospitals and medical centers.

"So think about how much cost [savings] and how much potential efficiency is created if you can improve the underlying systems" that support them, Gould said, "while giving the doctors the maximum freedom to make the best judgment they can based on health care principles."

Disabled Veterans Sports Clinic Opens in Colorado

By Donna Miles, American Forces Press Service



SNOWMASS VILLAGE, Colo., March 28, 2011 - Deputy Veterans Affairs Secretary W. Scott Gould called on more than 350 disabled veterans last night to strive for new heights as they par-

icipate here this week in the 25th National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic.

Disabled veterans arrive for opening ceremonies of the 25th National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic at Snowmass Village, Colo., March 27, 2011. DOD photo by Donna Miles

(Click photo for screen-resolution image);high-resolution image available.

Speaking during opening ceremonies alongside Vice President Joe Biden and Disabled American Veterans National Commander Wally Tyson, Gould praised the success of what has grown to become the world's largest disabled winter sports event.

"Those of you who have been here before know why," he told this year's participants, many of whom have served in Iraq and Afghanistan. "Those of you who are new to the clinic will soon know. There is something here for everyone."

The clinic, jointly sponsored by the Veterans Affairs Department and DAV, uses recreation as a rehabilitative tool for veterans with disabilities ranging from spinal cord injuries and orthopedic amputations to visual impairment and neurological conditions.

As they learn adaptive alpine and Nordic skiing and get introduced to rock climbing, scuba diving, trapshooting, curling, snowmobiling and sled hockey during a five-day program, the veterans' eyes get opened to a whole new world of opportunity.

"It is all about redefining possibilities in the life of a seriously wounded veteran," Gould told American Forces Press Service. "This set of events here is all about creating that moment where a veteran looks up at the hill and feels in the pit of their stomach, 'I don't know if I can do this,' whether because it's a whole new experience or a first return to the mountain with a disability.

"It is all about the camaraderie and the teamwork and the coaxing and the safety and the training and coaching that leads that person to get in the chairlift for the first time and go to the top of the hill," Gould said.

"And that moment is very important. It is an experiential kind of learning," he added. "And it moves the veteran from a clinic environment ... to one in which they are guiding their own recovery."

Those lessons, he said, will remain with the participants long after they leave Snowmass Mountain and the National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic.

"They figure out what they can do next -- the next move, the next challenge," Gould said. "And maybe they take a look at Aspen and say, 'Life has some beautiful qualities to it. My life is changed, but not over.'"

Tyson relayed his own experience participating in the clinic and its power in helping disabled veterans focus on their abilities rather than their disabilities.

"You will face challenges," he told the group, warning that they're likely to come

away from the experience tired, sore, and perhaps even with a few bruises.

"But you will come out of it stronger in every possible way," Tyson said.

Biden made a surprise appearance at last night's opening ceremony. The previous day he'd thanked the hundreds of volunteers and staff members that work to make the sports clinic a success.

Snowmass Village rolled out the red carpet to the participants, hosting the annual "Taste of Aspen" as the event kicked off.

Gates, Shinseki Agree to Joint Electronic Medical Records

By Donna Miles, American Forces Press Service



WASHINGTON, April 5, 2011

- Two years after they joined President Barack Obama in announcing plans to create a Joint Virtual Lifetime Electronic Record, Defense Secretary Robert

M. Gates and Veterans Affairs Secretary Eric K. Shinseki have agreed to create a joint common platform for their departments' electronic medical records.

Gates and Shinseki agreed in concept to create the joint common platform during a March 17 session, giving their staffs an early May deadline to come up with an implementation plan, VA Deputy Secretary W. Scott Gould told American Forces Press Service.

"They slapped the table and said, 'Okay, in concept we agree,'" Gould said during an interview while attending the 25th National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic in Snowmass Village, Colo.

Now DOD and VA are at work to determine if a joint e-platform will support their separate processes. DOD currently uses the Armed Forces Health Longitudinal Technology Application, or AHLTA system, and is transitioning to the more comprehensive, real-time Electronic Health Record Way Ahead system. VA uses the 20-plus-year-old Veterans Health Information Systems and Technology Architecture, or VISTA.

Gould expressed confidence that a joint system will work for both the Defense Department and VA.

"And the reasoning is pretty sound," he said. "Ninety percent of the medicine in DoD and VA is the same. So why shouldn't we have one system, and only have the taxpayer pay to build it once?"

The 2010 Defense-VA Interagency Program Office report to Congress noted that the two departments share nine of the 13 core functional capabilities for an electronic health record, Gould said.

"This shows the kind of leadership that both Secretary Shinseki and Secretary

Gates bring to the table," he said. "They are committed. They want to make a difference. And they are challenging both their deputies and their entire organizations to cut through the red tape and get it done. And [Deputy Defense Secretary] Bill Lynn and I are hard at work to make that happen."

Shinseki told a Senate Appropriations Committee subcommittee March 31 the deal followed about two years of discussions. He said DOD is "looking for new direction" for its own electronics record system, while noting the need to update VA's own aging system.

"We have a terrific electronic health record, but again, it's about 20 years in being," Shinseki said of VA's VistA system. "So, we're going to have to adjust also to ensure the sustainability of that system. It's a great opportunity for both of us to put our heads together."

Undersecretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness Clifford L. Stanley called the initiative an example of closer inter-departmental cooperation that's improving efficiencies and providing better patient care.

"We are working even ever more closely with our colleagues in the Department of Veterans' Affairs to ensure our activities are better coordinated to include the disability evaluation process, the sharing of personnel and health information, and collaboration on our future electronic health record," Stanley told the House Armed Service Committee's Military Personnel Subcommittee March 15.

During the same hearing Army Lt. Gen. Eric Schoomaker, Army surgeon general, said that creating a single electronic health record will increase information-sharing between the two departments and provide a better way to transfer patient data.

"No two health organizations in the nation share more non-billable health information than the DOD and the VA," Schoomaker noted. "The departments continue to standardize this sharing activity under delivering information technology solutions that will significantly improve the sharing of appropriate electronic health information."

The agreement to pursue a joint common platform for their electronic medical records follows the two departments' decision in April 2009 to create a Joint Virtual Lifetime Electronic Record to smooth the flow of medical records between the Defense and Veterans Affairs departments.

Five pilot programs are up and running to test out the initiative before it goes nationwide, Gould said.

Obama, in announcing the joint initiative, described the advantages of a common joint lifetime record.

"When a member of the armed forces separates from the military, he or she will no longer have to walk paperwork from a [Defense Department] duty station to a local

VA health center,” the president said. “Their electronic records will transition along with them and remain with them forever.”

Obama explained that the new system will include both administrative and medical information from the day recruits enter military service, throughout their military careers, and after they retire or leave the military.

“This would represent a huge step toward modernizing the way health care is delivered and benefits are administered for our nation’s veterans,” Obama added. “It would cut through red tape and reduce the number of administrative mistakes.”

