

**DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION
FOR APPROPRIATIONS FOR FISCAL YEAR
2010**

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 3, 2009

U.S. SENATE,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON PERSONNEL,
COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES,
Washington, DC.

**SUPPORT FOR MILITARY FAMILY PROGRAMS, POLICIES,
AND INITIATIVES**

The subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 2:31 p.m. in room SR-222, Russell Senate Office Building, Senator E. Benjamin Nelson (chairman of the subcommittee) presiding.

Committee members present: Senators E. Benjamin Nelson, Akaka, Burris, Chambliss, Graham, and Thune.

Majority staff member present: Gabriella Eisen, counsel.

Minority staff members present: Diana G. Tabler, professional staff member; and Richard F. Walsh, minority counsel.

Staff assistants present: Mary C. Holloway and Brian F. Sebold.

Committee members' assistants present: Ann Premer, assistant to Senator Ben Nelson; Nathan Davern, assistant to Senator Burris; Clyde A. Taylor, IV, assistant to Senator Chambliss; and Adam G. Brake, assistant to Senator Graham.

STATEMENT OF SENATOR E. BENJAMIN NELSON, CHAIRMAN

Senator BEN NELSON. Good afternoon. I am going to call this hearing to order.

The subcommittee meets today to discuss support for military family programs, policies, and initiatives in review of the defense authorization request for fiscal year 2010 and the Future Years Defense Program.

More than 1.8 million family members of active duty servicemembers and 1.1 million dependents of Reserve component members make sacrifices each and every day, along with their servicemembers. These family members are an integral part of the force, and stress on the force affects the overall readiness of our Armed Forces.

Military families often face unique challenges and difficulties throughout their loved one's career, including frequent relocations and reassignments to bases across the country and overseas as well as the various demands stemming from continued deployment of members from every Service.

The life of a military family member has never been an easy one. But in our eighth year of war, families are facing even more hardships, and it is clear that they play a very significant role in serving our country. Deployments are an undeniable strain on families. While a servicemember is away, spouses are often forced into the role of a single parent, juggling employment, childcare, and household duties each and every day, all the while living with the pressure of having a family member deployed to a combat zone.

Deployed servicemembers must be completely focused in theater, and they will experience less stress in the field if they are assured their families are being well taken care of back home.

It is imperative that families remain as resilient as possible in order to provide a stable environment for loved ones when they return home from those deployments. Families are often the first line of defense against post-traumatic stress and suicide, but may be experiencing similar feelings themselves.

We must ensure that families and servicemembers have timely access to mental health resources and programs. We must make every dependent aware of the resources available to them to assist in everything from financial counseling to job placement to accessing quality healthcare and childcare.

Not only do we need to provide the resources, but we must also actively reach out to these families. Even when there are programs established, many times people are not able to reach out for themselves. In talking with spouses from my home State of Nebraska, I know how important it is to them that they have base and community support and they are contacted before, during, and after a servicemember's deployment. Just a phone call or a note to check in is meaningful, and we must encourage and support groups that take this sort of initiative.

In my mind, this outreach provides the kind of family support friends or a neighbor would offer. Oftentimes, these crucial support networks are missing for military families because they are stationed far away from family and friends.

Of course, deployments are not the only cause for stress for military families. Routine training exercise and deployments may take airmen and women away from their families for flight training and sailors away from their families to be aboard ship. Perhaps the biggest nondeployment issue facing military families is permanent changes of station.

Most servicemembers are moved from post to post every few years, and some may have to move even more often than that. Active duty families know to expect this, but that doesn't necessarily make the transition easier. Each time a family moves, they must once again arrange for childcare, assist their children in transition to a new school, and new healthcare providers, and searches for new jobs.

Additionally, we must not forget our single servicemembers. Their needs may be different, but their mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, and children still require support.

Thousands of military families have taken it upon themselves to confront these challenges by volunteering to provide critical assistance during deployments to servicemembers, their spouses, and children, as well as giving vital support to families relocating to a

new area. We are very lucky to have some of these volunteers with us here today.

And sadly, many families have made the ultimate sacrifice in the loss of a servicemember who proudly defended our Nation, and we must think of them as well.

We in Congress have tried to do our part to help and have made family support programs and initiatives a high priority. In recent bills, we have called for the establishment of a Department of Defense military family readiness council, education, training, and tuition assistance to help spouses maintain careers, respite care for parents caring for children on their own due to deployment, additional time off for family members to prepare for deployment, authorized increased levels of impact aid for military dependents' education, and established and supported the Nationwide expansion of the department's Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program, which is aimed at helping members and families of the Guard and Reserve.

And just this week, Senators Levin, McCain, Graham, and I introduced a Senate resolution, which passed unanimously yesterday encouraging the recognition of 2009 as the Year of the Military Family. It is my hope that this resolution increases awareness of the great sacrifices military families make and inspire Americans everywhere to express their appreciation, our appreciation.

But there is still more to do. We have always supported our military families, but they need our Nation's support now more than ever. I commend the department and each of the services for placing the support of our military families among their top budget priorities this year.

We look forward to hearing how each service in the department plan to sustain family readiness and improve support for these military family members who bravely serve this Nation alongside their servicemembers and what Congress can do to help.

Now I would like to welcome our ranking member, my good friend Senator Lindsey Graham. As always, we are delighted to have you here with us today to discuss these critical issues. And whether you have been the chair or I have been the chair, we have always been able to work together to make this committee a bipartisan committee. And it is my pleasure to turn it over to you for any opening statements you may want to make.

STATEMENT OF SENATOR LINDSEY GRAHAM

Senator GRAHAM. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

This is one of the joys of being in the Senate, serving on the subcommittee. We have got Senator Thune here and Senator Akaka, and this Personnel Subcommittee is one of the most bipartisan places in the Senate. And you have done a great job as chairman, and I have enjoyed working with you.

And from the family perspective, there is a military saying, "One team, one fight." Well, you are definitely part of the team, and you are definitely in this fight. The families are, in many ways, the unsung heroes of this war.

There are 40,000 active duty military personnel, 28,000 Reserve personnel, and their families in 7 military installations throughout South Carolina. I am sure that is true of Hawaii, South Dakota,

Nebraska. Our National Guard has been utilized unlike any time since World War II. Sixty percent of our active forces have been deployed, and 46 percent of our Reserves have deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan. That is a phenomenal number.

And as the soldiers, sailors, airmen, and Marines leave, family members go to the fight, but just in a different way. In some ways, harder because they know what is going on with them, you don't. And that creates its own kind of stress.

One of the things that I am proud of, working with Senator McCain and the chairman here, the GI bill of rights, for the first time, is more robust. But for the first time, a career member can transfer their benefits to their families. So there are going to be some family members, sons and daughters of active duty military members and reservists, that will be able to go to college on the military members GI bill of rights. I think that really helps families and leverages retired pay.

Our subcommittee has increased military pay 35 percent since 2000. I wish we could have done more, but I think that is a recognition that you mean a lot to us. Now you have TRICARE for Guard and Reserve families, a real advancement. We have improved survivor benefits, increased authorization for childcare, reintegration programs for the Guard and Reserve, the Wounded Warrior program. A DOD family readiness council has been created.

The President's budget, I appreciate what he has done. There is some good news in his budget that we have increased money available to families. And childcare and family counseling has doubled since 2001. Nearly 105,000 members of the Reserve and Guard and their families have healthcare coverage through TRICARE. The administration has increased family benefits at a time when we need it.

So I look forward to hearing from you about what we can do better, what we need to do more of, but if nothing else, just to say thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

[The prepared statement of Senator Graham follows:]

[SUBCOMMITTEE INSERT]

Senator BEN NELSON. Thank you, Senator Graham.

Senator Thune, do you have any opening comments you might like to make?

Senator THUNE. Well, only, Mr. Chairman, thank you for holding this hearing and thanks to our panelists, the spouses of our military leaders in this country, for being here today and for the sacrifices you all make every day.

There isn't any issue, as Senator Graham mentioned, that we deal with that is more important. And this is a—it is a team fight, and there have been a number of things that, hopefully, policies we have put in place that have improved just the way in which we deal with military families and the way that we value the contributions that they make.

But there is an old saying that the biggest room in the house is the room for improvement, and we are always looking for things that we can do better to better serve the men and women who wear the uniform and defend and protect us.

So there is—I can't tell you how much we appreciate the incredible sacrifices that our families make. So, thank you for being here today.

And Mr. Chairman, thank you for holding this, what is a very important hearing. Thanks.

Senator BEN NELSON. Thank you.

Senator Akaka, any opening remarks you might like to make?

[The prepared statement of Senator Thune follows:]

[SUBCOMMITTEE INSERT]

Senator AKAKA. Thank you so much, Mr. Chairman. And thank you for your leadership and your emphasis on families.

I would like to say aloha and welcome to our spouses that are here today on this panel. And along with your husbands, you are also military heroes, heroes for the selfless service that you provide and contribute to this great Nation.

The families, I think, have not been given the focus that you should have because you are the ones that really support those on the front line and help them in their readiness for whatever activity they are facing.

I would also like to offer my gratitude and thanks to the National Military Family Association. For over 40 years, they have remained committed to supporting and improving the lives of our military families. I am so glad you are here. I am glad to be here to ask you some questions, and I look forward to your testimony.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

[The prepared statement of Senator Akaka follows:]

[SUBCOMMITTEE INSERT]

Senator BEN NELSON. Thank you, Senator Akaka.

Without objection, all witness written testimony submitted for today's hearing will be included in the record.

Additionally, we have received statements from the Fleet Reserve Association; Mrs. Kristina Kaufman Turner, an Army wife and military advocate; Mrs. Stacy Bannerman, an Army National Guard Blue Star wife; and members of the group Military Families Speak Out. So, without objection, all of these statements will be included in the record of this hearing.

Now it is my pleasure to introduce our first panel. We have with us Mrs. Sheila L. Casey, wife of General George W. Casey, Chief of Staff of our United States Army. It is good to see you again, Mrs. Casey.

Mrs. Jennifer A. Mancini, wife of Chief Petty Officer Steven F. Mancini, United States Navy.

Mrs. Colleen K. Smith, wife of Colonel Andrew H. Smith, Commanding Officer, Marine Barracks, Washington, D.C., United States Marine Corp.

Mrs. Patricia Davis, wife of Chief Master Sergeant James E. Davis, the Command Master Chief Sergeant of the 316th Wing at Andrews Air Force Base.

And Mrs. Kathleen Moakler, Director of Government Relations for the National Military Family Association and an Army spouse and mother. And we are glad to have you back, Mrs. Moakler. Nice to see you again.

