

STATEMENT

OF

ARTHUR J. MYERS

ACTING DEPUTY UNDER SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

(MILITARY COMMUNITY AND FAMILY POLICY)

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON MILITARY PERSONNEL

OF THE

SENATE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE

ON

FAMILY SUPPORT

JUNE 3, 2009

Not for Publication until Released
By Committee on Armed Services
U.S. House of Representatives

The Department of Defense has made family support a high priority in recognition of the crucial role families play in supporting Service members on the battlefield, a concept that has resounded during these times of multiple deployments. To ensure continuity in program delivery, the Department increased the FY2010 Defense-wide baseline by shifting \$234M from the Overseas Contingency Operations funding to the baseline. The total FY2010 Defense-wide Family Assistance budget request is \$472M to fund programs such as child care expansion, outreach to Guard and Reserve, non-medical counseling, financial education and training and access to training and certification opportunities for spouses. These programs are lifelines of support for military members and their families who are stationed around the globe. The purpose of my statement today is to describe our many successes and build a record that supports authorization of funds and programs needed for family support. Our military leaders stand with me in this important endeavor to reiterate the inextricable link between investments in quality of life programs and readiness of soldiers, sailors, airmen, and Marines. It is clear, at a time of increased deployment and demand on our Service members and their families, there is need for consistent, commensurate family support.

Improvements to military quality of life are framed by the past with a view toward the future. Today, the Department has a wide range of quality of life policies, services and programs to address personal and family issues. Initiatives address the nexus of work life and personal/family life; all are concerned with key organizational goals related to recruitment, retention, morale and mission readiness.

Child Care: The Department considers care for children of military members to be a key work force issue with a direct impact on the effectiveness and readiness of the

force. Though the Department has a strong commitment to child care and youth programs, some components still have unmet demand for child care. Efforts are ongoing to address an estimated shortage of approximately 37,000 child care spaces needed for active duty, Guard, and Reserve families. The FY 2010 Defense-wide budget includes \$60M to expand child care in civilian communities for public-private ventures. Plans to build this capacity involve utilizing a myriad of delivery systems to include existing child care facilities, schools, recreation and after-school programs, and home-based care programs. We will aid in the recruitment of private sector licensed child care providers at locations where child care needs are identified, such as locations from which Guard or Reserve units are being deployed. The Department will ensure the level of quality is comparable to that offered on-installation by implementing an assistance plan geared to the specific needs of the community. We will utilize existing state and local resources, supplementing when needed, to raise the quality of care.

Increased child care capacity requires a high-quality, well-trained workforce. We need to eliminate barriers to hiring practices key to expanding our partnerships with community providers of child care. The Department has exercised a robust construction program to accelerate child care capacity and increase spaces by over 15,000 on a rapid basis. The temporary program to use minor military construction authority for the construction of child development centers provided a means to increase the availability of quality, affordable child care for Service members and their families. I thank you for your strong support.

The Department has initiated outreach to universities and nonprofits for the purpose of developing recruitment and retention programs and to strengthen existing

partnerships. These strategic efforts will enhance DoD's capacity to recruit and retain talented professionals in Child Development, Youth Development, Counseling, Family Support, & Financial Management. In addition, outreach efforts designed to increase the number of students completing internships and pursuing professional careers are also under development. The Department is working with campus-based partnerships to identify promising or best practices, develop training programs, create campus-based seminars, colloquia, workshops, and distance learning and to provide research on the impact and quality of programs.

The Department continues to lead the nation with 98 percent of DoD Child Development Centers accredited by the National Academy of Early Childhood Programs, as compared to 8 – 10 percent of civilian child care centers. To be accredited, early childhood programs voluntarily undergo a comprehensive self-study and an external, professional review. Criteria are aimed at providing a safe and nurturing environment while promoting the physical, social, emotional and intellectual development of young children. Additionally, a report released by the National Association of Child Care Resources and Referral Agencies in March 2009 rated the DoD child care system oversight and standards as the top ranking among all 50 states and the District of Columbia with a score of 131 out of 150 points, 20 points ahead of its nearest competitors (District of Columbia, Oklahoma, and Tennessee).