Department Hosts Adventure Camps for Military Teens

By Elaine Sanchez, American Forces Press Service



WASHINGTON, April 8, 2011 - Whether it’s kayaking down a river, backpacking through the forest or racing “high-adventure style,” military teens with a thirst for adventure will have a host of options to choose from this year.

The Defense Department has teamed up with the Agriculture Department and 12 land-grant universities to offer military teens low-cost, high-adventure camps at 50 locations, including one in Alaska and two in Europe, officials said. Four of the camps will offer high-adventure opportunities to family members with special needs, they added.

“This is a great opportunity for our military youth to leave their comfort zones and challenge themselves in a variety of ways,” said Robert L. Gordon III, deputy assistant secretary of defense for military community and family policy. “The skills they learn through these camps will remain with them for the rest of their lives.”

This joint DOD-USDA effort arose out of the Presidential Study Directive 9, in which all government agencies were directed to identify ways to better serve military families. In January, President Barack Obama released the results of that directive, and touched on the nearly 50 commitments agencies made to support military families, many of which focused on children’s well-being.

The camps will offer military youth experiences not readily available through traditional programs, officials said. Additionally, due to frequent moves, parents and youth may be unaware of local opportunities. These camps are intended to fill that gap, they said.

The USDA, land-grant universities and

the Cooperative Extension System will work with local communities to offer the camps. Military teens ages 14 to 18 can pick their adventure -- from a five-day kayaking trip through Washington’s San Juan Islands to a four-day adventure racing course in the Northeast to a one-week backpacking trip through Alaska’s Denali Forest.

Special needs camps will be offered in Ohio, California and New Hampshire, and will feature active sports such as skiing, dog sledding, tubing and sled hockey.

Camps will become available as early as next week and will continue throughout the year. People can check out camp locations online at https://www.extension.purdue.edu/Adventure_camps/campsloc.html.

For camp times, see https://www.extension.purdue.edu/Adventure_camps/campsdate.html.

The camps are open to all services, both active and reserve; however, participation will be on a first-come, first-served basis. Program participation will either be no cost or at a very low cost, officials said, noting that some fees may be reimbursable. Travel expenses may be the responsibility of the family.

All of the camps are accredited through the American Camping Association, and most will have a military family life consultant in attendance, officials said. All staff members go through extensive training and, due to the high adventure aspects of these camps, many of the staff are experts in areas such as climbing, camping and water sports.

Along with these camps, military services offer a variety of other summer opportunities, including day camps and specialty camps. Military families should contact their local family support center to find out what opportunities are offered in their area. Youth also can participate in the 4-H, Boys and Girls Club of America, Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts and in installation-based workshops, officials said.

The camps will be operated even in the event of a federal government shutdown, officials said.

Dempsey Lays Out Themes for Tenure as Army Chief

By Jim Garamone, American Forces Press Service



WASHINGTON, April 11, 2011 - Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates wanted an Army chief of staff willing to challenge the status quo, and he believes he has one in Gen. Martin E. Dempsey.

Dempsey succeeded Gen. George W. Casey Jr. as the Army chief of staff during a ceremony at Fort Myer, Va., today. Due to a

family tragedy, Casey and his family did not attend the event.

“Whatever challenges confront us in the future, your Army will respond with the same courage and resolve with which it has responded over the past 235 years,” Dempsey said.

Gates extolled the new chief of staff saying that he was impressed with Dempsey’s “keen mind, strategic vision, quiet confidence and the energy he brings to every assignment.”

Dempsey served as the commander of the 1st Armored Division in Baghdad in 2003. He then helped put in place the Iraqi army and police. He served as the deputy commander of U.S. Central Command and stepped in as acting commander when Navy Adm. William Fallon resigned.

“While serving as acting Centcom commander, General Dempsey reorganized the headquarters, published new theater strategy and campaign plans, all the while managing the rotations and deployments of tens of thousands of troops throughout his command’s [area of responsibility],” Gates said.

He moved to the Army’s Training and Doctrine Command where he “spread the gospel of adaptation in a world, where, as he is fond of saying: ‘Uncertainty is the only certainty in life in this century,’” the secretary said. “He has pushed the Army to become more versatile and decentralized, and overhauled its approach to war-fighting, publishing a new capstone concept that elevates adaptation to an institutional imperative.”

Today the Army is in transition, which is not a new phenomenon, Dempsey said in his remarks. The Army is always in transition, but this one is unique because the Army is entering its 10th year of war with an all-volunteer force. The general called that an “incredible testament to America’s soldiers and their families.”

The way ahead will be tough and the service must “center its sights on who we are as an Army.”

Dempsey spoke about themes important to him and the service moving forward. “We will provide whatever it takes to achieve our objectives in the current fight,” he said. “We will win in an increasingly competitive learning environment -- that’s the domain in which we must prevail.”

The service must develop a shared vision of the Army in 2020. “We will design units and prepare leaders to over match their adversaries,” he said. “We will master our fundamentals and develop deep global expertise.”

He said the Army will continue to change, but that the service will change only when it contributes to the versatility and relevance of the nation’s military instrument of power.

In an era of constraint, the Army must maintain a reputation as a good steward of America's resources. "We will remain connected to America, and we will succeed in all of that because we will re-connect, engage, empower and hold our leaders accountable," he said.

Between now and June 14, the Army Birthday, Dempsey said he will engage the senior military and civilian leaders of all services. He will publish "a document that charts our way ahead including a portfolio of initiatives that chart our way ahead to deliver on the themes."

Trust is the heart of the military, the general said. "My commitment and expectation to this great Army is that we will work on strengthening the bond of trust among those with whom we work, among whom we support and among those who march with us into battle," he said. "On the foundation of trust we will overcome any challenge we confront in the future."

Department Program Works to Prevent Child Abuse



By Terri Moon Cronk
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, April 13, 2011 - Child abuse and neglect can affect all levels of society, but for military families, help and support are at their fingertips.

The military's strong sense of community gives service members and their families an advantage in preventing abuse and neglect, said Tib Campise, a senior program analyst for the Defense Department's family advocacy program.

The military's rate of child abuse and neglect is only half the rate reported in the civilian community, Campise said, with five to six incidents per 1,000 children in the military community compared to about 12 cases per 1,000 children in the civilian sector.

Nurturing and attachment, knowledge of parenting and of child and youth development, parental resilience, social connections, and concrete support for parents are five protective factors linked to a lower incidence of child abuse and neglect, Campise said.

These factors, she explained, set conditions in families and communities to increase the health and well-being of children and families, and act as buffers to help parents who might be at risk for abuse.

"The five factors are strength-based, and tend to match up with what military parents want to build up in their families," she said.

Campise said military families need to

be aware of resources that are available at military bases as part of the DOD's commitment to prevent child abuse and neglect. Though nurturing and attachment might come naturally for many parents, that's not true for everyone, she noted. A new parent support program, part of Military Homefront, can be helpful for new parents, she said.

As part of the program, a coach goes into the home and helps new parents learn how to be at ease with creating a nurturing attachment with their newborn.

Another popular resource is the "Parent Review" weekly newsletter, Campise said.