First, I want to express our gratitude to each of you and each of your spouses because, together, you have proudly served our coun-

try together, and I express my deep appreciation to all of you for taking the time to be here. We look forward to the hearing. There are many issues that are facing military families today, and we welcome your very frank assessments of the strengths and the weaknesses of the systems that are supporting the military families as well as, obviously, any recommendations that you might make to help us.

We will begin by hearing the opening statements. Following that, there will be some questions.

Mrs. Casey, again, thank you for being here, and we will be honored to have you start us off this afternoon.

STATEMENT OF SHEILA L. CASEY, WIFE OF GENERAL GEORGE W. CASEY, JR., USA, CHIEF OF STAFF, UNITED STATES ARMY

Ms. Casey: Mr. Chairman, Senator Graham, and distinguished members of this committee, thank you for the opportunity to share with you my perspectives and my personal experience as an Army spouse for almost four decades. I am also the mother of a soldier and a long-time Army volunteer.

I began my Army experience when I married George 39 years ago, and like all other Army spouses, I have experienced the ups and downs of military life. I have moved quite a bit—23 times, in fact—and I have seen my husband deploy overseas several times, once for 32 months to Iraq. And all the while I have balanced raising two sons and also having a career of my own.

Over the last 2 years, I have had the opportunity and privilege of traveling with George all over the United States Army and meeting with family members, soldiers, wounded warriors, parents, surviving spouses, and their families and children.

I am amazed at what military families and spouses are doing on a daily basis. Their self-sacrifice and their dedication are awe-inspiring. But I will tell you that in talking with them, I have grown increasingly concerned. Army families are stretched, and they are stressed. And I have often referred to them as the most brittle part of the force.

And what I am starting to see as I go around speaking with them are families that are so stressed that everything is becoming an issue. Things that never seemed to be an issue before are now becoming a big deal.

I am also seeing signs of a force under immense strain, and this concerns me greatly. These signs, these indicators include cases of domestic violence, child neglect, as well as increases in suicides, alcohol abuse, and cases of post-traumatic stress.

We also seeing slight upticks in our divorce rates, and I say slight because what I hear from people is they don't have time to get divorced.

I am also concerned about the family unit, specifically keeping them together. And I am worried especially about our young, newly married Army families. Because with repeated deployments bearing down on them, these young families don't have enough time together to build strong bonds. So they are particularly vulnerable to being stressed by the war.

And actually, what really keeps me awake at night are our children. The cumulative effects of repeated deployments by their par-

ents, coupled with the stress of daily life in a military family, is having an effect on them. And that worries me.

I was up at Fort Drum, and I will never forget this young woman who stood, and through her sobs, she talked about her fears that her two small children would not know their father, who spent so much time deployed. And she was particularly concerned about the inability for them to attach to him emotionally with his military service that keeps him in and out of their lives. And quite frankly, the only thing I could do was hold her as she cried.

It is important to recognize that what families are dealing with are the cumulative effects of nearly 8 years of war. Because it is cumulative, the negative effects are not easily reversed. And my concern is that we are going to see these things appear again later, when families have the time to really reintegrate.

My sense is that more service and support will be needed as dwell time increases. So we need to be ready for it because if we don't stay ahead and in front of these indicators, we won't be able to react fast enough.

I would also like to share with you the three things that I hear from Army families everywhere I go. The first is the lack of access to quality medical care and mental healthcare. The lack of the ability to get appointments, concerns from providers who because of the cost-prohibitive reimbursement rates are not taking TRICARE patients.

There is a lack of mental healthcare professionals in on-post facilities, but also in the outlying communities. Many have to drive distances to find care, and waiting periods for appointments are long.

Second, there is a widespread concern about the access to quality education for our children and our spouses. Initiatives like the Interstate Compact, which is signed by many of the States that you represent here, and the post 9/11 GI bill are helping improve access to education. But there are still concerns out there about many of the school districts that Army families live in and the problems faced by our high school students as they transfer from school to school.

And thirdly is the issue of spouse employment. Some Army spouses are having difficulty finding jobs. Some others find it a challenge to transfer their jobs as they move from post to post. Those in professions requiring licensing are faced with certification tests and fees each time they move. It is an added stressor on the family unit.

Mr. Chairman, the Army has certainly come a long way over the years in the level and quality of family support. Over the last four decades, I have seen family support evolve from a sort of informal alliance of spouses helping other spouses to a fully regulated support network made up of family readiness groups, family readiness support assistance, and soldier and family assistance centers.

When George and I came into the Army, childcare centers were nurseries. Now we have state-of-the-art childcare centers. Army community services in the 1970s was nothing more than a lending closet, and now it is a full-service organization that deals with family advocacy issues, financial readiness support, pre- and post de-

ployment programs, as well as myriad educational programs that help families acclimate to Army life.

And I have witnessed a culture change with regard to spouses working outside of the home. While I have managed to maintain my career during most of George's time in the Army, it has not always been easy. In the early days, spouses were highly discouraged from working outside of the home.

Mr. Chairman, when George was a youngster and moving from post to post with his brothers and sisters, and they would throw the five of them in the back of the station wagon and move to another post, and they would be complaining about not wanting to leave where they have been. And his mother would say to them, "Make the best of it." Well, today, Army families are sacrificing too much. We can no longer ask them to just make the best of it.

The continued commitment to this all-volunteer force is just too important to our Nation to leave it to that. It is important that we continue our investment in our military families.

So, Mr. Chairman, members of the committee, thank you very much, and thank you for your continued support to the Army and especially to our Army families.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Casey follows:]

[SUBCOMMITTEE INSERT]

Senator BEN NELSON. Thank you, Mrs. Casey.

Mrs. Mancini?

STATEMENT OF JENNIFER A. MANCINI, WIFE OF CHIEF PETTY OFFICER STEVEN F. MANCINI, USN, UNITED STATES NAVY

Ms. Mancini: Chairman Nelson, Senator Graham, and members of the committee, thank you for this great honor and opportunity to talk about Navy family issues close to my heart.

My name is Jennifer Mancini. I have stood by my husband for 17 years with three children, proudly watching him rise through the ranks, becoming a chief petty officer, supporting him as he pulled away from the pier time and time on amphibious ships and an aircraft carrier, presenting him his newborn babies at his homecomings and seeing the pride beam across his face, praying for his safe return from his deployment where he patrolled the waterways in Iraq.

It has been my privilege to serve as an ombudsman for 7 years with fleet Navy commands and 3 years with expeditionary commands. Currently, I serve as force ombudsman for 32,000 naval expeditionary combat sailors and their families.

Navy expeditionary warriors stand shoulder-to-shoulder with Army, Marines, and National Guard serving in Iraq and Afghanistan at the tip of the spear. We face enduring stressful operations, fatigue, lack of decompression, and hyper vigilance. Some sailors return home with physical wounds. Some sailors return home with invisible wounds. And some don't return at all.

Our commands deserve funding for combat-focused family readiness programs, including paid positions for our burned-out ombudsmen, for embedded mental health professionals, and for Navy fleet and family programs designed specifically to address multiple deployments. This funding will maintain and enhance an already extraordinary force.

Families tell me they are frustrated and concerned with budget cutbacks. They wonder if their sailor will receive adequate training and supplies required to support the mission. Ombudsmen serve 10 to 20 hours a week, not a month, and sometimes more. We are tired and need relief and funding for paid positions. These concerns directly impact whether a spouse will encourage his or her sailor to reenlist.

As the first ombudsman for Riverine Squadron One, I experienced an incredible lack of training and support from fleet Navy, due to their lack of understanding for brown water sailors and expeditionary capabilities. Our families were shocked to see battle gear coming home to their living rooms. The unknown was daunting because our sailors were not on ships, did not have the same OPTEMPO, and our deployments were on land.

Spouses of explosive ordnance disposal, EOD sailors also experience unique stress. A group of EOD ombudsmen and I recently created the EOD mobile dive and salvage unit "battle book" to specifically address how to support and empower EOD families. This is a living document that will be passed forward with lessons learned from ombudsman to ombudsman.

In closing, I offer this quote from one of our spouses. After the loss of several of her husband's friends, he called her from Iraq stating, "I am alone and unafraid." After the call, she thought, "I am alone and very afraid." This emphasizes what my testimony is about and why I am here.

Thank you for this incredible opportunity to speak with you about my Navy career and subjects close to my heart. I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Mancini follows:]

[SUBCOMMITTEE INSERT]

Senator BEN NELSON. Thank you, Mrs. Mancini. Thank you very much.

Mrs. Smith?

STATEMENT OF COLLEEN K. SMITH, WIFE OF COLONEL ANDREW H. SMITH, USMC, COMMANDING OFFICER, MARINE BARRACKS, WASHINGTON, D.C., UNITED STATES MARINE CORP

Ms. Smith: Chairman Nelson, Senator Graham, and distinguished members of the subcommittee, it is my pleasure to appear before you today to discuss issues that are near and dear to me, the families of our brave men and women in uniform.

By way of introduction, I am Colleen Smith, wife of Colonel Andrew Smith, United States Marine Corps.

Today, I would like to talk to you about several issues that are important to me—one, maintaining a healthy family life for our spouses and our children while our Marines are deployed; two, access to quality medical care; and three, the vital importance of on-base housing.

Drew and I have been married for 14 years. In that time he has deployed numerous times, and I have lived in 10 different homes. Our four children, ranging from ages 13 to 7, have all attended multiple schools. Our oldest, Victoria, who is in seventh grade, has already attended five different schools.

At one point, Drew missed three Christmases in four years and all of our birthdays and anniversaries in that time period. Through these experiences, I feel confident that I can speak with you today about the needs of our Marine Corps families.

The frequent overseas deployments that we have all experienced since 2001 seem to have become routine. What is not routine, however, are the challenges faced by the spouse and children who remain behind. As I mentioned, Drew spent considerable time deployed in recent years, as well as 3 years on recruiting. This has had a huge impact on our children.

However, answering questions like, "What will we do if something happens to dad?" will never become routine. Nor is it routine to watch your children cry and fight not to let go of their father as he prepares to deploy. While I have been through this multiple times, I am not a professional child psychologist. I am just trying to be the best mom I can be.

Access to professional counselors through the DOD healthcare system is a necessity for our children and our spouses. Dealing with the emotional toll of this ongoing conflict is essential if we are going to maintain healthy families.

It is important to note that it is not just our children that need this kind of quality counseling. I wrote a note of condolence to a friend whose husband was killed by a suicide IED. The sudden loss of her husband left her with the reality that is often thought about, but rarely discussed, "the death of my spouse."

