

**STATEMENT OF**

**Ms. Jane Burke**

**Principal Director**

**Military Community and Family Policy**

**Before The**

**House Committee on Veterans' Affairs**

**Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity**

**ON**

**Transition Assistance Program  
for Guard and Reserve Forces**

**May 16, 2008**

**1:00 PM**

**NOT FOR PUBLIC RELEASE UNTIL  
RELEASED BY THE COMMITTEE**

Chairwoman Herseth Sandlin and distinguished members of the committee: thank you for the opportunity to discuss what the Department of Defense (DoD) is doing to provide Service members and their families with the information and resources necessary to facilitate a successful transition from military to civilian life.

We require a great deal from our Service members and their families, whether they be Active, National Guard, or Reserve, and I want to affirm the Department's steadfast commitment to them.

Returning to private life after serving in the military is a very complex undertaking. To assist them in doing so, we must empower our Service members with the tools and information they need to develop individual solutions to the challenges they may face as they return to civilian life. Service members' and their families most immediate goals are finding a job, changing careers, enrolling in higher education, and ultimately improving their economic quality of life.

### **Federal Collaboration**

I am impressed by the dedication and willingness of all our Federal partners to provide an assortment of highly desirable transition services. You can be truly proud of the manner in which the DoD, Department of Labor (DOL), and Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) have continued to enthusiastically support our men and women in uniform. The sustained interest and support of this Committee is also vital to our efforts.

The three Federal departments have been working together in earnest for well over a decade. The many professionals within these departments are bringing DoD, DOL, and

the VA even closer together for a common goal of preparing Service members and their families for military life and transition into the civilian community at a pace greater than at any time before. Examples of our increasingly focused efforts include the Transition Assistance Program Steering Committee and the Secretary of Labor's Advisory Committee on Veterans Employment, Training, and Employer Outreach (ACVETEO). DoD and VA also continue to partner extensively through the VA/DoD Joint Executive Council (JEC), the Benefits Executive Council (BEC), and the Health Executive Council (HEC).

The rest of my statement today will touch on the many programs, actions, and activities under way that reflect the shared commitment to delivering transition assistance, employment assistance, and benefits information to our Service members and their families.

### **Office of Personal Finance and Transition (PF&T)**

The DoD has undergone a paradigm shift and adopted a new philosophy with respect to assisting our transitioning Service members and their families. Recognizing that financial readiness, military and veterans benefits, and transition assistance are closely linked to one another and must be addressed as a whole, The Office of the Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Military Community and Family Policy (ODUSD (MC&FP)) established its newest directorate, the Office of Personal Finance and Transition (PF&T), this past March.

Combining oversight for both the Financial Readiness Program and the Transition Assistance Program (TAP), previously operating independently within separate Office of the Secretary of Defense directorates, the office is responsible for a broad range of policies, educational programs, and resource services that address both the financial readiness and transition assistance needs of military members and their families.

Through education, counseling, and an inventory of high-tech and interactive resources and programs, PF&T is responsible for ensuring all military members and their families have access to the tools necessary to attain economic security throughout their military careers and beyond and to make educated decisions regarding their next military career milestones and ultimate transitions to the civilian workforce. Ensuring military members and their families have an accurate and complete understanding of both military and veterans' benefits, and how application of those benefits affects their individual transition and economic security plans, can have significant retention implications, which, in turn, can contribute to mission and force readiness. Part of the office's philosophy is that military life is a series of key transitions, and that "transition assistance" is a life-long process, required for these transitions within the military just as much as it is for the transition out of the military.

With a mission inclusive of all Services and components (Active Duty, National Guard, and Reserve) and their families, PF&T is establishing a national network of financial and transition professionals and resources through a "train-the-trainer" approach to ensure the DoD is responsive to the financial readiness and transition needs of state Adjutant Generals and governors, military regions and installations, and individual units.

Additionally, this new approach will ensure 24/7 global access of educational resources and individualized financial and transition plans using the latest technology and multiple delivery methodologies throughout the Service members' and their families' life cycle.

However, while this represents the future vision of the nature of transition assistance, it is important to discuss the formal TAP as it exists today to show how it currently assists our troops and families.

### **Transition Assistance Program**

Since its inception in 1990, the goal of TAP has been to provide Service members and their families the skills, tools, knowledge, and self-confidence necessary for a successful reentry into the Nation's civilian work force. The goal is to help prepare them to move into the job market or an educational institution. We deliver TAP through a collaborative effort involving DOL, the Military Services, VA, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), the Department of Education (ED), the Small Business Administration (SBA), the National Veterans Business Development Corporation, and other federal, state, local and non-profit organizations. The Veterans Service and Military Service Organizations provide outstanding support to TAP and to our Service members and their families at both the national and local levels.