"[The newsletter] is customized to the birth date of the child," she said. "Each week, parents receive an email message that talks about where their child is developmentally and adds helpful hints and links to other resources targeted to the child's developmental age."

Fathers who are deployed also can sign up for the newsletter, she added, as well as grandparents and other family members who spend a lot of time with the children.

DOD's family advocacy program addresses the issue of domestic abuse and child abuse in the military through prevention efforts, early identification and intervention, victim support, and treatment for abusers, Campise said. The program, she added, offers a wide range of services for the specific needs of individual families.

The program's staff works with commanders, military law enforcement personnel, medical and family center staffs, chaplains and civilian organizations and agencies, she said.

Informal support also provides important resources, Campise said.

"We encourage military families to get out and meet their neighbors to get and give support from friends, family and community groups," she said.

The key to preventing child abuse and neglect, Campise said, is for families to get ahead of it before it happens and to learn about the programs in their communities.

"Preventing abuse is about building relationships," she said. "And the military really gets that."

Casey Retires After Four Decades of Army Service



By Jim Garamone,
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, April 12, 2011 - Army Chief of Staff Gen. George W. Casey Jr. expressed great pride in his soldiers and

their families as he ended more than four decades of military service yesterday.

"I couldn't be prouder of your courage, your resilience and your commitment to the values and ideals that make this country and this Army great," Casey, the 36th Army Chief of Staff, wrote in a farewell letter to the troops.

Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates called Casey "a valued leader" yesterday during the general's Pentagon retirement ceremony.

"The Army George Casey leaves behind, a force that has borne the brunt of our nation's wars, is more resilient, better trained, more balanced and vastly more lethal because of his leadership," Gates said. "He served as a stalwart advocate and guide for thousands of brave young men and women, and their loved ones."

Before becoming chief of staff in 2007, Casey served as commander of Multinational Forces Iraq. The general led the force through a difficult time including Iraq's transition to a sovereign government, three elections, and the growth -- in size and capability -- of the Iraqi army and police, Gates said.

Casey's "personal demeanor, steady confidence and care for the well being of his troops served as an important example for our young men and women on the front lines," the secretary said.

Upon becoming the Army's chief of staff, Casey found that the service was out of balance.

The Army at that time was "so weighed down by current demands that we couldn't do the things we needed to do to sustain the all-volunteer force and simultaneously prepare ourselves for the full range of missions," Casey wrote.

Casey and his wife, Sheila, journeyed to installations and units around the world to speak to Army families and see firsthand how they were handling the strain of simultaneously fighting two wars, Gates said.

Under Casey's tenure as chief of staff, the Army expanded programs to help America's wounded sons and daughters receive needed treatment and recover from war's physical and emotional trauma.

"George greatly increased the number of behavioral health providers and improved mental health screening for returning soldiers in order to identify those at risk," Gates said. "He pushed the Army to reduce the stigma associated with combat stress and traumatic brain injuries and to treat them as the injuries they truly are."

"General Casey led the battle to provide long-term support to survivors of the fallen, creating the Army Survivor Outreach Services," he added.

Casey also implemented alcohol treatment and suicide prevention programs at Army installations around the country to

help returning soldiers struggling to adjust to life at home.

When the president authorized an increase in the size of the Army, Casey pushed to exceed the service's recruiting goals.

Because of Casey's efforts "the Army was able to end the practice of stop-loss and increase soldiers' home station dwell time — developments that have greatly increased force readiness," Gates said.

"Nearly 70 percent of the Army is now on a path to meet the goal of two years at home for every year deployed," the secretary added. "As the drawdown in Iraq continues, and the transition in Afghanistan begins, I hope the Army will be able to achieve its longer-term goal of three years home for every year deployed."

During the ceremony, Gates presented Casey with the Distinguished Service Medal.

DOD Celebrates Month of the Military Child



By Elaine Sanchez
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, April 1, 2011 - Children of U.S. service members around the world will be honored throughout the month for their contributions to their families' well-being and sacrifices on behalf of the nation, a Defense Department official said.

Each April, Americans pause to recognize the nation's 1.8 million military children during the Month of the Military Child, which marks its 25th anniversary this year.

"It's really exciting that the Department of Defense, the White House and civic leaders recognize the sacrifices that military children make," Barbara Thompson, director of the Pentagon's office of family policy, children and youth, told American Forces Press Service. "It's particularly important during these times of conflict, when children are missing their parents and are sacrificing a lot, to say your sacrifice is recognized and we want to commend you for what you do for your family."

Throughout the month, military installations worldwide will host programs and activities for military children, including fairs, picnics, carnivals and parades, Thompson said. Communities also can get involved by sponsoring fun events to celebrate military children, she added.

Military children's sacrifices and contributions have risen to the forefront in recent years, Thompson said, as people have become increasingly aware of the impact a decade of war is having on military families. Along with the typical military-related stressors of multiple moves and schools, children also have had to deal with long-term, mul-

iple deployments and separations from one, or both, parents over the past 10-plus years, Thompson said.

More than 900,000 military children have had a parent deploy multiple times, she added.

Military children have known only war since 9/11, Thompson noted, and recent research suggests deployments and the length of time separated have an impact on children's academic success and psychological well-being. Other research regarding children and attachment indicates that "this has to be a difficult time for military children," she said.

Just as important as caring for children is caring for their parents, Thompson added. "We know that if the parent is taken care of, the children are taken care of," she said.

Thompson praised the introduction of programs such as the Defense Department's military family life consultants, who provide coaching and nonmedical counseling to children, families and staff in schools and child development and youth programs. Sports and camps offer other opportunities for children to thrive and grow, she said.

However, she said, the Defense Department can't tackle all of these issues alone.

The nation took an important step forward in January, Thompson said, when President Barack Obama unveiled a governmentwide plan to strengthen military family support. Federal agencies committed to nearly 50 new programs and cooperative efforts to improve quality of life and well-being for military families.

Thompson also called for a strong "circle of support," in which schools, communities, health care providers and federal agencies come together to support military families. "We know that it takes a village," she said.

"Without a doubt, when we can recognize their sacrifices, when we can tell them that we'll reach out and help them, that we care about them and will connect them with the resources they need, then we're doing right by them," she said.

Gates Will Present President With Cost-cutting Options



By Donna Miles
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, April 18, 2011 - Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates is "a leader when it comes to fiscal responsibility" and will provide President Barack Obama with options -- along with the pros and cons of each -- to make additional defense cuts, the

assistant secretary of defense for public affairs said yesterday.

Gates "has made some very hard choices and some very innovative decisions in doing his efficiencies exercise," Douglas B. Wilson told interviewer Vago Muradian on "This Week in Defense News."

Obama announced last week that he would work with Gates and Navy Adm. Mike Mullen, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, to find additional cost savings beyond the \$400 billion in reductions the department has made over the past two years.

The goal is an additional \$400 billion in national security cuts through 2023, to help realize \$2 trillion in savings as part of a plan to reduce federal borrowing by \$4 trillion over the next 12 years.

"We have been given a mission, and the secretary will undertake it," Wilson said.