In this case, my friend was left with her four children, the same ages as mine. It is difficult to think that, at one point, it could have just as easily been my husband. Despite my sadness for her loss, I still needed to maintain my composure for my children.

This scenario highlights the need for greater access to counseling services for spouses as well. We all know how nice it is to hear "it is going to be all right" at the end of a long day. However, we often don't have someone there to tell us that. Only if we are in a healthy state of mind ourselves can we ensure a healthy, normal outlook for our children.

Additionally, this kind of counseling needs to be available for the spouses and children of our wounded Marines as well as the ones we have lost. We have done a great job as a Nation in reaching out to our servicemembers to increase awareness of PTSD, depression, or other conditions. Now is the time to expand this benefit to our family members as well.

We need to establish a program making counseling available outside of base hospitals. We envision qualified personnel on our base or duty station who you could call and simply say, "My son is having nightmares since his dad is deployed," and they would see him without having to go through multiple layers of medical referrals.

To that end, childcare is a significant issue for the mental health of the parent who remains behind. More childcare should be available and at low or no cost to our families. A respite care type program for spouses whose Marine is deployed and has no one around to help would be a tremendous benefit.

As an example, free childcare at base gyms and fitness centers with the idea that exercise can improve attitude, increases well-being, and offers socialization. Many spouses would like to partici-

pate in fitness classes or other activities, but do not due to the lack of availability, cost, and limitations associated with childcare.

Hand in hand with access to quality counseling for our children and spouses is the ever-pressing need for quality healthcare. While we appreciate the urgent needs of our deployed forces, we, too, have pressing healthcare needs at home.

As you can imagine, with four children, I have made my fair share of doctors' visits. As those of you with children understand, it isn't always for a single problem. Yet I have seen signs in providers' offices that state "15 minutes per appointment" or "only one issue will be discussed per appointment."

It is unacceptable to think that a mother would have to bring her child back to a second appointment should they have a sore knee and a fever on the same day. It is unacceptable that mothers are resorting to emergency room appointments for simple matters such as strep throat or an ear infection due to limited availability of the same-day appointments.

The system needs to be more in-tune with the competing demands on the time of the spouses who are forced to be single parents while their loved one is deployed.

Lastly, I would like to touch on the importance of on-base housing. Ample and quality housing must be available for Marines of all ranks. While it is understood that the military bases will not have the housing capacity to support all personnel assigned, having the opportunity to live aboard base is important and for my family has been the desired option.

On-base housing affords a degree of security, comfort, and stability that cannot be replicated in the civilian market. Simply stated, the community of military families cannot be underestimated. Regardless of whether one is a junior enlisted Marine or a field grade officer, I believe servicemembers and their families are better able to handle the rigor of military life because of the shared bond and network of support.

Allow me to emphasize one point. The support a spouse receives from other spouses is, in a word, invaluable. Whether it is a hug when you know your friend's husband is in a hotspot and Marines are being wounded or killed, or sitting in the emergency room with them when their children are sick or injured, or watching their children while they are attending to other spouses and family members within their unit. This shared bond and support network is the foundation upon which military spouses build and sustain their service.

The spirit of mutual support, of shared burden, of affection and commitment for a fellow spouse is something that is woven throughout each day, each separation, each social gathering, each hardship, and each triumph. Living in base housing gives us a sense of normalcy, a place where our children grow up around other children going through similar difficulties with multiple deployments, injuries to their friends' fathers, and the like. It is a trusted community where we have access to childcare centers, schools, libraries, and playgrounds in an enclosed neighborhood.

In closing, I would like to reiterate that these are just three examples of areas where we can work to improve the health of our Marine Corps families. In the past 14 years, I have seen significant

improvements in many of these areas, such as improved base housing, the establishment of the Professional Family Readiness Officer Program in every Marine Corps unit, and the ever-increasing awareness of the toll frequent deployments have on our families.

However, I firmly believe more can be done, and I ask for your kind consideration to the thoughts I have presented before you today.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Smith follows:]

[SUBCOMMITTEE INSERT]

Senator BEN NELSON. Thank you.

Mrs. Davis?

STATEMENT OF PATRICIA DAVIS, WIFE OF CHIEF MASTER SERGEANT JAMES E. DAVIS, USAF, COMMAND MASTER CHIEF SERGEANT, 316TH WING, ANDREWS AIR FORCE BASE, UNITED STATES AIR FORCE

Ms. Davis: Yes. Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Graham, members of the committee, thank you for this opportunity to come before you on behalf of Air Force spouses whose loved ones faithfully and unselfishly serve our Nation.

My name is Patricia Davis. I am the spouse of an active duty member, a mother of two young boys, and a retired Air Force veteran of 22 years' service. As such, I am in a unique position of having experienced both sides of the military family dynamic.

I recognize the strides that have been made to support the military family. However, I find that there are many spouses who seem unaware of what support programs are available during their spouse's deployment and where to turn when in need of such assistance.

Direct communication with civilian spouses prior to deployment is necessary. Currently, family members' attendance at pre-deployment briefings is optional, and in most cases, spouses do not attend. I believe if spouses are put in touch with those who provide firsthand support to them before the member departs, they are less likely to feel isolated and more inclined to seek support and counseling during the deployment when it is needed.

I know support for the military working spouse can be challenging. Obtaining reliable and affordable childcare for children under 5 years of age is an obstacle for many. Junior enlisted spouses are more likely than any other group to be unable to work due to this reason. Many spouses who do work cannot utilize family support services because they are offered during the hours that they work. Flexibility in these support programs is key.

According to the January 2009 Quadrennial Quality of Life Review, 59 percent of military spouses are employed or are seeking employment. Finding employment after a military move is very difficult. Many times military spouses are denied employment benefits because they voluntarily left their previous job due to military orders.

There is no standard or State policy, so ability to receive unemployment benefits vary depending on the State. I believe a military spouse's clause should be added to each State's unemployment guidelines to ensure military spouses who leave their job because

of military orders should be allowed to receive unemployment benefits they are entitled to. So many military families rely on two incomes, and in a time of transition, such as permanent change of station moves, withholding monetary benefits isn't the best way to serve our military families.

As a mother, I am deeply concerned about the quality of education my children receive. Military moves are especially stressful times for the family, and moving to new schools can be very difficult for our children.

This past school year, my children were in the third and fifth grade. This is the third school they have attended since beginning their academic careers. Increasingly, I see military families paying to send their children to private schools due to the lack of quality education in the area they are assigned to, or they are deciding to home school instead.

To have our children in one area with quality blue ribbon schools and then be reassigned to a location where the schools are rated below average is distressing to families. Our kids' education should not have to suffer because of military obligations. The creation of a school voucher program should be considered.

Also, a school liaison office should be available at every Air Force installation if not already available. The school liaison office is an advocate—would be an advocate for military children and a bridge between the military family and local schools.

I applaud the Air Force for its commitment to finding new ways to support our military families. There are so many programs that are working and working well. The military family is truly the backbone of the Air Force. And I am proud to say I served 22 years in the Air Force, and I am just as proud to say that I know the Air Force is committed to creating and sustaining healthy, well adjusted, and successful families. Go, Air Force.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Davis follows:]

[SUBCOMMITTEE INSERT]

Senator BEN NELSON. Thank you, Ms. Davis.

Ms. Moakler, it is good to have you back. Appreciate your being here.

STATEMENT OF KATHLEEN B. MOAKLER, DIRECTOR, GOVERNMENT RELATIONS, NATIONAL MILITARY FAMILY ASSOCIATION

Ms. Moakler: Thank you, Senator Nelson.

Good afternoon, Chairman Nelson, Senator Graham, and other distinguished members of the subcommittee.

I would like to take this time to thank you for introducing and supporting the resolution that makes 2009 the Year of the Military Family. We really, really appreciate that.

Senator Akaka, thank you for your kind words on the 40th birthday of the National Military Family Association.

Today, I will talk with you about military families, our Nation's families. These families serve and sacrifice alongside their servicemembers. Some families are experiencing third or fourth deployments. Children are growing up with a parent who has been

in and out of their lives to Iraq, Afghanistan, and numerous training locations for months at a time.

They may spend time in the local child development center or youth program. They may have had a chance to talk to a military OneSource counselor if they are having trouble dealing with deployment. They could even have attended one of our Operation Purple camps. We need to know how our military children are handling deployment and what lies ahead for them.

Our seasoned military spouses have been there, done that. They think they know the drill, but each deployment is different—a new baby, a difficult adolescent, a sick parent. Maybe they find they are just not as resilient as before. Our spouses need to know about different resources or programs with each deployment.

While once they could juggle it all, they now realize that talking to a counselor may help. Will they be able to find that counselor when they need one?

Some families are new to the military. Fresh from basic training, they need to find out about resources and programs that are available to them in language they understand, be it Spanish or Twitter. Financial training programs can teach them why shopping at the commissary can make their paychecks go further, and payday lenders can stop their career in its tracks.

Spouse career advancement programs can provide training and skills to help a new spouse find a portable career. Engage these young families, and they will become active members of our military community.

Some families support deployed members of the Guard and Reserve. They depend on the support services that you have provided and they have come to expect through their States and regions. The joint family assistance centers, subsidized childcare during deployments, access to TRICARE providers and mental health counselors when they are far from the flagpole. Greater access for families to the Yellow Ribbon program could help them learn how to bring their servicemember all the way home from the horrors of war and become a whole family again.

Some families have had to change their plans. When their servicemember is severely wounded, ill, or injured, many of them have to quit their jobs to journey to the side of their loved one to become part of the care team. How can we support these caregivers so they can support their servicemember? How do we help these families transition to a life that wasn't in their plans?

Some families lose a family member forever. How do we help them with their grief? What else can we do to help ensure their financial well-being for the long term?

Some families have children affected by disabilities. How can we best support them? How can we help them transition as they move from installation to installation, from active duty to retirement?

Our association recognizes and appreciates the many resources and programs that support our military families during this time of war. The need will not go away the day the war ends. We believe that it is imperative that these programs be included in the regular budget process.

We hope the military family readiness council mandated by this body 2 years ago will help identify best practices and programs and

help eliminate overlapping or redundant programs. In our written statement, we have identified other ways to assist military families, and I will be glad to expand on those suggestions should you have questions.

Military families, one size does not fit all, but they are united in their sacrifices and support of their servicemembers and our Nation. We ask you to help the Nation sustain and support them.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Moakler follows:]

Senator BEN NELSON. Thank you, Ms. Moakler.

We will do a 5-minute round, and Ranking Member Graham has another engagement in a little bit. So we will ask him to go first.