There are four key components to TAP, the responsibility for each shared among DoD, Labor, and the VA.

**Preparation Counseling is the first component of TAP.** This counseling is mandatory for separating and retiring Service members and all eligible demobilizing

members of the National Guard and Reserve. The Military Services are responsible for providing Preseparation Counseling. Service members are introduced to information about employment opportunities and how to go about finding a job. Also during this phase of TAP, Active Component Service members, looking for a job post-military, are encouraged to attend a DOL TAP Employment Workshop. For the National Guard and Reserve, similar information is provided geared to their needs. The Guard and Reserve receive a Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act (USERRA) briefing. USERRA briefings are scheduled at installation demobilization sites in coordination with the demobilization commander. National Guard and Reserve personnel are also informed, during the Preseparation Counseling session, about the services available to them at the DOL One-Stop Career Centers. Surveys show that the overwhelming majority of the Guard and Reserve activated have jobs when they are activated; therefore, they have jobs to which they will return. However, members looking for jobs or a career change are encouraged to visit and register with the One-Stop Career Center nearest their residence, once they return home.

While at the demobilization station, they get information about their eligibility to receive employment assistance and other transition services up to 180 days after demobilization from any of the Military Services Transition Offices and DOL One-Stop Career Centers.

In addition to the DOL Employment Workshops, the Military Services provide a vast array of additional employment seminars and one-on-one counseling to Service members. This extensive assistance covers resume and cover letter writing, information

about electronic job banks and Internet access to automated employment tools (resume writer, cover letter and job assistance tutorials), tools on salary negotiation; location of job fairs, details about Federal employment workshops and seminars, opportunities for post military employment networking, relocation assistance, information about government partnerships for employment and training, benefits for members who are involuntarily separated, employer panels, and information about Veterans benefits (including disability benefits).

**The second component of TAP is the DOL TAP Employment Workshop.**

Attendance is voluntary for Active Duty Service members and their spouses, with the exception of the Marine Corps, which has made attending the DOL Employment Workshop mandatory. The curriculum, facilitators, workshop materials, data collection and analysis related to the employment workshops are the responsibility of DOL. Service members receive information on labor market conditions, assessing individual skills and competencies, how to write effective resumes and cover letters, proper interviewing techniques, and the best methods of searching for jobs. They also learn how to use electronic employment data banks. Finally, they get information addressing the special employment needs of those separating with a disability.

**The third component of TAP is the VA Benefits Briefing.** Attendance at the VA Benefits Briefing is voluntary for Active Component Service members. The briefing addresses education and training, health care, home loans, life insurance, vocational rehabilitation and employment (VR&E), disability benefits, burial benefits, and dependents' and survivors' benefits.

Demobilizing National Guard and Reserve Service members receive a VA briefing which also includes information on Disabled Transition Assistance Program (DTAP). The materials, information, counselors, and all data collection and analysis related to the VA Benefits Briefings are the responsibility of the VA.

**The fourth component of TAP is the Disabled Transition Assistance Program.**

Attendance at DTAP is voluntary for Active Component Service members and is a separate briefing. DTAP is for Service members and veterans who have, or suspect they have a service-connected disability or an injury or illness that was aggravated by service. During the DTAP briefing, VA addresses VR&E, sometimes referred to as Chapter 31. DTAP addresses the five tracks to employment: re-employment, rapid access to employment, employment through long term services, independent living services, and self employment. DTAP also addresses other services such as medical, dental, optical, mental health treatment, special adapted housing, vet centers, vocational/educational counseling and special hiring authorities for Federal employment. VA provides all materials and information, counselors, data collection and any analysis related to DTAP.

We also cannot overlook the many options for federal employment such as Veterans Recruitment Appointment (VRA), Veterans Employment Opportunities Act (VEOA), Appointment of 30% or More Disabled Veterans, Federal Career Intern Program (FCIP), SBA, and the National Veterans Business Development Corporation Programs for those who want to start their own business or franchise.

Finally, as a result of recommendations from the VA's Returning Global War on Terror Heroes Task Force, DoD has established a goal for TAP and DTAP attendance of

85% for separating Service members and demobilizing National Guard and Reserve Forces. To meet this goal, we have tasked the Services to allow Service members to attend these sessions so they have access to the employment resources they need to help them transition into the workforce or into an educational institution. In partnership with the DOL and VA, a life-long learning approach to transition assistance is being developed, to include the redesign and modernize of existing TAP curriculum and course objectives for the four components of TAP. TAP will be designed into a “purple” solution for transition assistance using highly interactive features hosted on the TurboTAP website and multi-media mobile learning technologies (m-learning) to deliver program modules as standalone, web-based, and hybrid courses with a blend of web-based and traditional classroom instruction. The TAP will also provide instructors and facilitators with access to the latest interactive technologies and teaching methodologies to maximize student participation and increase effectiveness and value of course curriculum, regardless of delivery location. This modernization of the TAP programs will provide global 24/7 access and increased quality control of TAP and enable commanders to meet the 85% goal while enhancing the Service members’ and their spouses’ learning experience.