It's too early to determine where exactly those cuts will be made, he said, noting that Obama called for a review of the nation's role in the world, along with its missions and responsibilities.

"That will be the framework for this initiative," Wilson said. "And the secretary of defense is committed to providing the president with the options necessary and the choices and the implications of those choices."

Pentagon Press Secretary Geoff Morrell said Gates believes that the Defense Department cannot be exempt from efforts to trim the federal budget.

"However, it is important that any reduction in [defense] funding be shaped by strategy and policy choices, and not by a budget math exercise," Morrell said.

Gates "has been clear that further significant defense cuts cannot be accomplished without reducing forces structure and military capabilities," Morrell added. "The comprehensive review of missions, capabilities and America's role in the world will identify alternatives for the president's consideration."

Accomplishing the president's goal, Morrell said, "must be about managing risks associated with future threats and national security challenges and identifying missions that the country is willing to forego."

Obama has acknowledged that the Pentagon has been at the forefront at eliminating "unnecessary, duplicative and obsolete programs and administrative overhead," Morrell said.

The president "wants us to continue this effort with the goal of significant additional savings over the coming decade," Morrell added.

Rollout Approaches for Young Adult TRICARE Enrollment



By Donna Miles
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, March 30, 2011 - Qualified young adults up to age 26 soon will be able purchase TRICARE military health plan coverage on a month-to-month basis.

TRICARE officials announced plans to roll out the new Young Adult Program -- including an option to make coverage retroactive to Jan. 1 — in the near future.

This, officials said, will ensure military families aren't left out as the new national health care reform law extends parents' health insurance for their children up to age 26.

The new program will allow qualified, unmarried military children up to age 26 to buy health care coverage under their parents' TRICARE plans through age 26. That's up from the current maximum age of 21, or age 23 for full-time college students whose parents provide more than half of their financial support.

The fiscal 2011 National Defense Authorization Act, which President Barack Obama signed Jan. 7, gave the Defense Department the authority it needed to extend TRICARE coverage to young adults, TRICARE spokesman Austin Camacho said.

This ensures benefits extended are in line with those all American families receive under the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, which took effect in March 2010.

"We've been working hard to make sure we could put TRICARE Young Adult on a fast track," Navy Rear Adm. (Dr.) Christine S. Hunter, director of the TRICARE Management Activity, told American Forces Press Service. "Fortunately for our beneficiaries concerned about health care coverage for their adult children, the law signed by the president includes opportunities for military families to elect this new premium-based plan retroactive to Jan. 1."

Qualified young adults who do not have access to employer-sponsored health care coverage will be eligible to purchase it through TRICARE on a month-to-month basis, Camacho said.

TRICARE officials expect to announce premium costs shortly, before enrollment begins. But because the 2011 defense authorization specifies that the rates must cover all program costs, Camacho said, premiums will be based on commercial insurance data about the costs of providing care.

Once premiums are determined, officials encourage eligible beneficiaries to explore all of their health care coverage options to choose a plan that makes sense

for them.

Hunter estimated that the program, once in place, could extend TRICARE coverage to several hundred thousand additional beneficiaries.

"The premium allows us to provide the excellent benefit to our military families while responsibly addressing the impact of health care costs on the DOD budget," she said.

Officials plan to roll out the new program in two phases, first offering a premium-based TRICARE Standard/Extra benefit, Camacho said. Then, later this year, they plan to introduce the TRICARE Prime and TRICARE Prime Remote plan, including overseas options, and the Uniformed Services Family Health Plan.

Once the program is in place, eligible young adults may submit an application and premium payment to the appropriate regional or overseas contractor for processing, Camacho said. Cost shares, deductibles and catastrophic caps will vary, based on the plan selected and the sponsor's status.

Young adult beneficiaries will receive an enrollment card after they buy coverage and their payment is reflected in the Defense Eligibility Enrollment Reporting System, Camacho said.

The new beneficiaries may choose to pay premiums back to Jan. 1, which will entitle them to file claims for any health care costs they have accrued since that date. To do so, officials advise that they save all receipts to ease claims processing.

For adults who need health insurance coverage but no longer qualify for TRICARE coverage, officials advise exploring the Continued Health Care Benefit Program. This premium-based program offers temporary, transitional health coverage for 18 to 36 months.

Coverage must be purchased within 60 days of losing TRICARE eligibility. Information about the program is posted on the TRICARE website.

Smartphone App Helps Troops, Vets Manage Stress



From a Department of
Veterans Affairs News Release

WASHINGTON, April 19, 2011 - Veterans dealing with symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder can turn to their smartphones for help any time with the "PTSD Coach" application created by the Veterans Affairs and Defense departments.

"This is about giving veterans and service members the help they earned when

and where they need it," Veterans Affairs Secretary Eric K. Shinseki said. "We hope they, their families and friends download this free app. Understanding PTSD and those who live with it is too important to ignore."

PTSD Coach lets users track their symptoms, links them with local sources of support, provides accurate information and helpful individualized strategies for managing symptoms, officials said. The app is now available for download from the iTunes Store and will be available for Android devices by the end of the spring.

"This application acknowledges the frequency with which our warriors and veterans use technology and allows them to get help when and where they feel most comfortable," said Dr. Jonathan Woodson, assistant secretary of defense for health affairs.

PTSD Coach is primarily designed to enhance services for individuals who are already receiving mental health care, though it is helpful for those considering entering mental health care and those who just want to learn more about post-traumatic stress, officials said.

"This is a great service we are providing to veterans, service members, their families and friends, but it should not be seen as a replacement for traditional therapy," said Dr. Robert Petzel, VA's undersecretary for health. "Veterans should utilize all of the benefits they have earned with their service, and one of the best things about this app is it will get veterans connected to the places that are out there to provide help."

The application is one of the first in a series of jointly designed resources by the VA National Center for PTSD and the Defense Department's National Center for Telehealth and Technology to help service members, veterans, their families and friends manage their readjustment challenges and get anonymous assistance, officials said.

Respect Highlights Don't Ask, Don't Tell Repeal Training



By Jim Garamone
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, April 1, 2011 - Respect for all service members is at the heart of training for the repeal of the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" law, the undersecretary of defense for personnel and readiness said today.

Clifford L. Stanley and Navy Vice Adm. William E. Gortney, director of the Joint Staff, testified before the House Armed Services Committee's military personnel subcommittee about preparing the force for repeal of the law that bans gay men and

lesbians from serving openly in the military.

"My focus is total force readiness, caring for our people and creating a culture of relevance, effectiveness and efficiency," Stanley said. He told the subcommittee that he views total force readiness as encompassing a mental, physical, emotional and spiritual state of preparedness and resilience.

"This policy change embodies that view of total force readiness. More simply put, it's about respect," Stanley said. "Respect is not a word I use lightly. It embraces the true meaning of honorable service. Respect is also a word that captures the indelible bond shared by all who serve, especially when serving in harm's way."

All services began training before March 1, Stanley said, and he expects all to be finished by the end of summer.