Senator GRAHAM. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate that courtesy.

Starting with Ms. Casey and going across the panel, give a grade to TRICARE from an A to an F.

Ms. Casey: Boy, that is a tough one. I would say C minus.

Senator GRAHAM. Ma'am?

Ms. Mancini: From my personal experience, a B.

Ms. Smith: I would have to agree with Mrs. Casey—C, C minus.

Ms. Davis: I would have to say B.

Ms. Moakler: I have a two-parter. Quality of care, B. Access to care, C minus.

Senator GRAHAM. That is great. Everybody kind of agree with that? Okay.

Well, we are trying. We are trying to get more providers. But the cost of military healthcare in the budget is exploding like it is throughout the private sector, and we are just going to have to get our hands around this and find a system that can provide better quality and have more providers. And that is tough because of the reimbursements. And we will just keep doing the best we can.

The voucher idea, that is the first I have heard of that, actually. Ms. Davis, that was the vouchers, you know, when you move from one school. Starting with Mrs. Casey, do you agree that would be a good idea?

Ms. Casey: Yes, actually, I hear that a lot when I go because people are concerned about the quality of the schools, where they are necessarily bused off base to outlying schools, what ones they end up in. And I have been asked that question also, if we couldn't have vouchers where then you would have a choice.

Senator GRAHAM. Ms. Mancini?

Ms. Mancini: Yes. I agree completely. I think that would be a great idea to be able to allow these families to go to an adequate school for their children.

Senator GRAHAM. Ms. Smith?

Ms. Smith: I agree. Our children, we live here on Capitol Hill, and our four children go to a private school.

Senator GRAHAM. On the mental health side, we got the message. It is just a capacity problem. We are trying. There are just not that many people available. It is a problem. The ones in the mental health professions in the military are being worn out. They deploy, too.

And so, we are going to try to come up with a new program to home grow some mental health professionals, to get some people

who are in the military to make a career change. So we got the message. It is just a capacity problem, and it is just hard to fill these slots.

So I want you to know that the committee is working on that. The Wounded Warrior program, we have learned, that is a big problem, providing mental health services, and now to the families themselves.

Ms. Casey, you mentioned something about spouses who are licensed professionals or whatever licensing you may have to work. Is there any reciprocity program that you know that DOD has if you move from one State to the other because you are a DOD family member you can get reciprocity?

Ms. Casey: No. But I do know that the Department of Labor has a pilot program going right now where up to \$3,000 can be covered. We found we have that with lawyers, with some teachers, with some—

Senator GRAHAM. Nurses.

Ms. Casey:—medical personnel that when they move, and some of them, they have to take tests.

Senator GRAHAM. Mr. Chairman, that is something maybe the committee could look at. It would make it easier for spouses who move to get jobs not to have to go through the qualifications as long as they are overall qualified.

Thank you for your service. We got the message. On-base housing, we are looking at privatizing housing because of money. I do understand the value of on-base housing. You have got Guard and Reserve members who are far away from a military base, and trying to get them services is its own unique challenge.

So thank you very much. It has been very helpful, very educational, and the committee will, from your testimony, I think, look at some new idea that would not have come about if you hadn't been here.

Thanks.

Senator BEN NELSON. Thank you, Mr. Graham.

There was a recent op-ed piece in the Washington Post where the wife of an Army officer wrote that, "Too many military families are quietly coming apart at the seams." And that seems to be consistent with what you all are saying today, that the stress that your families are feeling is, in fact, adversely affecting the families.

And no matter what we try to do, it is not enough and you need more support, particularly in the area of mental healthcare providers, both for the military members as well as for the family members. As Senator Graham indicated, trying to get those skilled, trained individuals is a challenge for us, and we are working at it.

Do you think that, overall, the military is listening? And when you have the support groups come and talk to you, do you have a feeling that you are being listened to? I know you hopefully you feel like you are being listened to here, but do you feel like you are being listened to internally within the military?

Ms. Casey, you have got a direct line to the chief. So—

Ms. Casey: Yes, part of the problem is they are talking to me. So I have to tell you that when I meet with these families, they are very candid. They are—they tell you exactly what is on their

mind and exactly what they need. And quite frankly, we are pedaling as fast as we can.

Some of these things can be dealt with more quickly than others. We are very grateful for the amount of money that has been given to us for family programs. Now we just need to make sure it is all out of the supplemental and into the base budget so we can continue with these programs.

But some of them take time, and they not only take time, but some of the things we are doing now have to be evaluated and make sure that they are hitting the right people they are supposed to be hitting. So there is a lot of work to be done.

Senator BEN NELSON. Do the rest of you feel that your concerns are being listened to and hopefully responded to, even maybe inadequately, but you feel that they are being responded to?

Ms. Smith: I feel that with the establishment of the Professional Family Readiness Officer Program at each base has helped tremendously.

Senator BEN NELSON. Do others feel the same way?

Ms. Davis: I think there should—or it is definitely helping, but I think there is more need for more family-type counseling, not just for the military member because as we are seeing the suicide rates rise, and it is not always so much what happened in the area of deployment. It is when you come home and have the stresses that the family went through while you were gone and then the added stress the wife is adding that she has been stressed.

So I think there should be definitely family counseling, and I think the availability of that and, to take the stigma out of the word “counseling” because we all know—military personnel family know that sometimes if a military member is in counseling, that can affect job opportunities and continual stigmas that go along with that.

But I definitely think counseling, but it should be more along the lines of family, especially including the children, because our children are the ones that we are really missing sometimes with this counseling.

Senator BEN NELSON. Well, there is no question about that. It sort of leads me to the next question where families are often the first line of defense to recognize or deal with potential suicide or post-traumatic stress syndrome. Do you get any help to be able to detect that condition with reuniting with your servicemember, your family member when he comes home?

Ms. Smith: I know the Marine Corps, under homecoming brief, will give you information on signs and warnings.

Ms. Davis: Absolutely. There is reintegration briefings. Again, but my concern is that the spouses aren't always attending those.

Senator BEN NELSON. Well, on the other side as well. I understand both sides.

Ms. Davis: Yes. Yes. And I think the spouses that I am seeing, our family support centers are doing a wonderful job of having programs available and spouses, letting them know what to expect when the member comes back. We all go through the honeymoon period, and then life sets in.

So, yes, I think that there is support there for them.

Senator BEN NELSON. Good. That is critically important. I am glad that you are getting some help in that area.

In your experience about military dependents, you said that you thought the quality of care was a B, access was, am I right, a C and a C minus. Is that true for you individually as the spouse, or does that apply to your children, your family members? Or is there any difference between the quality of care that you might get and your family might get?

Ms. Casey: I don't see a difference in that. I mean, we have always said that once you get past the gatekeeper and you can get into the system, the quality of care is wonderful. It is getting in there that is the issue.

Senator BEN NELSON. Is the access a problem for the spouse as well as the children or more so for the children or the spouse?

Ms. Casey: It is worse—at least in the Army, it is worse for the family members than it is for the active duty personnel because we also have doctors who are deployed. So you don't have full staffs necessarily at hospitals. I mean, they are doing the best they can. So people are being forced to go outside.

I mean, some of the major hospitals can't even—don't have the personnel to even see family members.

Ms. Moakler: Senator Nelson?

Senator BEN NELSON. Yes.

Ms. Moakler: We find that sometimes the military treatment facilities are rationing care because it is more expensive for them to send families out into the network. So that is what we hear from families, that it is harder for them to sometimes get appointments. They would call and say there wouldn't be another appointment available until 2 weeks from now, but they never offer the family member the choice of going to one of the network providers where they could get an appointment sooner.

Senator BEN NELSON. I see.

Ms. Moakler: So there is an education piece to our families. It shouldn't be, but they need to know to ask the right questions about what the access standards are.

Senator BEN NELSON. Understand.

Senator Chambliss?

Senator CHAMBLISS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And let me say to all of you, first of all, how much we appreciate your service. We understand that a commitment to the military is a family commitment, and without great support from spouses as well as children, our men and women would not be able to do the great job they do. So we just tell you thank you for what you do.

I have had the privilege of meeting with spouses at our installations both within Georgia as well as overseas on a number of occasions. And it is kind of interesting to occasionally have a male show up at a spouses meeting, but it is important that we don't forget that there are a lot of females out there in service, too.

Ms. Davis, you obviously have been there. Your idea about a voucher program I think is unique. There is no reason, Ms. Smith, you ought to be required to fund private school for your children because schools in

Washington, D.C., are inadequate. And yet I think it is pretty generally known that that is the case, and I think, Mr. Chairman,

we might ought to look at some sort of pilot program for the military.

And perhaps Washington, D.C., where we have some experience already with a voucher program, and we have a school system that has actually promoted that, that might be a good place to start.

But before we really move on to new programs, we always like to make sure that things that we have done are working and that we are seeing some real progress in certain areas. That is why I appreciate Senator Graham's comment about TRICARE, and your responses are pretty interesting.

And I will have to say that seems to be an improvement over what I have heard in years past. So I hope that is the case.

Let me ask you about another program that is kind of different from different States. But we have got 13 installations in my State, and we have a program that provides reciprocity with other States regarding high school graduates and whether or not they have to take the Georgia history exam, which has been a problem. But I think we are working through that.

The other thing that we have done is we grant exemption from out-of-State tuition to all graduates, military children who graduate from State high schools. Can you all tell me how that is working across the country?

Ms. Casey, you first.

Ms. Casey: I am not sure how many States have actually signed on to that. But one of the things that has occurred over time is the fact that if you, like my husband, had been in four different high schools, you would have needed four different State history classes. And a lot of States have gotten away from doing that. And if you have had it in one, you don't have to do it.

MCEC, the Military Child Education Coalition, has done great work with that as well, helping children transfer and transfer credits. We are finding great success with the in-State tuition with colleges for spouses and for family members. In some States, that if the servicemember leaves that State and you are in the middle of college in that State, sometimes then all of a sudden you become an out-of-State resident. Not all States have done that, but I think a good number of them have.

Kathy, do you have the stats on that?

Ms. Moakler: With recent legislation within the past 2 years, it required State universities that accepted Federal funds to provide in-State tuition for military servicemembers and their family members. So that has taken care of the problem at State institutions for our military families.

The Interstate Compact, which addresses transitioning needs of our children, such as the need to take State history in each high school that they attend, availability of spaces on the yearbook staff or on sports teams, or availability for special classes, beginning age for kindergarten enrollment or first grade enrollment, all of these things are being addressed in the Interstate Compact.