### **TurboTAP**

There is much concern about how we can better serve the National Guard and Reserve Components coming from Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF)/Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF). As I’ve stated earlier, we are leveraging technology in its many forms to

change how the National Guard and Reserve members transition out of the military, in addition to serving as a valuable tool for the Active Component Service members as well. This leveraging has resulted in what we call “TurboTAP”.

When TAP was originally developed in 1990, we did not design it with the needs of the National Guard and Reserves in mind. Their mission has changed dramatically since 9-11 and the requirements, with respect to TAP, warrant a fresh look. To better meet the needs of the Guard and Reserves, DoD, with the cooperation and collaboration of the Military Services, National Guard Bureau (NGB), DOL, VA, ED, SBA, and the National Veterans Business Development Corporation, has designed a dynamic, automated web-based system for delivery of transition assistance and related information. The TurboTAP web portal, launched in 2007, allows each Service member, regardless of component, to obtain a lifelong account and a tailored Individual Transition Plan based on their transition needs which can also connect them to information on military and veterans benefits, many of which have significant cash value. Examples include the Montgomery GI Bill, the Thrift Savings Plan and the Savings Deposit Program.

This portal architecture is the backbone of the updated DoD TAP process for National Guard and Reserve Service members. Usability, flexibility, adaptability, and individual customization are the keys to successful implementation of this new technology-enabled process. The goal for this system is to increase Service member participation, satisfaction, and ultimately, enhance awareness of military benefits for recruitment, retention, and transition.

We continue to be encouraged by the possibilities for TurboTAP. Military personnel can access a comprehensive Transition Guide for Guard and Reserve and a Pre-separation Guide for the Active Component, obtain employment information, build a resume online, conduct a job search, contact and locate their local One-Stop Career Center for employment assistance, locate the nearest VA Regional Office, Vet Center, and Medical Center, use helpful checklists reminding troops of key things to do prior to leaving the Service, be connected to information about VA benefits, services, and programs, and the list goes on.

TurboTAP better meets the needs of the National Guard, Reserve, and Active Component Service members and their families because the website gives them the tools to connect and access the information to meet their needs when they are ready – present or future. This is a 21<sup>st</sup> century approach to delivering individualized information and benefits to Service members and families. We plan to make the transition to an online transaction, much like banking and bill paying have become. The success and accountability of the transition will be managed online versus a form being hand carried to a personnel file. As we continue to expand the capabilities of the website, we will solicit your approval and legislative support.

The site can be accessed at [www.TurboTAP.org](http://www.TurboTAP.org).

## **Outreach, Counseling, and Decision-Making Tools**

There are multiple “high-tech, high-touch” initiatives, both online and in person, that exist to better serve our troops and families with their transition, financial readiness, and benefits awareness needs.

In the Fall of 2007, DoD TurboTAP Mobile Training Teams began training the National Guard and Reserves. These highly specialized outreach teams travel to State level deployment support and reintegration programs at the request of National Guard and Reserve Component leaders to connect Service members to the benefits they have earned through military service. The TurboTAP Mobile Training Teams provide information about transition assistance, service-related benefits, and related on-demand financial counseling services. By the end of 2009, DoD’s goal is to have the TurboTAP Mobile Training Teams fully integrated into deployment support, transition assistance, and financial awareness programs in all 50 states. By coupling financial assistance with transition assistance, Service members will better understand how their benefits can help them reach their military career, personal and family goals and provide economic security throughout their lifetime.

DoD is expanding and enhancing its network of financial professionals to provide financial counseling and planning services to meet the needs of all our Service members and families, ranging from budgeting and debt consolidation to advanced financial planning. To augment our own network of contracted financial professionals, DoD is building and expanding relationships with United States Department of Agriculture Cooperative Extension educational institutions, community colleges, universities, non-

profit financial readiness partner organizations, financial planning associations, and DoD on-installation banks and credit unions to provide our troops with a variety of financial planning and counseling resources. A key to the success of expanding resources and partnerships is the train-the-trainer program being developed by DoD. The websites and multimedia mobile learning technologies (m-learning) will deliver train-the-trainer program modules as stand-alone, web-based, and hybrid courses with a blend of web-based and traditional classroom instruction. Benefits awareness and an understanding of how these benefits fit into a larger financial wellness plan can act as a powerful retention tool, or, should the member still decide to leave the Service, can assist tremendously with the decision-making process for a second career.

