

DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE

**PRESENTATION TO THE JOINT READINESS AND MANAGEMENT
SUPPORT AND MILITARY PERSONNEL SUBCOMMITTEES**

COMMITTEES ON ARMED SERVICES

UNITED STATES SENATE

UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SUBJECT: FAMILY READINESS

**STATEMENT OF: LIEUTENANT GENERAL ROGER A. BRADY
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APRIL 18, 2007

NOT FOR PUBLICATION UNTIL RELEASED
BY THE COMMITTEES ON ARMED SERVICES
UNITED STATES SENATE
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thank you, Chairman Akaka and Chairman Nelson and distinguished Committee Members for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss Air Force Family Readiness Programs. The statement “We recruit the member, but we retain the family” is not a cliché but has been a reality in the Air Force for many years. The quality of life we provide for our Airmen and their families is a distinct determining factor in how long they remain in our service.

The sacrifices our Airmen, their spouses and children make throughout a typical career are enormous. As our operations tempo increases and deployments lengthen, our Air Force families are presented with many unique challenges not experienced by their civilian counterparts. We have over 30 thousand Total Force Airmen deployed in support of the Global War on Terror, and in many respects, the families of these deployees are at war too. To meet their needs, our Air Force community support programs and services are there for both married and single Total Force Airmen, whether at home or deployed.

In particular, the Air Force developed the Heritage to Horizon initiative to strengthen all predeployment, deployment, and post deployment Airmen and family wellness programs. Specific areas of improvement include a standardized predeployment checklist and education, mandatory, comprehensive redeployment services, post-deployment health assessment and reassessment, non-clinical counseling, and reunion challenges that the Airman and family face. Many of these programs are outlined in more detail below. Together they demonstrate the Air Force’s strong commitment to ensuring our Airmen and their families have the right tools to cope with the challenges that may arise from deployments.

Child Care

Readily available, high quality and affordable child care and youth programs are a workforce issue with direct impact on mission readiness. Airmen must balance the competing

demands of parenting and military service. This is particularly challenging in today's environment of higher operations tempo, increased mobilization, and longer periods of time away from home. We are committed to serving these Airmen and their families by reaching out and assisting all members of the total force through robust child and youth programs wherever the member resides.

Our Air Force Home Community Care program reduces out-of-pocket expenses for Air Reserve Component members by providing free in-home quality child care during their scheduled drill weekends. This program provides the same quality child care available to Airmen assigned to or living on a military installation. This past year, the Home Community Care program provided more than 10,000 child care hours, enabling our Air Reserve and Air Guard's mission readiness. As one Air Guard member concluded, "This is an invaluable asset to a dual military couple! Drills have always been a headache for child care and it is great to have someone to count on for these times! Thank you, Thank you, Thank you!" Another Air Guard member shared, "The Air Force's Home Community Care program is greatly appreciated. If not for this program, I would have to consider leaving the Air National Guard."

AF active duty families are also eligible for the Military Child Care in Your Neighborhood program designed to meet the child care needs of Service members living in areas where on-base military child care is not available. This program supports military families with locating and paying the cost of high-quality child care outside military installations. It also provides eligible members with a subsidy for 60 days while a non-military spouse is looking for work.

Similarly, the Air Force Expanded Child Care programs provides 18,000 hours each month of child care during non-traditional work hours at no cost to the military member. These

programs enable Airmen to obtain high quality child care even when the mission requires duty hours at night or on weekends. In addition, the Returning Home Care program provides 16 hours of free child care per child to active duty, Air National Guard, and Air Force Reserve members returning to their home stations after deployment in support of contingency operations. The Air Force Family Child Care Subsidy program saves families an average of \$143 per child per month by subsidizing the care received in an Air Force home when a slot is unavailable at the child development center. This program is of particular help to those Airmen with children under the age of three or children with special needs, and to those Airmen who work shifts outside of a normal duty day.

A recent national study highlighted the DoD child care program as leading the nation in quality standards and effective oversight. We are proud of this honor and believe that our child care is extremely important to our single and dual military parents, enabling them to focus on the mission. Unfortunately, we still have approximately 5,000 children on our waiting lists. To reduce this shortfall for our Airmen, we are adding 2,176 child care spaces using emergency intervention funding from OSD. Child and youth programs are vital to our readiness and we ask for your continued support.