It has been—last year, it was approved by 10 States. Now we are up to about 20 States or so. There will be a commission that will be looking at reciprocities between the States on how they can handle these things, and the States that have already joined the compact will be able to take part in how those things are agreed upon.

Senator CHAMBLISS. If there is something with respect to those Interstate Compacts that you think we need to deal with legislatively, I wish you would give us some recommendations there.

Ms. Moakler: It is up to the—

Senator CHAMBLISS. Because I know it is a problem in my State.

Ms. Moakler: It is up to the States right now, and we are working—the Department of Defense has a State liaison office that is working with all the different States as the legislation comes up before their State legislatures. And we have been working with them, and other agencies have been testifying before the State legislatures when these come up.

Senator CHAMBLISS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator BEN NELSON. Senator Chambliss, one thought occurred to me. We always want to be careful about a lot of preemption coming from Washington on State laws. But what about a sense of the Senate resolution urging the States to take this up, and maybe that will be more than a subtle nudge to the States to consider this within their own State borders and their own State schools.

Would that be helpful?

Ms. Moakler: That would be very helpful.

Senator BEN NELSON. Well, let us consider that.

Senator CHAMBLISS. Sign me up.

Senator BEN NELSON. Okay. Thank you.

Senator Akaka?

Senator AKAKA. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

I look upon all of you on this panel as a tremendous source of strength of our military leaders, and I want to thank you very much for what you have done for military families over the years. I am sure each of you bring different experiences, but they are all built upon the foundation of caring for our military families.

As military spouses and advocates in the military community, I would like to ask each of you the following question. In your opinion, what is the number-one issue or area of concern for our military families? Ms. Casey?

Ms. Casey: Boy, I think I have to stick with medical, both medical care and mental healthcare. As our families are quietly or not so quietly coming apart at the seams, it is really the mental healthcare piece is very, very important right now.

And I think it is probably so important, too, because we realize, the services realize that there is a lack of mental healthcare professionals in the United States, not just within the military, which makes this job that much harder to find that. But I would probably say that I hear that everywhere.

Senator AKAKA. Ms. Mancini?

Ms. Mancini: In my experience, it would have to be OPTEMPO, along with the mental health. Several of our sailors come home, and they go straight to training. The downtime is very minimal. They don't have enough time to even reconnect, reintegrate with their family, much less take off their boots. They are going again.

And so, mental health would definitely benefit us. It would benefit our families, our spouses, and to take that stigma off of it. Maybe it could be offered continually pre, post, during. Take the stigma away and have everyone go see a mental healthcare pro-

vider so that you can't pinpoint someone that is doing that and then there be repercussion from that.

Senator AKAKA. Thank you.

Ms. Smith?

Ms. Smith: I agree. I think the operational tempo right now is so high. I know in my personal situation, we were—my husband had come home. That day, we were excited, his homecoming, and found out that same day he was turning around and leaving again in just a few short months.

So I think that between the operational tempo, and our families are tired. And I think that counseling would help tremendously.

Senator AKAKA. Ms. Davis?

Ms. Davis: Yes, I agree. OPTEMPO definitely is the number-one area of concern, and a big one from what I am seeing—again, I have younger children as well—is education. Education is huge because, again, like Ms. Smith, I have been funding education for our two children as well. And whereas, if I go to another base, I may not need to because we came from locations where there were blue ribbon schools. We are in a location now where the schools are not really rated very high.

So we are up and down with funding, and of course, that affects families' incomes. If you are funding school for your children in one location, in another location you are not. So OPTEMPO, by far, is the number one, but I think education is creeping up there because of the amount of PCS moves, or permanent change of station moves as well.

Senator AKAKA. Yes, Ms. Moakler?

Ms. Moakler: I think that something that touches on everything that the spouses said at this panel, sustained funding and support for our programs and resources that are out there. So we can keep supporting our families.

Senator AKAKA. Ms. Moakler, many military families in Hawaii have benefited from the ongoing privatized housing efforts at our installations. I believe military housing directly impacts the quality of life of our military families. Therefore, we must closely monitor the implementation and operation of privatized housing.

What is your assessment, Ms. Moakler, of the overall impact of privatized housing on the quality of life for our military families?

Ms. Moakler: Well, as someone who in 28 years of my husband's service in the Army lived in quarters, as we say, for 24 of those years, I understand how important housing on the installation is to our military families, to their morale and to their spirit.

We hear from families in our association how pleased they are with the privatized housing, where there is the availability of more new housing, where existing housing has been rehabbed to bring it up from a 1950s-style house to something in the 21st century, with new appliances, outlets where you can plug in your computers and your TVs without having to worry if everything is going to blow up.

So there have been great, great strides. That said, there are some installations where we are not moving quite as quickly as we might in bringing all the housing up to that standard. And we would also like to see a greater involvement of the installation com-

mander with the privatized housing contractor when military families can't get problems resolved with the contractor.

Senator AKAKA. And before my time expires, I would like to ask this question, Ms. Moakler. I am a strong advocate for financial literacy. I sponsor annual legislation designating April as financial literary month to highlight the need for increased financial literacy.

Financial education helps our military families be better able to make informed financial decisions and deal more effectively with difficult financial situations. The DOD has several programs in place to support financial readiness. How would you assess the success of the DOD's financial readiness efforts?

Ms. Moakler: I think that the many prongs that they have been following to help military families, both with supporting the elimination of payday lenders, which was huge and, more importantly, making more opportunities for military families to learn how to be better financial managers through the availability, through the support centers of financial counselors. The financial counselors can also be made available through the defense credit unions and military banks and the Military Saves program.

It all encourages families to be more aware of their financial responsibilities, and this is directly tied to readiness because when a family feels more financially secure, then the servicemember can go off and serve in a combat area without worry.

Senator AKAKA. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. My time has expired.

Senator BEN NELSON. Thank you, Senator Akaka.

Senator Burris?

Senator BURRIS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And I would like to also add my comments to these distinguished family members whose spouses and Ms. Davis have served our country so valiantly and so gallantly. And I think Admiral Mullen had it very right when, as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, he said, "Our future is guaranteed from a national standpoint if we take care of our people."

I agree with the Admiral. I can think of no more important issue facing the service than taking care of our families. And with that in mind, Ms. Casey, I just heard you say that if you take your children to the doctor—or was it Mrs. Mancini, that you can only get one appointment?

Oh, it was Ms. Smith. You said it. So if your child has some other type of illness, the doctor is going to see one illness? I mean, why is that?

Ms. Smith: Because they say there is not enough time to discuss more than one issue at a time.

Senator BURRIS. Is there a specific base or city that this is taking place?

Ms. Smith: You see the signs up in hospitals—or doctors' offices throughout the military.

Senator BURRIS. Yes?

Ms. Mancini: For the Navy, in Norfolk, when you call, they tell you that. "What is your symptom?"

Senator BURRIS. If you have a sick child, you probably don't even know what the symptom is. I mean, I have two grandchildren, and

the one is 1 year old, and one is 4 years old. And you tell those little boogers, you can't tell what is wrong with them sometimes.

And you have some young children. One of you all have young children. I think you, Ms. Davis?

Ms. Davis: Yes.

Senator BURRIS. Ms. Davis, let me ask you this. I notice, and I don't want to sound like I am sexist on this, but your husband also is in the military, right?

Ms. Davis: Yes. Yes, he is.

Senator BURRIS. Now, were any of you other ladies in the military yourselves? Now, do you think if a male were here testifying that he is the home person and the female is deployed, is he experiencing the same thing that you all would be experiencing? Since we have now got so many females in the military, I mean, I would assume that that is also taking place.

But do you think, have you heard any comments from males who stayed back as to how are they coping because you have this situation where the mother can better cope with the children than the father can. Have we heard anything in that regard?

Ms. Casey: I mean, I think it varies. I think it varies on individuals and their coping mechanisms. There are—

Senator BURRIS. Have you had any experience like that from a male? How would your husband say—were you ever deployed, Ms. Davis?

Ms. Davis: I have not been deployed. My husband has taken care of the children when I have been TDY. My son was 4 months old—

Senator BURRIS. What is TDY?

Ms. Davis: Temporary duty. I am sorry. I had to go temporary duty for 6 weeks, and I had a 4 month old and a 2 year old, and my husband obviously was left with two children very young.

And again, coping mechanisms is the key because in my house, and I am sure every other house, I am not a single parent in my house. There are two parents. So he was very active in obviously child rearing, and he did not—I wouldn't say he had any issues other than issues I would have had, other than trying to understand how a female does it all.

[Laughter.]

Ms. Davis: But as far as—

Senator BURRIS. That is a major issue. That is where I am going.

Ms. Davis: Right.

Senator BURRIS. You all have that natural—am I wrong? An instinct that is sort of inherent. And I think about my trying to handle my two children, I couldn't do it the way my wife did. No way I could have done that.

Ms. Davis: I do feel, though, the issues and concerns we have brought forth today would be the exact same issues because they have to deal with the exact same offices. They have TRICARE issues. They have—any need that I have as an active duty spouse or a dependent spouse, so to speak, my husband as a dependent would have the same issue.

We would have to call and make an appointment and be told, "I am sorry there is no appointments for 2 weeks." Or "I am sorry we can only see this one issue because we have got five doctors deployed."

So I can't imagine any issues being any different other than the standpoint it is a male you are speaking to, and I couldn't obviously give you a male perspective, but—

Senator BURRIS. Now, Ms. Davis, were you ever stationed at Scott Air Force Base?

Ms. Davis: No, I have not. But I have been at Offutt. I was at Offutt for almost 11 years.

Senator BURRIS. At Scott Air Force Base, I was down there a few weeks back, and they had the dedication of a high school, and the military is very involved. Scott is a major command Air Force center, and they were building a new high school. And there was naturally Federal impact funds that come to those schools because of the military families that are stationed there.

Ms. Davis: Absolutely.

Senator BURRIS. Now you mentioned the fact of vouchers that would be an answer to that.

Ms. Davis: Yes.

Senator BURRIS. I am trying to reconcile the voucher situation with a situation where there is impact funds being paid to a school district because of the military children that are attending those schools. How would you reconcile that?

Ms. Davis: In my particular situation because of where we are currently assigned, the local schools are not rated very highly. So a big portion of the military personnel either home school or they are paying they are actually paying to send their children to school.

Now if I am living in whatever county as an active duty member and the schools in that particular county are not very are adequate to the standards I would like for my child, I believe that a voucher program would allow me to be able to take my children outside of that district because schools are districted of some sort.

But I can't, as far as the impact on the schools and funding—

Senator BURRIS. Now are you in a military environment?

Ms. Davis: Yes.

Senator BURRIS. So, therefore, the other military students are going to that same school?