Additionally, at the request of National Guard and Reserve units, the Department is dispatching consultants with financial readiness specialties to attend special events such as drill weekends, reintegration, pre-deployment, and wellness fairs, to meet with Guard and Reserve members and families and provide education on many aspects of financial readiness and transition.

One of the newest key outreach and benefits awareness initiatives is the Joint Family Support and Assistance Program (JFSAP). Originally started in 15 States and now projected to expand to all 50 (to include the four territories) by the end of 2009, the JFSAP facilitates partnerships among federal, state and local organizations, builds benefits and transition assistance outreach for deploying units, and resources a vital state by state database for around the clock family assistance. Through partnerships with such groups as the Red Cross, JFSAP will help reach Service members and their families

within each State, especially the geographically dispersed families of the National Guard and Reserve, to ensure they are aware of and can easily be connected to benefits within their area. In this manner, we can contribute to the financial well-being of all troops and families, and in keeping with the new DoD philosophy, leverage this awareness as a retention tool.

Regarding financial tools, DoD is committed to providing our Service members and families with those that will enable them to truly enhance their financial wellness and economic security. DoD is building a catalog of resources through technology, expanding online counseling and mentoring tools, and researching and providing more decision-making calculators for financial career decisions to help troops address the question that all Service members eventually have to confront: “Should I go or should I stay?”

Three of the key online resources sponsored by DoD that contain transition, financial, and benefits information are Military OneSource ([www.militaryonesource.com](http://www.militaryonesource.com)), Military Home Front ([www.militaryhomefront.dod.mil](http://www.militaryhomefront.dod.mil)), and TurboTap ([www.turbotap.org](http://www.turbotap.org))

Military OneSource provides support services 24/7 for all troops and their families, including the Guard and Reserves, regardless of their mobilization status, and offers free, convenient access to confidential resource and referral support. When a Service member or spouse calls or emails, a master's level consultant provides assistance. Military OneSource is especially beneficial to those geographically separated from installation services or those who are unable to seek assistance during traditional working hours. The “Money Matters” section of Military OneSource contains financial

calculators, DVDs, CDs, and informational pamphlets to assist a family in its financial plan. Additionally, Military OneSource now features telephonic financial counseling to augment those programs provided by the Services.

Military Home Front is DoD's "Google" for quality of life information. As a sister site to Military OneSource, MilitaryHOMEFRONT is the library of DoD information on quality of life issues – to include transition and financial readiness - useful to installation staff and policy makers. In Fiscal Year 2007, there were over 1.7 million visits to the site.

MilitaryHOMEFRONT, in coordination with the JFSAP, has introduced the *MySTATE* database ([www.mystate.mhf.DoD.mil](http://www.mystate.mhf.DoD.mil)), a powerful new tool providing State and local Service members and their families across the nation with access to various organizations and businesses that offer special discounts and services specifically for military personnel and their families. MySTATE includes State directories, locations of programs and services, maps, directions and much more. The website also gives users the opportunity to provide feedback on the organizations or businesses listed.

### **Credentialing and Certification**

While in the Service, Service members receive extensive, high-quality training in a wide range of military professional fields (referred to as MOS's and Rates). The training, combined with military work experience, contributes significantly to a highly skilled workforce. Making the conversion from military occupations and skill sets to civilian jobs and certification presents challenges for transitioning military members. It

is critical that DoD assist these troops in overcoming these challenges since credentials help pave the way to immediate employment in the civilian world and long term economic security

In response, DoD, in partnership with the DOL, formed the Credentialing Working Group to address the issue of the conversion of military training and experience into nationally recognized industry accepted certifications. The Working Group is carrying out its mission by expanding current information, leveraging assistance resources, and promoting uniformity and reciprocity across the States with regard to certification, licensing, and apprenticeship to assist and prepare individuals to transition into civilian life with credentials for high-wage high-demand jobs that can provide economic security.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, our Service members and their families have sacrificed much in support of the Global War on Terror. Our military is experiencing a dynamic deployment cycle of unprecedented levels. It is DoD's duty to provide our troops with the decision-making tools they need to help them with the key financial and transition decision points in their life to enable them to execute their individual career and economic security plans. The new DoD Office of PF&T in partnership with other Federal and private agencies will get us there.

Madame Chairwoman, on behalf of the men and women in the military today and their families, I thank you and the members of the Committee for your steadfast support during these demanding times.