Youth Programs: DoD promotes positive youth development by designing programs to recognize the achievements of youth and by developing partnerships with other youth-serving organizations like the Boys & Girls Clubs of America and 4-H that offer a variety of resources. Programs prepare pre-teens and teenagers to meet the

challenges of military life, adolescence, and adulthood. Recognizing that developing good financial habits needs to start earlier, we launched the Military Youth Financial Readiness Campaign as part of the Military Saves Week in 2008. In 2008, we had over 5,000 youth participants and this year that number grew to more than 7,000.

This month, DoD launched a new website, Military Youth on the Move, <http://apps.mhf.dod.mil/myom>, to replace Military Teens on the Move. This site is an easy to use resource that reaches out to youth with creative ways to cope with issues that arise in the face of a move, such as transitioning to a new school, saying goodbye to friends, and getting involved in a new community. The website is divided into three target audiences: elementary school, middle school, and high school. Users simply click on their age group to get started. Once inside the site, users search different topics that pertain to both military youth in particular and youth in general. Moving once or repeatedly has a significant impact on our youth. Military Youth on the Move helps to make the transition as smooth as possible by giving them a safe place for information and advice.

To support military youth impacted by deployment, *Operation: Military Kids* (OMK), collaborated with the Joint Family Support Assistance Program in 15 pilot states. 4-H/Army Youth Development Project Youth Program Specialist staff assigned to support OMK trained 26,543 community members at Ready, Set, Go community events, informed 16,267 partners and decision-makers at Informational Briefings, trained 1,270 youth at Speak Out for Military Kids events, presented 2,264 Hero Packs to military youth, engaged 289 non-military youth, involved 1,946 military youth and 399 non-military youth, 1,835 family members and 387 community members at Mobile

Technology Lab events, and involved 7,872 military youth in other youth program events.

DoD provided funds to OMK states for the expansion of OMK camping opportunities that advance the accomplishment of national OMK goals, support the Joint Family Support Assistance Program and enhance the effective implementation of OMK elements to reach more military youth. Thirty eight states with current OMK grants and the District of Columbia will be eligible to apply for supplemental OMK Camp funding in the amount of \$50,000. Because of larger military populations, the following 10 states will be eligible for an additional \$35,000 (total of \$85,000): CA, TX, NC, VA, GA, FL, WA, SC, HI, and KY. Summer Camps are defined as weekend events, special focus camps (computer, conservation, leadership, etc.), day camps, school break retreats, or residential experiences of varying lengths organized and operated by OMK. The outcomes for military youth include opportunities, in a camp setting, to ease the stress associated with the deployment of a parent and to form a support network of military peers. The outcomes for parents include opportunities for youth to attend a no cost camping experience with other military youth impacted by deployment throughout their state and/or neighboring states.

Department of Defense Education Activity: Department of Defense Education Activity: A key quality of life issue is the education of military children. Service members often make decisions about assignments based on the availability of quality educational opportunities for their children. The Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA) provides quality pre-kindergarten through 12th grade educational opportunities and services to military dependents around the globe, who

would otherwise not have access to U.S.-accredited public education. *Of the approximately 1.2 million military school-age children, DoDEA educates nearly 85,000 in 192 schools in 12 foreign countries, seven states, Guam, and Puerto Rico with 8,700 educators. The excellent ratio of educators to students (1:10 overall) contributes to the quality individual attention and education afforded throughout the DoDEA system.*

DoDEA also operates a tuition reimbursement program for military assigned overseas without a DoDEA school. Through the Educational Partnership Initiative and new technologies, DoDEA can expand its reach to the approximately 92% of military students who do not attend DoDEA Schools.

The ongoing relocation of thousands of military students through force structure changes has created an urgent need and responsibility to enrich and expand partnerships with military-connected communities to ensure the best possible educational opportunities for military children. DoDEA works collaboratively with the Secretary of Education to ease the transition of military students, to use DoDEA funds to share experience with local educational agencies (LEAs) who educate military students, and to provide programs such as distance learning and teacher training to LEAs with military students undergoing transition from force structure changes. DoDEA is developing a new approach to provide a fully accredited virtual school program for Grades 9-12 for eligible students. Beginning in School Year 2009-2010, DoDEA plans to increase course offerings within the existing distance learning program to implement a comprehensive accredited virtual high school by School Year 2010-2011. A middle and upper elementary program is also planned for delivery in subsequent years.