Ms. Davis: Yes. Obviously, yes.

Senator BURRIS. So there are some impact funds coming in for that school?

Ms. Davis: Absolutely, yes.

Senator BURRIS. So you are saying impact funds along with the voucher funds?

Ms. Moakler: If I could address this, Senator Burriss, please? Taking the voucher program separately, each—because there is an installation in that area, a military installation that impacts that school district's ability to raise taxes, they, along with other schools that have military children in them or other schools that are near a military installation, other school districts that might have an Indian reservation in them, other schools that might have some other kind of Federal entity within that school district are eligible for what is known as "impact aid."

It comes from the Department of Education, and it is dependent upon how many children supported by that Federal installation, be they military, be they Indians on the reservation, be they children of those Federal employees, that school district then receives a cer-

tain amount of money for those children. It is a fairly involved process.

Senator BURRIS. I am familiar with the process. I am trying to get a comparison here whether or not we would be also, if you are in that environment where impact aid is going because there are military children and then you are also asking for vouchers not to send your child to that school, but you want to send your child to another school, I am trying to figure out how you reconcile that?

Ms. Moakler: Well, traditionally, we have not equated impact aid with tuition. Impact aid is not tuition.

Senator BURRIS. No, because what you are saying is you want to send your child to a religious school or some other type of special school, and not send them to the school where the impact aid is supposed to be calculated based on so many military families being in that community.

Ms. Moakler: But it is to offset the taxes that they are—

Senator BURRIS. Yes, I know what it is for.

Ms. Moakler: I know what you are asking. I mean, I don't know what the answer to that question is, but I know exactly what you are asking. What happens if we then give vouchers, what happens to that impact aid money?

Senator BURRIS. That is correct, yes.

Ms. Moakler: And I mean, I don't know the answer to that.

Senator BURRIS. Mr. Chairman, that is an issue that—

Senator BEN NELSON. Senator Burris, I think that is something maybe we can talk about within the committee and see if we can come to a resolution because you raise an interesting question.

Senator BURRIS. Mr. Chairman, I do have to go to preside over the Senate. So I take leave.

Senator BEN NELSON. I appreciate it. Thank you.

And I have got to ask Ms. Davis, what years were you at Offutt?

Ms. Davis: I am going to tell my age. Let us see, I was there from 1988 to 1999.

Senator BEN NELSON. 1999. Well, I was Governor during most of that time.

Ms. Davis: Yes, you were. Yes, you were. So—

Senator BEN NELSON. And I hope you were able to have good schools within that district.

Ms. Davis: I did not have any children, sir. I did not. But actually, there were some awesome schools in Offutt. So, yes, there was.

Senator BEN NELSON. All right. I thank you. I want the record to reflect they have good schools.

[Laughter.]

Senator BEN NELSON. Thank you. Thank you all for coming here today and expressing very sincerely and openly your concerns and experiences. It is essentially what we have to have in order to be able to try to help in areas where help is required.

It is encouraging to know that some things are working, but discouraging that some things aren't working as well as we would like them to. But at least we are aware and we will do what we can to try to rectify some of these challenges.

The OPTEMPO is something that we have always hoped would take care of itself. It hasn't to date. But I know there are efforts

underway to try to get more dwell time, and we are going to continue to work, do everything we possibly can, including expanding end strength, to try to get to that.

So thank you very, very much. Appreciate it. God bless you, and God bless your families.

[Pause.]

Senator BEN NELSON. For our second panel, we are pleased to have Mr. Arthur J. Myers, the Principal Director and the acting Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Military Community and Family Policy.

Ms. Kathleen Marin, Director, Installation Services, Office of the assistant Chief of Staff for Installation Management, United States Army.

Ms. Terri J. Rau, Ph.D., Deputy Director for Research and Development and Performance Measurement, Navy Installations Command, United States Navy.

Major General Timothy R. Larsen, United States Marine Corp (Ret.), Director of Personnel, Family Readiness Division, Manpower and Reserve Affairs Department, United States Marine Corps.

And Ms. Eliza J. Nesmith, Chief Airman and Family Services Division, United States Air Force.

We are eager to hear the various departments' and services' family support programs and initiatives, including how each plans to resource these programs.

With that, let me first call on Mr. Myers to begin the panel's opening statements.

**STATEMENT OF ARTHUR J. MYERS, PRINCIPAL DIRECTOR
AND ACTING DEPUTY UNDER SECRETARY OF DEFENSE FOR
MILITARY COMMUNITY AND FAMILY POLICY, DEPARTMENT
OF DEFENSE**

Mr. Myers: Thank you, sir.

Chairman Nelson, the Secretary of Defense and all the men and women of the Armed Forces, as well as their families, thank you for your support.

We are very appreciative that you are holding this hearing on family support issues. It is our opportunity to tell you about our many initiatives and validate our need for continued authorization of funds.

One of our biggest successes is military OneSource. This service is well known for its individually tailored services and its availability any time, any place, which is particularly helpful for those who are geographically isolated from installation support.

As a result of the Senate's insight into the special needs of this population who are separated from installation support, we established a joint family assistance program in 15 States and then extended the service to all States and territories. We have also implemented a program of face-to-face nonmedical counseling for military families experiencing normal stress of multiple deployments and reunions.

Additionally, we have placed military family life consultants in schools selected by the military departments to provide consultation, education, training and workshops to faculty, parents, and children to help cope with deployments. This pilot program was of-

ferred at six schools in Europe and at Fort Hood and at Fort Campbell in the United States.

We are also assisting spouses to develop portable careers by offering Military Spouse Career Advancement Accounts. A total of up to \$6,000 per spouse is available for credentialing and licensure. This initiative began in March, and already 15,000 military spouse profiles have been received. About 45 percent of those spouses are seeking careers in health professions.

Our financial readiness campaign focuses on empowering servicemembers and their families with the tools and information they need to meet their financial goals. We want to place them on the path to financial freedom. Also, our youth program and Department of Defense schools encourage financial literacy at a very early age.

We are ready to accept the challenge to meet the emerging needs of our military members and their families. We know there is always more to be done to meet their many requirements. I would like to highlight some areas for your consideration.

Several years ago, the Congress granted temporary authority for minor military construction of child development centers that allowed us to accelerate childcare capacity and increase spaces by 15,000 on a rapid basis. To meet our goals for childcare and to keep our members fit to fight and win, we require similar authority for fitness centers and family centers and for child care for children through 12 years of age.

We need to extend the authority, which ends this fiscal year, through fiscal year 2012 and also increase the projected threshold to \$15 million. In addition, we need to eliminate barriers to our partnerships with military providers of childcare, such as relief from the Service Contract Act.

Thank you again for your strong support of the military members and their families. I will be happy to respond to any of your questions.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Myers follows:]

Senator BEN NELSON. Thank you, Mr. Myers.

Ms. Marin?

STATEMENT OF KATHLEEN MARIN, DIRECTOR, INSTALLATION SERVICES, OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT CHIEF OF STAFF FOR INSTALLATION MANAGEMENT, UNITED STATES ARMY

Ms. Marin: Mr. Chairman, I am honored to appear here today to share how the Army is enhancing programs to restore our soldiers' and families' sense of balance.

Never before in history have we asked so much of our Army families. They make incredible sacrifices, as we have heard here today. They remain steadfast in support of their soldiers, but families are showing the stress of nearly 8 years at war.

The Army recognizes that soldier readiness and family readiness are inextricably linked, and that is why we have doubled our investment in base funding for family programs from 2007 to 2010. The Army's request for fiscal year 2010 soldier and family programs is \$1.726 billion. Continuing predictable funding is crucial to sustain and preserve the all-volunteer force.

We are investing the Nation's resources wisely. We are focusing on areas to promote readiness and resilience, reducing the turbulence and stress that comes with military life. Our primary focus areas have been to standardize services across the Army, close gaps in underfunded programs, and to enhance and adapt services to meet the constantly evolving requirements associated with multiple deployments and frequent relocations.

For example, we are augmenting the OSD program of military family life consultants due to such a high demand. As a way to reach out to geographically dispersed soldiers and families, we have expanded the National Guard's model Yellow Ribbon program, and we have established our own Army OneSource.

We are expanding education and employment opportunities for family members and better serving the unique needs of the families of our fallen and wounded. We have provided them places to connect and be connected with others going through the same experiences. And we are providing for the fundamental safety and security of our military children by building more child and youth centers, increasing available hours, as well as offering specialized activities to combat stress, isolation, and loneliness.

We have reduced program fees, provide free childcare for spouses who must now fill both parenting roles, and we provide support to those in geographically dispersed locations by subsidizing high-quality local childcare. We are continuing to fund respite care for those with exceptional family members, and we are easing the burdens created by frequent military moves, ensuring our youth receive credit for academic achievement from school to school and State to State.

We are keenly aware of the unique stressors facing our soldiers and their families today. In fact, new challenges are constantly emerging. And while we don't have all the answers, we are working on how to assess the relevance and the impact of the full spectrum of our programs.

One way we measure effectiveness is by surveying on a regular basis to seek the opinions of our soldiers and families and assess their satisfaction and, most importantly, to monitor their adaptation to the unique challenges of Army life. These measurements assist us in matching the capabilities of our programs to the expectations of our soldiers and families, keeping the Army strong, ready, and resilient.

Thank you, sir, for the opportunity to speak to you today. And thank you for all you do for our soldiers and families. And I stand ready to answer your questions.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Marin follows:]

Senator BEN NELSON. Thank you very much.

Dr. Rau?

STATEMENT OF TERRI J. RAU, PH.D., DEPUTY DIRECTOR FOR RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT AND PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT, NAVY INSTALLATIONS COMMAND, UNITED STATES NAVY

Dr. Rau: Chairman Nelson, it is my honor to testify today on Navy family readiness programs and initiatives. Thank you for

your leadership and attention to this vital issue and for your continued support to our sailors and families.

Navy family readiness programs include Navy fleet and family support programs, child and youth programs, and emergency preparedness and community alliance. Navy family readiness has been afforded the highest visibility, advocacy, and priority in recent years.

The Navy's commitment to family readiness has resulted in increased capability for both Navy fleet and family support programs and child and youth programs. In practical terms, this has resulted in increased individual and group services for family members, including clinical counseling services, proactive outreach, and increased childcare capacity.

Emergency preparedness and community alliance provides preparedness and coordinated family support during natural or man-made emergencies or noncombatant evacuation and repatriation events.

This year marks the 30th anniversary of the establishment of Navy fleet and family support centers. We support individual and family resiliency and adaptation to military life by providing 12 core programs and services in 3 functional areas—deployment readiness, career support and retention, and crisis response.