Because the training emphasizes leadership, professionalism, discipline and respect, Stanley said, he believes it "will enable any change in policy to be executed with minimal disruption to the force."

Gortney spoke of the three-part process the military has put in place to repeal the law. The first step was implementing or changing policies. The second was training changes and the third step was actually training service members.

"The services have reviewed policies and directives that will require change, and are on target to implement them effective the date of repeal," he said.

A repeal implementation team and the services developed the training for the force and planned how to put that training in place, Gortney said.

"The services have implemented these plans," he said, "and are proceeding smartly with the training of tier 1, experts; tier 2, leadership; and tier 3, the total force."

Gortney said the Joint Chiefs of Staff discuss the training and monitor progress regularly.

"Our intent is to ensure that a preponderance of the force, including the Reserve and National Guard, is prepared expeditiously, but in a careful and responsible manner," the admiral said.

The repeal will take effect 60 days after the defense secretary and the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff certify the process should move ahead.

"The secretary of defense and the chairman will not certify until, in their judgments, the force is prepared to implement the new policies and regulations consistent with our standards of military readiness, military effectiveness, unit cohesion and recruiting and retention of the armed forces," Gortney said.

Both Stanley and Gortney said the military is being very deliberate to ensure all questions are answered before repeal.

Troops in Parts of Japan to Receive Hardship Pay



By Jim Garamone
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, April 3, 2011

- Service members in certain prefectures of Japan will receive hardship duty pay effective April 1, Defense Department officials announced.

Service members will receive \$50 hardship duty pay per month if they are based in the Tokyo Capital Region and the prefectures of Aichi, Kanagawa, Akita, Aomori, Chiba, Fukushima, Gunma, Ibaraki, Iwate, Miyagi, Nagano, Niigata, Saitama, Shizuoka, Tochigi, Yamagata and Yamanashi.

"The designation is in recognition of the hardships caused by the March 11, 2011, earthquake, the tsunami that followed and issues related to Japan nuclear reactors," according to a letter signed by Lynn C. Simpson, acting principle deputy undersecretary of defense for personnel and readiness. The letter went to the secretaries of the Army, Navy and Air Force and to the director of the Defense Finance and Accounting Service.

Service members who are permanently assigned to the designated locations are eligible for the pay. Service members who are on temporary duty to the specified prefectures in support of Operation Tomodachi for longer than 30 days also will receive the pay. Those aboard ship are not eligible.

The pay is additional compensation paid to service members in recognition of the hardships associated with duty assignments in designated locations.

Those eligible will receive the pay automatically. Service members do not need to apply.

DOD Launches Sexual Assault Response Helpline



American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, April 15, 2011

- Defense Department officials today launched the Pentagon's newest initiative to support victims of sexual assault.

The DOD Safe Helpline allows service members to click, call or text for victim support services for themselves or others.

The resource is free, anonymous and confidential. Those who need the service will connect with live sexual assault support professionals. It is live 24 hours a day, every day.

In addition to improving victim care, officials designed the Safe Helpline to be

secure and confidential to encourage victims to come forward when they might not otherwise.

"The underreporting of sexual assault poses a serious challenge to military readiness," said Clifford L. Stanley, undersecretary of defense for personnel and readiness. "We believe the Safe Helpline will provide DOD sexual assault victims with a variety of support outlets, which will lead victims to report sexual assault, seek needed information, and receive care."

Safe Helpline offers three access options designed for service members. Users can go to <http://SafeHelpline.org> to receive live, one-on-one confidential help with a trained professional through a secure instant-messaging format. The website also provides vital information about recovering from and reporting sexual assault.

A second option is to call the telephone hotline at 877-995-5247 to speak with Safe Helpline staff for personalized advice and support. Safe Helpline staff also can transfer callers to installation-based sexual assault response coordinators, on-call victim advocates, civilian rape crisis centers or to the Suicide Prevention Lifeline.

The third option is for users to text their location to 55247 inside the United States or 202-470-5546 outside of the United States to receive automated contact information for the sexual assault response coordinator at their installation or base.

For more information on the Defense Department's sexual assault prevention and response office, go to <http://www.sapr.mil>.

TRICARE Continues Web-based Counseling



By Elaine Sanchez
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, March 30, 2011 - TRICARE officials are extending a state-of-the-art program that's intended to ease the path to mental-health services.

The TRICARE Assistance Program will now run through March 20, 2012, to give officials more time to measure the program's effectiveness, a TRICARE release said.

Through the program, TRICARE health care beneficiaries use the Internet and a Web cam to speak "face-to-face" with mental-health counselors around the clock and from anywhere in the United States.

People can log on from home to receive short-term, nonmedical counseling for situations that may arise from life circumstances such as deployment stress, relationships, personal loss and parent-child communications.

These services are available in the United States to active-duty service members,

active-duty family members who are at least 18 years old, beneficiaries using TRICARE Reserve Select and beneficiaries covered under the Transitional Assistance Management Program, the release said.

For some people, the online services aren't an appropriate level of care or video services aren't accessible. In that case, a licensed professional will refer the beneficiary to the right organization.

To find out more about this program, beneficiaries can go to TRICARE's website

If you've used the program and would like to comment on your experience with it, don't hesitate to write in.

To comment or for more blog posts, visit the Family Matters blog, or visit Family Matters on Facebook or Twitter.

DOD to Drop Social Security Numbers from ID Cards

By Jim Garamone

American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, April 1, 2011 - Beginning June 1, Social Security numbers on military identification cards will begin to disappear, said Air Force Maj. Monica M. Matoush, a Pentagon spokeswoman.

The effort is part of a larger plan to protect service members and other DOD identification card holders from identity theft, officials said.

Criminals use Social Security numbers to steal identities, allowing them to pillage resources, establish credit or to hijack credit cards, bank accounts or debit cards.

Currently, the Social Security number is printed on the back of common access cards, and on the front of cards issued to dependents and retirees. Beginning in June, when current cards expire, they will be replaced with new cards having a DOD identification number replacing the Social Security number, officials said. The DOD identification number is a unique 10-digit number that is assigned to every person with a direct relationship with the department. The new number also will be the service member's Geneva Convention identification number.

An 11-digit DOD benefits number also will appear on the cards of those people eligible for DOD benefits. The first nine digits are common to a sponsor, the official said, and the last two digits will identify a specific person within the sponsor's family.

Social Security numbers embedded in the bar codes on the back of identification cards will remain there for the time being, and will be phased out beginning in 2012.

The department will replace identification cards as they expire.

"Because cards will be replaced upon expiration, it will be approximately four years until all cards are replaced with the DOD ID number," Matoush said.

The identity protection program began

in 2008, when DOD started removing Social Security numbers from family member identification cards.

Military Children Can Attend Free Camp



By Elaine Sanchez
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, March 31, 2011 - Military parents seeking a fun -- and free -- summer camp option for their children should

check out the National Military Family Association's Operation Purple Summer Camp program.

The association developed the camps to support military children ages 7 to 17 dealing with the stressors of war, according to an association news release. Now in its eighth year, the program will host more than 3,500 children during 40 weeks of camp in 25 states, as well as one overseas location this summer.