Many of the school facilities within DoDEA have exceeded the life expectancy and do not meet today's educational standards. Schools are currently operating within structures that were erected in the 1930s through the 1960s. These aged buildings were either built for other purposes (i.e., barracks, administration buildings) or were constructed prior to major technological advances for the kindergarten to high school learning environment. Independent condition assessments indicate that it is more cost effective to replace these buildings than to upgrade or modernize them. Many are due for replacement in the next 10 years. Continued support of the DoDEA effort is needed and appreciated. This supports the Department's force management quality of life and retention goals of attracting and retaining the highest quality personnel.

DoDEA continues to make significant improvements to facilities due to gains in the facilities sustainment, restoration and modernization (FSRM) budget. In FY09 DoDEA, will meet the Department standard for FSRM with obligations of \$86 million; of this amount sustainment funding is \$72.6 million. The FY10 DoDEA FSRM budget is currently \$93.7 million with \$73.8 million allocated to sustainment. Both these figures are vast improvements over FY08 and previous years. In FY08 the sustainment budget was \$55.8 million. The current and projected budget will allow DoDEA to target high-cost, priority repairs on roofs; heating, ventilation, and air conditioning; other critical systems that may be failing; and improvements to support technology requirements in the classrooms. Complimenting the O&M increase in FSRM is the increase to the DoDEA MILCON program. The FY09 DoDEA MILCON budget is \$102 million and the FY10 budget is programmed for \$208 million, a major increase from the previous DoDEA MILCON budgets of approximately \$45 million a year. This increase is attributed to

Department recognition and support of DoDEA requirements. In the future, DoDEA plans to replace three to four schools a year as a well as meet new requirements.

New information today can make educational programs that were developed and implemented yesterday obsolete. To that end, DoDEA is conducting a multi-phased comprehensive program evaluation process to review the current status of its educational programs to develop recommendations to increase the impact of those programs as well as increase accountability and student achievement. Some programs can be modified to make them more effective, while others may have to be discontinued. The entire DoDEA staff will continually assess data and review research to meet the needs of students to show continuous gains in student achievement.

The process of program evaluation follows the steps of planning, implementing, evaluating, reviewing, and refining. We look to you for your support in continuing this effort. This effort includes an assessment program that will align DoDEA's assessment of student achievement in accordance with state; administrative and teacher professional development programs to support data-driven differentiated instruction; and a comprehensive grade 9-12 Virtual School program by School Year 2010/11. This is a significant commitment to ensure the children of our uniformed service members are receiving the best education possible.

Many military installations have school liaison officers to advise military parents of school-aged children on educational issues and needs and to assist in solving education-related problems. School liaison officers are helping to identify barriers to academic success and develop solutions, promote parental involvement, develop and

coordinate partnerships in education and provide parents with the tools they need to overcome obstacles to education that stem from the military lifestyle. The School liaison officer acts as an advocate and communication link between the installation and the surrounding school districts to “level the playing field” for transitioning military children and youth. The purpose of the program is to provide a link between military families on and off - installation schools to assist them with those unique problems facing military children, i.e., PCS moves, deployments, varying graduation and records transfer requirements, differences in curriculum and schedules between stateside and overseas schools, and Department of Defense Schools and civilian schools. Their mission is to mobilize and utilize community resources to reduce the impact of the mobile military lifestyle on children/youth, implement predictable support services that assist children/youth with relocations, life transitions and achievement of academic success, and provide access for parents, children, youth, schools, commanders, and communities to a wide range of resources to facilitate school transitions.

Exceptional Family Member Program: Through the military medical departments, at no charge to families, DoD provides early intervention services, from birth until three years of age, to infants and toddlers who are developmentally delayed or at high risk for a developmental delay and who (but for age) are eligible to attend a DoD school. The DoD schools provide specially designed instruction, support, and services to children with educational disabilities, who are three years of age and until they are 21 years of age. The DoD schools provide a full continuum of programs to meet the needs of children with disabilities in our military families. During the last six years, the DoD

schools have focused on children with moderate to severe disabilities by purchasing new equipment and assistive technology devices and providing professional development for all special education personnel. The intent is for consistency in curriculum and instruction as families move from one DoD school to another. In response to the increased incidence of children with autism in our DoD schools, the DoD school system hired autism consultants to help design the curriculum and interventions for students with autism.