As we have increased capability, we have become increasingly focused on prevention and, when necessary, early identification and assistance before more significant problems develop that require command medical or legal intervention. Services are delivered from 81 sites worldwide.

Child development and youth programs help families balance the competing demands of mission readiness and family responsibilities. The Navy provides high-quality childcare, youth development, and school transition for 120,000 children from 4 weeks to 18 years of age.

Our current capacity meets 72 percent of potential need, with a 6-month placement time, except in fleet concentration areas where placement times can be longer. To attain the DOD capacity goal of 80 percent of potential need, the Navy's expansion plan is adding approximately 7,000 new childcare spaces through several initiatives.

Increasing our response capability to reach geographically dispersed family members of our active and Reserve component remains on the forefront of our efforts. Our primary focus remains to deliver the highest quality services at the right time and in the right place.

Thank you for this opportunity and for your leadership and focus on this important issue.

[The prepared statement of Dr. Rau follows:]

Senator BEN NELSON. And thank you.

General Larsen?

**STATEMENT OF MAJOR GENERAL TIMOTHY R. LARSEN, USMC
(RET.), DIRECTOR, PERSONAL AND FAMILY READINESS DIVI-
SION, MANPOWER AND RESERVE AFFAIRS DEPARTMENT,
UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS**

General Larsen: Senator Nelson, thank you very much for the opportunity today to come and appear before the subcommittee and report on family support programs within the Marine Corps. It is really a great opportunity. Also, it helps us focus on the things we need to do and highlight some of the gaps that we have or areas we need to refocus ourselves.

First, I would like to say thanks to the panel that spoke before us. They did a great job, and it is really eye opening to listen to their feedback on the services and the programs that we provide. So I think that they did a tremendous job, and it will help us very much.

As far as the Marine Corps is concerned, we are in the second year of a multi-year program to change our programs and to reshape them and recast them. We did that at the guidance of the Commandant of the Marine Corps. At his direction, we did a series of functionality assessments to assess where we are on the programs, and then we went out and did a series of surveys to our people across the Marine Corps and asked them what they thought about the programs that we had.

We found out in a lot of cases we are missing the target. The things that we thought we were doing or the programs that we had in place sometimes weren't meeting the needs of the people that we are trying to help.

The changes that we have put in place have been well received. There is a lot more work to do, and we have got to get started on it. Basically, this past year, we have completely changed four of the fundamental programs we have for family support—the Marine Corps family teambuilding, unit family readiness, the Exceptional Family Member Program, and the School Liaison Program.

This year, where we are going to go is we are going to first do a baseline assessment of all of our current programs and how they are being funded and what we think they need as we go forward so we can determine where we are, and then we are going to do a needs assessment of those programs and other programs at the installations to see where we go and what we need to do.

We have found out that a lot of the things that we have done in the past have been focused on the installations. And so, an installation-based program is not necessarily what we need to do as we go forward. We need more community-based programs to get those people that are not assigned to installations that are across the country in a lot of different locations.

And we also want to make sure that the programs that we have support the operational commander and meet the needs of the Marines and their families. And we are doing this largely because there is an expectation not only on the part of the leadership of the Marine Corps, but on the part of the individual Marine and his family that they deserve a quality of life that supports their commitment to the country and their commitment to the Marine Corps and the mission that they are undergoing.

And we feel that we are obligated from our perspective to make sure that those families, their needs are taken care of. So, and I wish I could have had the opportunity to answer a lot of the questions that were asked before. I am sure we will. So thank you very much.

[The prepared statement of General Larsen follows:]

Senator BEN NELSON. Thank you, General.

Ms. Nesmith?

STATEMENT OF ELIZA G. NESMITH, CHIEF, AIRMEN AND FAMILY SERVICES DIVISION, UNITED STATES AIR FORCE

Ms. Nesmith: Chairman Nelson, Senator Graham, thank you for your service to this country and for the invitation to come to speak today on behalf of Air Force family support programs.

Our chief of staff, General Norton Schwartz, recognizes the importance of families and has made developing and care for airmen and their families one of the top five Air Force priorities. I am honored to share with you today some of the programs that support that objective.

We take care of our airmen and their families through a variety of services, including child and youth development programs, airmen and family readiness, morale, welfare, and recreation programs, including libraries, fitness centers, outdoor recreation, and community centers.

With high operations tempo, increased mobilization, and longer periods of time away from home, these programs help our airmen focus on the mission while we take care of the families. These programs and services make the Air Force a good place to live and work and to raise a family.

You have my written statement, but I would like to highlight two key areas. The Air Force has always placed a high priority on families, and we are particularly proud of our child and youth development programs. We know that quality, affordable, and available childcare is a workforce issue that has a direct impact on mission readiness.

This year marks the 20th anniversary of the Military Childcare Act of 1989. With your support, this act allowed military childcare to become a model for the Nation. We share this honor with the Department of Defense and the other services. Because of the quality associated with this program, our airmen and their families have come to rely on this benefit as a part of the daily fabric of being in the Air Force.

One area where more support is needed is the Exceptional Family Member Program. Our Air Force does a good job arranging assignments for over 14,00 Air Force families with special needs. However, we know we need to do more for these families once they reach those assignments. While some families may not need assistance, many of them do need help to navigate the school systems, find childcare, and balance their parental responsibilities with their duty demands.

As this example shows, we continually assess our programs in light of the emerging needs of our airmen and their families. We employ a wide variety of techniques, including surveys, assessments, focus groups, online customer satisfaction polls, and just

talking to people. We strive to close any gaps in service by identifying the requirements and seeking resources through our Air Force corporate structure.

Your continued support will allow us to do even better in this area. Thank you again so much for this opportunity, and I will look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Nesmith follows:]

Senator BEN NELSON. Thank you.

Since you mentioned it, Ms. Nesmith, in terms of getting surveys and responses back from the members and families, do those result in a study, per se, or is that just to give you an idea of what the reaction is to the programs?

Ms. Nesmith: One of the primary surveys that we use in the Air Force we call a community assessment, and we are going into about the 20th year of doing that every 2 years. We have a multi-functional cross-agency group, which we call a community action information board, made up of mental health professionals, family support professionals, chaplains, sexual assault resource people, and all of those people who come together to make the community decisions.

We take that data at every level, installation, major command, and headquarters level, and we focus on an area of a year. And then we develop programs, if needed, to address the issues that have come up as a result of that.

I will just give one example. From 2000, we recognized that we were providing childcare within the gates, and we needed to provide nights, weekends, for us people who were working in missiles 24 hours. So at that time we started a program, and today, we provide about 18,000 hours a month of childcare through those programs—one example where we used that community assessment very gingerly.

Senator BEN NELSON. Well, one of the things that was very clear from the first panel, we are all concerned about the stress on the children of our military personnel, frequent and lengthy redeployments and dangerous missions and the absence of a parent in the home.

Are there any—this is for everyone. Is there any ongoing or are you aware of any ongoing or completed studies of the impact of this operation tempo, this OPTEMPO on children or family personnel? Do we have a study that has gone through and established from review and scientific data and medical information, mental health information, a study that would establish that as an impact?

Mr. Myers: I believe that data is gathered from all of the services and put together. In fact, yesterday, they had a briefing just going over all of that data.

But with the force today, it is a young force. So the issues are a lot different. For instance, at our military OneSource center, we have a program. A lot of people didn't want to come up and ask for assistance and so forth. So our military OneSource, we started a program where any family member or military member could get help either online, on the telephone, or, if they want, face to face. And a lot of these issues with children and so forth are discussed.

On the divorce rate, they talked earlier in the session. The divorce rate has increased in the military. And what we find out on

this military OneSource, many of the issues that are brought up is communication and relationships. So you can see the war is taking a toll on the families. The families are trying to stick together.

But all of these studies put together is the result. That is why we put these various programs in, and as the first group said, access to medical care is a key issue and mental health.

Senator BEN NELSON. But do we have the opportunity to focus primarily, let us say, on children to see what the impact? I think we know, but we need sometimes verification and concrete evidence of it to where we could focus on that, family as well, but on the children?

Ms. Marin: Sir, in the Army, we have two ongoing studies right now. One is an academic study for the effects of multiple deployments on school-age children, and we are to get the final results of that in the next several months. We have also kicked off a major study partnering with the Military Childcare—Child Education Coalition, and they are going into districts, and they are partnering, going out into the schools—not just on post schools—and also exploring the effects of multiple deployments on children.

Senator BEN NELSON. Excuse me. And on their academic and on their social performance?

Ms. Marin: Yes, sir, both. And so, we are going to be having those benefits, and we will be able to do an analysis and do programmatic adjustments based upon that information. So those information are going to be available to us by the end of this summer and on into the next year.

Senator BEN NELSON. That base of information may be very helpful in determining what we are doing and whether it is really reaching far enough into it or whether there ought to be some other approaches.

Ms. Marin: Absolutely, sir.

General Larsen: Sir?

Senator BEN NELSON. General?

General Larsen: The Marine Corps, through the Center of Naval Analysis and some other things that we have done, we have looked at parts of the issue. We have looked at it from a small, narrow perspective on some of the questions that we have asked, particularly dealing with wounded warriors and others and the impacts on their families.

We would welcome some kind of a congressional study or some effort to look at the whole problem of the impact of stress on the families. But there is a lot of stuff that has been done on stress on the force. There is not a lot of stuff that has been done on stress on the family.

And so, I mean, if that is an opportunity, we would welcome that and we would welcome to participate in that program.

Senator BEN NELSON. And make it department wide, DOD wide on all the branches so that we could accumulate—there may be some distinctions between some of the branches. But I rather doubt it, but there could be.

Dr. Rau: Senator Nelson, it is interesting that you ask that question. My staff and I have just been reviewing the scientific literature on that question in relation to supporting a three-star board that we have in the Navy called the Navy Preparedness Alli-

ance. And they have asked the question about the impact of deployment on children, specifically individual deployers within the Navy, which is a relatively new phenomenon.

A review of that literature really suggests that there is a fair amount of literature, but it focuses a lot on teenagers and less on school age and even less on preschool. But certainly what the literature does suggest, and then there is a—it is a 20-year literature. So the literature that is more recent is fewer than the literature that is even older. So the issues are different now than they were 20 years ago when we were researching this question.

But the results are what you would expect, that children of deployers are having more difficulties, and that is for young children as well as teenagers and school age. So—

Senator BEN NELSON. Well, it is unfortunate that we have 8 years of experience, but we do have 8 years of experience that we ought to capitalize on to know about the effects to help us understand what the current situation is, how we can deal with it, but also with some idea of preparation for the future in the event that history repeats itself in a timely fashion. And we hope it doesn't, but being prepared is certainly part of our response to the families.