People can apply for a camp through April 29 at midnight EDT. The camps are open to children of all services, whether active duty, National Guard or Reserve.

However, priority will be given to military children with a parent deployed or deploying any time between September 2010 and December 2011 who have not attended an Operation Purple camp in the past.

For more information about the program, or camp locations and dates, visit the association's website.

To comment or for more blog posts, visit Family Matters, or check out Family Matters on Facebook or Twitter.

Defense Finance and Accounting Service Revamps Website



By Terri Moon Cronk
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, April 21, 2011 - Defense Finance and Accounting Service officials are rolling

out a redesigned website tonight to give the Defense Department's workforce easier, quicker access to the information they need.

"We know our online visitors don't want to spend more of their time on our website than they have to," said Richard

Gustafson, the finance service's principal deputy director. "We're trying to help them keep that time to a minimum while getting them the answers they are looking for."

The redesigned site at <http://www.dfas.mil> has a clean, streamlined look with an improved, more intuitive navigation system to help DFAS's more than 6 million customers -- including military personnel, civilian employees, contractors, vendors, retirees and annuitants -- access popular features more quickly, Gustafson said.

"Our last redesign was in 2005," Gustafson said. "Over the years, the navigation and content has gotten more difficult for users to get the information they need to understand and maintain their pay or vendor accounts. The new site gives our customers better information, faster."

The new site features links across the top for each category of people DFAS serves. A "how to" section composed of links down the left side of the page provides easy access for customers to find travel pay information, pay tables, information on correcting military records and other services.

For the first few weeks, the revamped site will include a link to an instructional video that explains changes to the site's navigation.

DOD Issues Purple Heart Standards for Brain Injury



By Jim Garamone
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, April 28, 2011 - U.S. service members have long been eligible to receive the Purple Heart Medal for the signature wounds of the current wars -- mild traumatic brain injuries and concussions -- but now there is more clarity on how

medical criteria for the award are applied, Defense Department officials said yesterday.

The criteria for the Purple Heart award state that the injury must have been caused by enemy action or in action against the enemy and has to be of a degree requiring treatment by a medical officer.

But it may be difficult to determine when a mild traumatic brain injury or a concussive injury that does not result in a loss of consciousness is severe enough to require treatment by a medical officer. "This is why we created this baseline standard," DOD spokeswoman Eileen Lainez said.

DOD allows the award of the Purple Heart even if a service member was not treated by a medical officer, as long as a medical officer certifies that the injury would have required treatment by a medical officer had one been available.

DOD officials said that as the science of traumatic brain injuries becomes better understood, guidance for award of the medal will evolve.

"The services are not able to speculate

as to how many service members may have received a mild TBI or concussion but did not seek or receive medical treatment," Lainez said. "Therefore, each military department will establish its retroactive review procedures in the near future to ensure deserving service members are appropriately recognized." Retroactive reviews would cover injuries suffered since Sept. 11, 2001, she added.

The Marine Corps has issued clarifying guidance to ensure commanders in the field understand when the Purple Heart is appropriate for concussions.

Army officials are preparing to issue their guidance and ask soldiers to wait until submission requirements are published through command channels and on the Human Resources Command website at <http://www.hrc.army.mil> before submitting or resubmitting nominations for the Purple Heart Medal for concussion injuries.

Once the Army publishes its requirements, officials said, soldiers should resubmit requests through their chains of command.

Army veterans should resubmit to the U.S. Army Human Resources Command at Commander, USA HRC, ATTN: Awards and Decorations Branch (AHRC-PDP-A), 1600 Spearhead Division Ave., Fort Knox, KY 40122. Vets also can call 1-888-276-9472 or email hrc.tagd.awards@conus.army.mil.

DOD to Drop Social Security Numbers from ID Cards



By Jim Garamone
American Forces Press Service

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Social Security numbers embedded in the bar codes on the back of identification cards will remain there for the time being, and will be phased out beginning in 2012.

The department will replace identification cards as they expire.

"Because cards will be replaced upon expiration, it will be approximately four years until all cards are replaced with the DOD ID number," Matoush said.

The identity protection program began in 2008, when DOD started removing Social Security numbers from family member identification cards.

Iraq Withdrawal Agreement Still Stands, Mullen Says



By Jim Garamone, American Forces Press Service

BAGHDAD, April 22, 2011 - All American troops will be out of Iraq at the end of the year in accordance with the security agreement signed in 2008, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff said here today.

"There are no plans — nor has there been any request from the Iraqi government — for any residual U.S. force presence here after December," Navy Adm. Mike Mullen said during a news conference in the Marine Corps Maj. Megan McClung Memorial TV Studio at the Al Faw Palace complex.

Roughly 47,000 American service members are in Iraq now. Since signing the agreement, the United States has already withdrawn more than 100,000 personnel -- at the height of the surge, the U.S. military had about 170,000 personnel in Iraq.

Army Gen. Lloyd J. Austin III, commander of U.S. Forces Iraq, has a plan in place to complete the withdrawal on time, Mullen said. "There are no official discussions with respect to any extended presence of United States forces," the chairman added.

Though Iraqi security forces have the capability to defend their country, Mullen said, they still have vulnerabilities that will not be closed by the end of the year. The Iraqi air force, which has no fighter jets, will not be up to the task of defending its airspace, he noted. Intelligence capabilities and command and control capabilities need

to be filled out, he added, and sustainment, maintenance and logistics capabilities need to be much more robust.

"For our part, the United States military will remain committed to helping Iraqi security forces improve their readiness in these areas," Mullen said. "We will continue to help our State Department, as they now assume the mantle of leadership in this relationship."

Moving troops, their equipment and other military materiel out of Iraq will be difficult. U.S. Forces Iraq personnel said that more than 2 million separate items need to be packaged and shipped in the next few months. This does not include items the U.S. military will turn over to the Iraqis.

"I think later this summer, we will see the pace and scope of the drawdown reach its most aggressive level," Mullen said.

In his meeting with Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki last night, Mullen reaffirmed the U.S. desire for a long-term strategic partnership with Iraq.

"That partnership won't end with our departure, but it certainly must begin with keeping our promises," the admiral said. "Leaders of both the United States and Iraq are committed to the partnership, and it is up to the political leaders of both sides to determine what that means." If Iraq wants to keep some American forces in the country to shore up its military vulnerabilities, the U.S. government would welcome the discussion, the chairman said.

"It is up to the government of Iraq to reach out, to initiate a dialogue to look at the future agreement possibilities and to work out the specifics of what that might be," he said. "But it needs to start soon -- very soon -- should there be any chance of avoiding irrevocable logistics and operational decisions we must make in coming weeks. Time is running short for any negotiations to occur."

Some decisions, Mullen added, would have to be made in the next few weeks.

Parents Help Children Prepare for Deployments

By Air Force Staff Sgt. Vanessa Young
Defense Media Activity



SAN ANTONIO, May 2, 2011 - When Erin Hirvela was 2, her parents, Air Force Master Sgts. Gus and Danielle Hirvela, enlisted Sesame Street's Elmo to help their daughter understand why her daddy was going away for a while.