The Department publishes an annual directory to assist the medical and educational assignment coordinators to identify those military communities outside the continental United States with pre-established programs or services for children with special needs, including those with more serious needs, such as those with intellectual impairments, autism or physical disabilities such as blindness.

Recently, the Department embarked on a joint Service campaign to raise awareness of the Exceptional Family Member Program, the issues that these families face, and the resources available to address their needs.

Interstate Compact: The mobile military lifestyle creates tough challenges for children who attend, on average, six to nine different school systems from kindergarten to twelfth grade. To help overcome these issues, the Department is working with the states to implement the Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children. A variety of federal, state and local officials as well as national stakeholder organizations helped develop this interstate agreement whose goal is to replace the widely varying treatment of transitioning military students with a comprehensive approach that provides

a uniform policy on eligibility, enrollment, placement and graduation in every state that chooses to join.

Eleven states, Arizona, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Kansas, Kentucky, Michigan, Missouri, North Carolina and Oklahoma, adopted the compact in 2008. This was sufficient to activate the Compact and establish the Commission to finalize implementing rules and provide operational oversight. Although it is still fairly early in 2009, Alabama, Alaska, Indiana, Iowa, Maryland Mississippi, Texas, Virginia, and Washington have joined the Compact bringing the total number of member states to 20 and covering approximately 64% of military children. In addition, legislation is being actively considered in 12 states.

Voluntary Education: The First Joint Service Graduation Ceremony in Iraq

Personal development is so ingrained in our culture that, even in a war zone, military personnel strive to continue their educational pursuits and personal improvement. To meet those needs, there are two full service Joint Education Centers operating in Iraq at Camp Victory and Camp Balad, with plans to open six more in the near future. Seven days a week, Service members may participate in traditional (instructor-led) on-the-ground classes, through Central Texas College, University of Maryland University College and Embry-Riddle Aeronautical, or via distance learning education. The centers also provide an extensive testing program, improvement courses, and Leader Skill Enhancement Instruction Courses.

On 17 May 2009, beneath the United States flag in the rotunda of the Al Faw Palace in Baghdad, a Graduation Commencement Ceremony was conducted in Iraq – a first for any combat zone. This was the conclusion of a long journey for many of the

Service members pursuing their educational goals. The degrees conferred represented all levels of mastery – associate, baccalaureate and masters.

All Service members deployed to Iraq who graduated in the 2008-2009 college year were invited to participate. Of the 130 identified as graduates, only 79 could participate in the ceremony due to operational reasons.

A tangible demonstration of the importance the military places on education, the graduation ceremony epitomized self improvement as a critical component of the warrior ethos. The warrior-scholars demonstrated their desire to pursue intellectual knowledge that will be applied in their job and to the military mission in Iraq.

Fitness: All of the military Services continue to expand and provide innovative fitness programs that sustain a physically fit, healthy force in our military communities and for deployed men and women around the world. Long term plans will modernize the fitness infrastructure beginning with the Services' request for ten fitness center military construction projects in FY 2009 and another 71 fitness centers programmed through FY 2014. The inclusion of fitness facilities in the minor military construction authority would serve as a boost to facilitate future construction. Installation fitness facilities are one of the most important facilities on base for troops to release stress after returning from combat, combat obesity, and remain physically and mentally fit. Also, more and more, our installation fitness centers are becoming "family friendly." Many installation fitness centers are carving out space for supervised child care to assist parents who otherwise could not work out because of lack of available child care. Programming is being expanded to include older children/youth in classes to help foster a healthier

lifestyle and combat obesity. The key initiative is ensuring our military members and their families are fit!