Thank you.

Senator Graham?

Senator GRAHAM. Mr. Myers, preference for military spouse hiring. Where are we at?

Mr. Myers: Right now, spouse do have preferential for hiring within the military. One of the problems I know they are working on, we have had cases where a spouse is offered a job, doesn't want to take that job because they don't want to use their authorization. They want to work for a better job. So working through personnel, they are looking at that to try to fix that.

Senator GRAHAM. Anything the committee could do to help?

Mr. Myers: I will take that for the record and talk to our personnel folks.

Senator GRAHAM. Great.

Mr. Myers: But we appreciate that offer.

Senator GRAHAM. Okay. Good.

The idea of vouchers available to military families as they move from school district to school district, starting with Ms. Nesmith and working down, how do you feel about that?

Ms. Nesmith: The issue of vouchers is certainly something that has come up in the public over the years. And just in my experience looking at it is that the possibility of adding it to the tax burden that a military member would realize, that this voucher would add into their income and thereby raise their tax implication.

Senator GRAHAM. What if we made it income free?

Ms. Nesmith: If you made it income free, it would certainly give some opportunities, as the panel mentioned, for parents to be able to seek out education that they desired for their children.

Senator GRAHAM. General Larsen, what is your view?

General Larsen: Sir, one of the issues that we are working right now with the Council on Disabilities is the possibility of developing a voucher-type program, particularly for our Exceptional Family Member Program.

Senator GRAHAM. Right. Right, absolutely.

General Larsen: And so, what I think we need to do, and this is—if you go across the Marine Corps and talk to people, education is one of our biggest issues.

Senator GRAHAM. Right.

General Larsen: And it is the reason people decide to become geographic bachelors and leave their family in one location and go to another location, and it is because for a lot of reasons people decide that the education either where they are is what they are looking for or where they are going is not what they are looking for.

And so, a voucher program would help us a lot. I think it is a great idea, and there is a lot of opportunities for this.

Senator GRAHAM. So what you are saying, General, is a lot of time when it comes assignment rotation time, the families will stay in what they think to be the better school, and the military member will go unaccompanied?

General Larsen: Exactly. That is one of the primary sources we have for geographic bachelors.

And we have schools in certain locations where the school that is adjacent to the installation is not necessarily a good school. It is not one of the schools that people want to have their children go, but they are prevented from going to the other schools in the public school system.

Senator GRAHAM. Gotcha. School choice within a public school setting.

Dr. Rau?

Dr. Rau: We would support anything or efforts that ease the transition of military families from one school system to another, and there might be a variety of options that would do that.

Senator GRAHAM. Okay. Ms. Marin?

Ms. Marin: Yes, as the panel expressed earlier, the robust discussion, I think that is something we really want to look at. In the Army, we have school liaison officers on all of our installations. So we already have a robust amount of information on the individual perceptions of the soldiers and families of the schools.

We know that there has been a lot of requests for public school of choice, what you just talked about. And we would like to look more into the school voucher issue and also how it would interplay with the impact aid, which was a discussion earlier.

General Larsen: Can I make a comment on impact aid? Impact aid lags. It is a year after. So the school system has to put in the request a year later to get that impact aid. The impact aid, like a voucher system, should follow the student. It shouldn't go to the school district. It ought to go to the school where the kid is attending.

Senator GRAHAM. Gotcha. Okay. Mr. Myers?

Mr. Myers: I think voucher program is very good.

In the Washington, D.C. area, there are several bases. On that base, over 90 percent of the children are being home schooled. And Senator Graham, as you said, there are people that opt out of the service or don't want the assignment because of education for the children. So that is a key issue with our military personnel.

And Senator Graham, I forgot to mention the Defense Center of Psychological Health is sponsoring research on children. So I think

that will encompass all and be a good basis for us to look at how it affects children.

Senator GRAHAM. One last comment. This reciprocity issue of making sure that people who have licensed professionals that are in Department of Defense families that when they move from State to State that maybe we could do something to help them maintain their practices or their profession, that is something I am interested in. I really hadn't thought about until the other panel spoke.

The last comment is TRICARE. I mean, at the end of the day, you have just got to get doctors and providers into the system to make this thing work. I am going to ask you what I asked the first panel. From your perspective, from what you hear and what you know, Ms. Nesmith, rate TRICARE from A to F.

Ms. Nesmith: Certainly I would concur with what I have heard. I am not a user of TRICARE myself. But from what I have heard, I would have to give B for access.

General Larsen: I would like to give a longer answer, but the short answer is I would give it at best a D. And in the last panel, we were mixing up the military treatment facilities and TRICARE. There are two separate problems, and there are two separate sets of issues that need to be discussed.

Senator GRAHAM. Gotcha.

General Larsen: But I would say access to care and because of some of the problems that our people experienced, I would say a D.

Senator GRAHAM. Dr. Rau?

Dr. Rau: Senator Graham, really, military medicine doesn't fall under my purview, and so I would really rather not give it a grade.

Senator GRAHAM. Fair enough.

Dr. Rau: I don't have a lot of experience.

Senator GRAHAM. Sure. Good answer.

Dr. Rau: Professionally or otherwise. So I would defer to Mrs. Mancini, who has the ground roots, grassroots experience.

Senator GRAHAM. Ms. Marin?

Ms. Marin: Sir, based upon what we are getting from our family readiness group leaders and other inputs, I would echo Mrs. Casey in that quality of care is rated very high. Access to care is lower.

Senator GRAHAM. Mr. Myers?

Mr. Myers: What we hear when we go out, access to care is an issue.

Senator GRAHAM. Okay. Thank you all.

Mr. Myers: And Senator Graham, one other thing, we do have this Military Spouse Career Advancement Account, which gives up to \$6,000 per spouse for credentialing and so forth. If you have to get recertified, they can now use that money to get that done.

Senator GRAHAM. Okay.

Dr. Rau: Senator Graham, I can also add that with regard to mental health professional licensing, there is reciprocity within the Federal system. So if you work anywhere within the Federal system, you can practice within the Federal system, licensed in any State or U.S. territory.

Senator GRAHAM. Yes, what I am thinking about—well, that is good to know. But let us say a nurse, or a lawyer or—

Dr. Rau: Sure.

Senator GRAHAM. How could we make it easier when they move? Well, thank you all.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator BEN NELSON. Thank you.

The Exceptional Family Member Program was established to assist active duty servicemembers in providing for the special needs of family members before, during, and after relocation required by a change of duty assignment to a new location. I understand that implementation of this program varies between the services. Would any of you be able to explain or wish to explain how your organization reaches out to servicemembers who have dependents with a special medical and/or educational needs? I think it is called ECHO?

General Larsen: I can start.

Senator BEN NELSON. Sure. General?

General Larsen: In the Marine Corps this last year, we established an Exceptional Family Member Program. Prior to that, we had a program that was basically an assignment program where we would make sure that the people, as they were moving from one location to another, had the type of care they needed for their family member in that location. And so, it was basically an assignment policy for the Marine Corps.

What we have established is a series of caseworkers and some legal assistance at locations across the Marine Corps that helps the family that has an exceptional family member in it do the things they need to do to get access to healthcare, to get some financial issues and educational issues addressed.

And so, we have done that by going from actually nothing a year ago to where we have about 6,500 people that are currently enrolled in the program, 6,500 families. And we have one caseworker for 225 families. So we have spread that across the Marine Corps. They are in the major geographic areas or the major locations where we have a high concentration of services that are available.

So southern California or areas where like the area here in northern Virginia, where they might have services available, is where those families get assigned. And we are trying to—we have a policy in place now to stabilize the family in that location so that they don't get moved from place to place every couple of years.

And the servicemember can go and do his overseas assignment or his or her overseas assignment or the things they need to do, but then they can come back to the place where their family is being stabilized in order to get into the system and get the care they need. Because often when we move them from one location to another, they get to the new location and they start over.

And that is another issue of reciprocity, where if they didn't have to start over, as we move them from California to North Carolina, then it would be better on the family. And they would be more able to move from these different locations. So that is kind of what we have done the last several months.

Senator BEN NELSON. Any other comments regarding ECHO?

Ms. Marin: Yes, sir. In the Army, about 10 percent of our active duty are registered in Exceptional Family Member Programs. So that is about over 51,000 soldiers have exceptional family mem-

bers, somewhat over 67,000 exceptional family members. It is mandatory to enroll.

And we have an exceptional family member coordinator on every installation, and they deal with what might be special needs for housing, for medical, and for education. We offer benefits like up to 40 hours of respite care free per month for the primary caregiver for families with exceptional family members.

And always, we are tweaking the nuances of this program. Just recently, it came up as an issue in our Army family action plan, which is a yearly forum for improving policies, is that they needed to actually—when a family was deploying overseas, even before the orders were cut, there needs to be an analysis of where they are going and what medical and housing and education is available for them.

So we have changed our policy so that is happening now. So we are consistently looking at those and improving them.

Senator BEN NELSON. Okay. Thank you.

Building child development centers has really increased rapidly most recently, thanks in part, I hope, to the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. What efforts are being made to increase access to childcare services by contracting out with child development centers that are off base if there isn't an adequate facility on base?

I heard something about waiting lists a little bit ago, and does that continue to be an issue?

Mr. Myers: Yes, sir. There is about 37,000 children on the waiting list, and we have seen a baby boom in the military in the last several years. We were able to build over 15,000 spaces because we had that authority that we could build child development centers up to around \$7 million or \$8 million, which is going to expire this year, and we need an extension on that.

But we also need child development centers out the gate. So we have funds to work with child development centers outside the gate, Boys and Girls Clubs to get care providers, bring them up to standards, and it will help those people out in the community. So we think that will be another way of providing this effort.

But childcare, the senior enlisted advisers tell me that is the number-one issue amongst our military families.

Senator BEN NELSON. Well, Ms. Davis, you left Offutt just too soon because we have a brand-new facility out there. It is state-of-the-art. Even though you didn't need it when you were there, if you decide to come back, it will fit and suit your needs.

Were you part of the 55th Wing?

Ms. Davis: Yes, sir.

Senator BEN NELSON. Okay. Thank you.

Well, thank you, everybody. It is great to have had the input from both panels. We thank the second panel in particular now for your input. It is helpful to us to understand what is happening in the real world and give us some idea of where we could be helpful to provide even more support for our military families.

So thank you all, and this hearing is adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 4:32 p.m., the hearing was adjourned.]