For service members and their families, preparing for an upcoming deployment is another of the many challenges unique to military life.

"When parents are having a conversation about their deployment with their child,

they should be as genuine as they can, but filter their communication to the degree that's appropriate for the age of their child," said Kristy Hagar, a child psychologist who has been working with children, adolescents, and young adults for 18 years.

"Children can get upset, because their lives were stable and predictable, and now with a parent or both parents leaving, there's going to be change," Hagar said. "Children are going to deal with change in their lives no matter what, so anything you can do proactively ahead of time where kids can feel like they are involved and they are being asked to help prepare for this shift, helps in the long run."

The Hirvelas prepared for Erin's first deployment experience with a Sesame Street DVD they picked up at the base library.

"It was the one where Elmo explained the military and deployments," Danielle said. "One of the sayings they use in the video that stood out to us was that Mommy and Daddy are 'helping people.'"

Today, both Hirvelas are deployed, and they said they still use that saying from the video to help 6-year-old Erin understand why they left.

"When Gus left, we told Erin that Daddy had to go help people, and that he would be home before she knew," she said. "We tried to keep a positive spin on everything. So when we discussed Mommy leaving and Aunt Gail coming, we mentioned how she was going to 'party like a rock star' and be a huge help for [her little brother] Jacob."

The level of honesty and the method of communication depend a lot on what the parent feels comfortable with, but they also need to recognize how they present themselves, Hagar said.

Children can pick up on their parent's emotions and stress, even when the parent is saying everything is going to be fine, she said. The children are looking at the parent and thinking, "Well, they are saying that they are fine, but I'm getting vibes that they feel nervous."

That can be more destructive and more anxiety-provoking in children than being able to model your feelings and saying, "You know what? I'm kind of scared, and I don't know what's going to happen, but I'm going to be as safe as I can be, and I'm going to be with all of the airmen, and we are going to do our best over there," Hagar said.

"Come up with things that make them at ease and at peace as well," she added.

Letting children know that they can talk about their fears and worries when preparing for a deployment helps them prepare for stressful situations in the future, Hagar said. Children can learn from that open dialogue, she added, because it sets up a problem-solving model and helps them think, "Well, I don't really know what's going to happen, but I'm going to do this and this, and this is

what I'm thinking, and this is what helps me feel better."

Danielle said they told Erin about the upcoming deployments as soon as they knew.

"We talked about it a lot, but like most kids, it didn't really sink in until it got closer to the day he and I both left," she said. "Each situation is different, and each kid is different, but the thing that has worked for us is being honest and putting a positive spin on everything as best as we could. I couldn't wear my emotions on my sleeve, and I had to be strong, hoping Erin would see that and do the same."

For younger kids, around ages 5 and below, parents sometimes have to play a role, Hagar said. For example, she explained, if you and your child both see a large dog, you would just have to react calmly and soothe the child, versus running away screaming, because you don't want to set that example for that child. The same applies to deployments, she added, and recognizing how you present yourself and how you deal with your worries and fears sets an example for the child to follow.

School-age children ages 5 through 12 have a greater awareness of a parent being gone, Hagar said. They are involved in a lot more activities, and sometimes that tends to serve as a reminder: "Oh, Dad's not going to be here to see my soccer game." Maintaining proactive strategies to stay connected can make the separation easier on children, she said.

Maybe Dad couldn't come to the soccer game, she explained, but you all can plan to film it and send it to him, she said. She recommended asking children how they want to stay connected, or let them pick out the pictures to send, noting that getting them involved gives them responsibility in collaborating as a family on how to solve the issue of Mom or Dad not being there.

Older children, ages 12 and older, may be less likely to reach out to a parent or caregiver to talk about an upcoming deployment, Hagar said.

"Because of adolescence and all the things that go along with adolescence, it's also not uncommon for children in this age group to not want to talk," she said. "Sitting them down to talk about their feelings may not be an effective strategy, but let them know if they have any questions about the deployment, they should let you know, and leave it at that."

"You're opening a door for dialogue and letting them know if they want to talk, they can, and if they want to ask questions, they can," she continued, "so they know the deployment is not some 'elephant in the room' that no one can talk about. A lot of teenagers will say, 'No, I'm fine,' but at least the door is open."

Some older children may have a greater

understanding and can recognize where their parent may be going and the danger that's involved, as opposed to a younger child, who just realizes that Mom or Dad isn't there to tuck them in at night, Hagar said.

Parents of children of different age groups need to prepare and adapt their filter for each child, she added, reflecting on what their child potentially could ask them and how they are going to respond.

Information on helping children deal with deployments is available at the Military OneSource website.

Petraeus to Leave Battlefield for CIA

By Lisa Daniel, American Forces Press Service



WASHINGTON, April 28, 2011 - Army Gen. David H. Petraeus plans hang up his uniform in September to lead the CIA.

President Barack Obama announced his intention today to nominate Petraeus to succeed Leon E. Panetta as CIA director. Panetta is the president's choice to succeed retiring Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates.

Petraeus said he would be grateful to continue his public service by heading the CIA. His nomination is subject to Senate confirmation. The general, who assumed command in Afghanistan on July 4 after serving 20 months as commander of U.S. Central Command, announced his plans to retire to take the CIA position.

Petraeus' retirement will end a four-decade career highlighted by his development of the Army/Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Manual and his leadership of U.S. and coalition forces through the "surge" credited with turning around the war in Iraq.

He is a 1974 graduate of the U.S. Military Academy, and he holds a doctorate from Princeton University's Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs.

President Praises Gates, Nominates New Security Team

By Jim Garamone, American Forces Press Service



WASHINGTON, April 28, 2011 - President Barack Obama today thanked Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates for his service as he officially announced his intention to nominate CIA Director Leon E. Panetta to lead the Pentagon after Gates retires June

30.

Obama said Gates will go down in history as one of the finest defense secretaries in U.S. history.

The president also nominated Army Gen. David H. Petraeus to succeed Panetta at the CIA and Marine Corps Lt. Gen. John R. Allen to succeed Petraeus as commander of the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan. Obama also is nominating Ryan C. Crocker to return from retirement and serve as U.S. ambassador to Afghanistan. The nominations are subject to Senate confirmation.

"Given the pivotal period that we're entering, I felt that it was absolutely critical that we had this team in place so that we can stay focused on our missions, maintain our momentum and keep our nation secure," Obama said in the White House East Room.

Gates will step down after serving more than four and a half years in office. President George W. Bush nominated Gates for the job at a time when prospects in Iraq looked bleak. The surge of U.S. forces into Iraq was hitting its stride, and hundreds of attacks occurred each day on coalition forces in the country.

"Today, every American must know that because he helped to responsibly wind down the war in Iraq, we're in a better position to support our troops and manage the transition in Afghanistan," Obama said. "Because he challenged conventional thinking, our troops have the lifesaving equipment they need, and our military is better prepared for today's wars.