MWR Outreach

To promote a healthy lifestyle and expand the military MWR benefit to Active Duty, Guard and Reserve and their families who do not have access to installation MWR programs, we have contracted with the Armed Services YMCA to offer free YMCA family memberships at local, participating YMCAs to families of deployed Guard and Reserve Personnel, Active Duty Service members and their families assigned to Independent Duty locations, any relocated spouse of a deployed Active Duty Service member and a limited number of families assigned to the Joint Base locations. In just seven months we funded over 15,000 memberships which include over 27,000 family members. Feedback has been overwhelmingly positive with comments such as *“with four children in tow, exercise would be impossible without child watch at the YMCA - thank you for finding military spouses/families worth it to use funds in this way”* and *“I have lost 30 pounds in just a couple of months since coming to the YMCA; I absolutely love it!”* We are expanding our marketing efforts to reach more families who meet the eligibility requirements.

We also created a DoD MWR Online Library with library resources in print, electronic and downloadable format for entertainment, learning or solace, available for free from Military OneSource, virtually anytime, anywhere. Resources include auto, home and small engine repair, Career Library, Peterson’s Life Long learning, Tumblebooks for kids, NetLibrary audio and e-books just to name a few. The online library is also available through the Military Services Portal. Again customer feedback

has been excellent with comments such “*You guys hit a home run with offering these books - great for the long plane rides to and from deployment - thank you for the great benefit!*” and “*Great job - love the free stuff.*” Supplemental funding has allowed us to renew these on-line resources for another year.

Communication Services in Combat Areas: The ability to communicate with family and friends is the number one factor in being able to cope with longer and more frequent deployments. Service members have free access to the non-secure military Internet by using their military e-mail address, including aboard ships. They also have free Internet access at 794 MWR Internet Cafes in Iraq and Afghanistan with 9,107 computers and 4,015 VOIP phones (with call rates of less than 4 cents a minute). To enhance MWR provided services, the Exchanges provide personal information services for a usage fee for this customer convenience. Back home, computers and Internet service located in our family support centers, recreation centers, libraries, and youth centers help ensure families can connect.

Additionally, the Exchanges contract for telephone services in combat zones, operating 72 calling centers with 1,536 phones in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Kuwait, plus calling centers on-board ships in theater. Rates are 45 cents per minute afloat and 15 cents per minute ashore. The Exchanges are in compliance with the Department of Defense policy and the law, which require that contracts for telephone service be awarded through competitive procedures and include options to minimize costs to individual users. Where feasible, the contracts provide the flexibility to use a variety of phone cards.

MilitaryHOMEFRONT (www.militaryhomefront.dod.mil) is the DoD library of official information about quality of life programs for helping professionals and military

families. The Homefront provides access to information about benefits, entitlements and programs available to military members and their families including policies, reports and directives on topics from child care to relocation, special needs to voluntary education, morale welfare and recreation to combat stress. MilitaryHOMEFRONT provides a searchable directory of educational programs and services and state-specific resources as well as hundreds of Autism and general disability resources. Parents who have children with autism can communicate directly with each other using HOMEFRONTConnections, a DoD social networking site available on MilitaryHOMEFRONT.

Further, DoD uses MilitaryHOMEFRONT to develop tools, accessible through both the Military OneSource and MilitaryHOMEFRONT websites, to assist families – including the very popular “Plan My Move” and “Military Installations.” Military Installations, an on-line directory within the website, provides access to points of contact for 56 activities on installations worldwide, including the commissary, exchanges, MWR programs, child development centers and the military health care facilities.

Military OneSource Outreach Center: Six years of deployments and multiple deployments have prompted the Department of Defense to rethink methods and strategies to deliver family support. Two major issues drove the development of the new delivery system: 1) how do we meet the needs of the National Guard and Reserve families and those geographically dispersed, and 2) how can we meet the needs of commanders for surge support surrounding deployments.

Primary among those responses was the opening of the Military OneSource Center, designed to provide Active Duty and Guard and Reserve Commanders the vehicles for surge support during deployments. The Military OneSource Center, along

with the Military OneSource 24/7/365 call center and web-site, provide the scaffolding for our outreach and support.

1. Military OneSource.com and Call Center: Launched in 2002, Military OneSource provides support services 24/7/365 to active duty, National Guard and Reserve component Service members and their families world-wide. This backbone of the Military OneSource Center provides toll-free confidential telephonic support and a website that provide interactive tools, educational materials, discussion boards, links to military and community resources, and tax filing services, among other services. Testimony to its usefulness is the fact that over 600, 000 tax returns were prepared through Military OneSource this tax season, at no charge to service members.