"And because he courageously cut unnecessary spending," the president continued, "we'll save hundreds of billions of dollars that can be invested in the 21st-century military that our troops deserve."

The United States military has fought in two wars every day of Gates' tenure. Service members have also stood watch elsewhere around the globe. "It has been the greatest honor of my life to serve and to lead our men and women in uniform and our defense civilians," he said. "They are the best America has to offer.

"My highest priority from my first day in office," he added, "has been to do everything I could for our uniformed men and women in harm's way to help them accomplish their mission, to come home safely, and if wounded, to get them the best possible care from battlefield to homefront. I've done my best to care for them as though they were my own sons and daughters, and I will miss them deeply."

The president said Panetta has the right skills to take over for Gates. "The patriotism and extraordinary management skills that have defined Leon's four decades of service is exactly what we need in our next secretary of defense," Obama said. "As a former congressman and White House chief

of staff, Leon knows how to lead, which is why he is held in such high esteem not only in this city, but around the world."

Panetta has served as CIA director for more than two years. The president said he has played a decisive role in the fight against violent extremism.

"He understands that even as we begin the transition in Afghanistan, we must remain unwavering in our fight against al-Qaida," Obama said. "And as a former [Office of Management and Budget] director, he will ensure that even as we make tough budget decisions, we will maintain our military superiority and keep our military the very best in the world."

Panetta thanked the men and women of the Central Intelligence Agency for their superb, but unheralded work.

"I spent 40 years in public service, and it began when I served in the Army as an intelligence officer in the 1960s," he said. "I was proud to wear the uniform of our country, and my respect and admiration for our nation's armed forces has only grown in the decades since."

Obama stressed continuity, noting that Petraeus will carry on Panetta's work at the CIA. After 35 years in uniform, the general will retire from the Army to become the next CIA director, effective early September, pending Senate confirmation.

"As a lifelong consumer of intelligence, he knows that intelligence must be timely, accurate and acted upon quickly," Obama said. "He understands that staying a step ahead of nimble adversaries requires sharing and coordinating information, including with my director of national intelligence, Jim Clapper."

Obama said he values Petraeus' flexibility and adaptability. "Just as General Petraeus changed the way that our military fights and wins wars in the 21st century, I have no doubt that Director Petraeus will guide our intelligence professionals as they continue to adapt and innovate in an ever-changing world," the president said.

And Allen is the right man for the job in Afghanistan, the president said.

"As a battle-tested combat leader, in Iraq he helped turn the tide in Anbar province," he said. "As deputy commander of Central Command, he's respected in the region and has been deeply involved in planning and executing our strategy in Afghanistan."

Pentagon Official Addresses WikiLeaks, Social Media

By Donna Miles, American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, April 18, 2011 - The

WikiLeaks episode underscores the need for laws and policies that address the unintended consequences of "technology at the intersection of national security," the Pentagon's lead communicator said yesterday.

Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs Douglas B. Wilson told interviewer Vago Muradian on "This Week in Defense News" he's not sure how the Defense Department might have handled the WikiLeaks situation differently.

WikiLeaks.org group posted more than 90,000 documents, many that detailed field reports from Afghanistan as well as Pakistan's relationships with the Taliban.

"I think the most significant lesson to come out of this is that technology -- and particularly technology at the intersection of national security -- has outpaced the policy and the law necessary to address the unintended consequences," Wilson said.

Wilson called WikiLeaks an example of how "arrogance and naiveté have determined and had negative consequences for national security."

"Classified information is classified information, and releasing that information is illegal," he said. "But I think that we have a lot to do in government to understand that we need to be focusing much more on policy and much more on the laws that we need to think about to address what have been very unintended consequences of technological advance."

Even as social media revolutionizes information-sharing, the Defense Department's communications strategy boils down to the responsibility of being transparent and timely without jeopardizing the safety and privacy of service members and their families, Wilson said.

"The issues that we face every day at the Pentagon involve two factors," he said. "One, how do you deal with the press and public openly, credibly, in a timely manner and honestly? How do you provide facts and the truth, by the same token understanding that we're responsible for our men and women in uniform who are in harm's way in many places? How do you make sure that there is not unintended consequences of information which can put them further in harm's way and affect their safety and the privacy of their families?"

"Those are the issues that frame everything that we do," Wilson said.

These enduring principles apply regardless of the communications format, and whether it's through traditional or evolving media, he said.

Wilson said he recognizes how the advent of social media revolutionized the way people around the world -- including those in the Defense Department -- communicate.

Social media "provides instantaneous, real-time ability to reach broad numbers of people and to communicate quickly and

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effectively," he said. "When everybody is equipped with the social media tools, it's a very effective means of communication."

Wilson noted the use of social media as an organizing and messaging tool in the Middle East in recent months.

"We've seen that in terms of sectors of societies in the Arab world which had not had that kind of communications across those sectors before being able to mobilize very quickly," he said.

Unlike in that past, where a finite number of elites around the world defined messages, social media provide a voice to anyone, regardless of what they have to say and whether they are friend or foe.

"You can have religious extremists from Florida to Yemen say things and do things

that are going to have international impact," Wilson said.

That makes it an imperative, he said, for communicators at the Defense Department -- and across government as a whole -- to be able to explain policies in ways that people find credible.

Twitter, Facebook and other social media, Wilson said, are among the many communication tools that DOD em-

employs, including print and broadcast media, the Internet and personal communication.

Social media "is not an end in itself. It is a tool of communications," Wilson said. "It's a way to communicate, and you need to understand the strengths and weaknesses of each of the tools of communications in order to be effective ... I don't believe that there is any panacea in communications."

27th Army Science Conference

COL Zach Wheeler, DIMA Director, Medical Capabilities Integration Center, U.S. AMEDD Center and School

The 27th Army Science Conference was held in late 2010. The theme for this year's conference was "Transformational Army Science and Technology -- Enabling Full-Spectrum Operations." Over 1,400 participants were attendance including representatives from numerous foreign nations. The purpose of this gathering was to allow participants to hear about and discuss the latest technological developments designed to empower, unburden, and protect the Warfighter in an environment of persistent conflict.

Much of the conference focused on protecting the Warfighter and advances in helping the Wounded Warrior. In particular, a number of featured speakers discussed the latest research in regenerative medicine, PTSD/TBI, and neurosciences. This conference demonstrated that the Army is spending significant time, money, and energy in an attempt to improve the capability and survivability of the Warfighter.

Much of the conference can be viewed online at <http://armyscienceconference.com>. You may also want to visit the following websites to learn more about current innovations presented at the conference:

U.S. Army Medical Research and Materiel Command <https://mrmc.amedd.army.mil/>

Pittsburg Tissue Engineering Initiative <http://www.ptei.org>

Armed Forces Institute for Regenerative Medicine

Wake Forest -- Pittsburg Consortium <http://www.afirmwakepitt.org/home.htm>

-Rutgers -- Cleveland Clinic Consortium <http://www.afirm-rccc.org/>

US Army Institute of Surgical Research <http://usaisr.amedd.army.mil/>

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