2. Outreach Counseling offers Services members and families with confidential, short term, situational, problem solving assistance, instrumental for coping with normal reactions to the stressful situations created by deployments, family separations and reintegration.

Military OneSource offers confidential face-to-face, telephonic, and on-line counseling up to twelve sessions. *Telephonic and on-line counseling sessions are new and beginning to grow.*

The *Military and Family Life Consultant* (MFLC) program provides professional, confidential, and flexible service delivery on a 30-90 day rotational basis on military installations to meet surge support requirements and to support Guard and Reserve events.

3. Financial Counseling. Additionally, financial counseling is available, through both Military OneSource and the MFLC program, to assist with the financial concerns of military members and their families during all stages of the deployment cycle. The Military OneSource Center has been highly successful in making these services available world wide.

Financial Readiness Installation Roadshows: Installation workshops are delivered on demand that include information about budgeting, mortgage and foreclosure, debt reduction, saving and investing, identity theft and retirement planning.

Twenty-three road shows have been conducted since November 2008; over 20 additional events are scheduled in 2009.

4. Military Spouse Career Advancement Accounts. To jump start portable careers in health services, education, information technology, and financial services, DoD will provide up to \$6000 per spouse to assist spouses in developing portable careers in fields such as nursing, teaching, real estate and banking. This, in turn, supports families in attaining their aspirations and goals that may be interrupted as a result of the mobile military lifestyle.

5. Outreach support to the National Guard and Reserve – Joint Family Support Assistance Program. A continuum of support and services for National Guard and Reserve members and their families during pre-deployment, deployment, post-deployment, reunion and reintegration. Services have reached 364,000 Service members and families over the last year. It is a support service multiplier by broadening the network of resources beyond those that exist on installations. This program also supports the Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program 30-60-90 day events during post-deployment.

6. Wounded Warrior Resource Call Center. Embedded in the Military OneSource Call Center, this feature provides Service members who have become wounded, ill or injured, as well as their families and their primary caregivers, with a single point of contact for referral to Services' resources. Assistance is provided with reporting deficiencies in covered military facilities, obtaining health care services, receiving benefits information and any other difficulties encountered.

Commissaries and Exchanges: The commissary and exchange programs are vital to mission accomplishment and, as components of the military compensation system, are important contributors to morale and readiness. The Defense Commissary Agency (DeCA) operates 254 commissaries around the world providing groceries and household products to military personnel, retirees, and their families at cost plus a five percent surcharge to fund commissary construction and equipment. Savings exceed 30 percent compared to commercial prices; savings that contribute nearly \$3,400 per year in disposable income for a family of four that does all of its grocery shopping at the commissary. Sales exceed \$5.8 billion; operations are funded by appropriations of \$1.3 billion. DeCA met or exceeded all performance goals in Fiscal Year 2008 and is performing equally well in 2009, with year-to date sales above target. DeCA is bringing the commissary benefit to Guard and Reserve personnel who don't live near a commissary through their 208 on-site sales at Guard and Reserve locations. The three exchange systems - the Army and Air Force Exchange System (AAFES), the Navy Exchange System Command (NEXCOM) and the Marine Corps Exchange (MCX) - operate over 3,700 retail outlets at 300 military installations, in 89 contingency operations, and aboard 161 ships. The exchanges sell a wide range of goods and services

and distribute about 70 percent of their profits to support MWR programs. Savings exceed 20 percent, not including sales tax savings. Soon, AAFES will deploy new mobile exchanges specially outfitted to serve Guard and Reserve units together with DeCA. In combat areas, the exchanges provide 129 retail operations ranging from exchanges to imprest funds, 228 name brand fast food outlets, 600 service concessions, and telephone services that minimize costs for deployed members to call home. The exchanges had sales of \$11.9 billion in FY 2008 with profits of \$523 million and project sales of \$13 billion in FY 2009.

The Department will continue to make family support a high priority. As the needs of Service members and their families evolve, the Department stands ready to improve the quality of life of its greatest resource – people.

In conclusion, thank you for your support of the dedicated men and women who chose the highest calling of public service in defense of our nation. We share a passion for improving the quality of life of our soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines and their families.