Youth Programs and Services

Our youth programs focus on children elementary age through teens. They are a key component of our strategy to support the quality of life of Airmen and their families. Our two ongoing partnerships with Boys & Girls Clubs of America and the US Department of Agriculture's 4-H program provide additional means to reach families living both in communities and on active installations. The Mission: Youth Outreach program provides a one-year free membership in a local Boys & Girls Club. Through this important program, active

duty, Guard and Reserve families who do not live near a military installation still have a safe and positive place for their youth to spend their out-of-school time. Our partnership with 4-H fosters the development of 4-H clubs on Air Force bases, and specially appointed State Military Liaisons reach Air Guard and Reserve families with these quality youth programs.

We offer a variety of summer camp opportunities including residential camps, specialty camps and other base specific camp programs. For the Guard and Reserve youth, our base youth programs have partnered with the National Military Family Association to provide residential youth camps during the summer. Over 5,000 Air Force youth participated in camps last year designed to help them achieve their potential, develop their self-esteem and build their resistance to negative pressures.

Outreach Programs

Taking care of our Air Force family members back home and helping to keep them in contact with the deployed member is extremely important to the morale and well being of our Airmen. The Air Force provides numerous programs to assist Airmen and their families cope with the stresses of deployment. Our support for spouses and families during deployment includes free e-mail access, phone and video calls, support groups within units or at central locations, and newsletters. These important programs help to keep families connected with their deployed spouse and up-to-date on programs offered by the installation. In addition, we provide workshops and seminars on topics such as financial survival during deployment, career planning and development for spouses, “suddenly single” parenting skills, and how to keep long-distance relationships healthy. Airman & Family Readiness Centers (A&FRCs) work with Family Member Programs and other support units on installations to sponsor special activities for children such as Junior Personal Deployment Functions which help young family members adapt

better to their parents deploying by understanding what their parent experiences in preparation for deployment.

Our A&FRCs also sponsor Heart Link Spouse Orientations designed to "blue" spouses who are new to a military life style. This day-long, fun-filled program helps spouses understand the Air Force mission and how they and their military spouse support that mission. Through games and interactive events, they learn about all the benefits and services provided to them by the AF. Our installation commanders open the program by giving a mission briefing and then close the day with the presentation of a Heart Link spouse coin and the singing of the AF song! The success of this program has been tremendous as measured by pre- and post-assessments, as well as a 90-day follow-on survey to ask if the program impacted their opinions about the AF. One spouse of a pilot said, "After learning about how the Air Force took care of me and my family, I **now** support my husband's continuation with an AF career."

Our Stay Connected deployment kits provide children and parents with a way to maintain a solid connection while they are separated during deployments. Since April 2006, over 13,000 of these kits have been provided to Airmen and their families. In the words of one reserve spouse, "Thanks again from all of us who are trying to make their deployment over there easier. I know my husband enjoyed the message I made him on the recorder pen, and I play the one from him almost everyday."

Providing free calling cards is another way we are facilitating better communication between deployed Airmen and their loved ones. The Air Force Aid Society distributed almost 79 thousand \$20 calling cards to Air Force active duty, Guard and Reserve personnel during fiscal year 2006—a total value of \$1.6 million. These cards were vital in helping families not only stay in better contact, but also saved them money on telephone bills. During the same period, the

VFW distributed approximately 19 thousand additional calling cards to Air Force personnel at an estimated value of \$135 thousand.

The Give Parents A Break program offered through Child Development Programs provides senior leadership and others in the referral network a way to offer no-cost child care to help support military members needing relief from the demands of parenting and military life such as deployment-related stress. The Child Care for PCS Program helps relieve some of the stress felt by families (E-5s and below) in the process of a PCS move. Families receive 20 hours of child care before departing and after arriving at the new base. Supporting the need for family members to be contributing citizens, the Child Care for Volunteers program provides child care services for individuals engaged in supporting activities that benefit the AF community.

As part of a DoD-wide deployment support initiative, Whiteman AFB will test the Parents as Teachers (PAT) Heroes at Home program. PAT Heroes at Home is an early childhood parent education program aimed at improving parenting practices and increasing school readiness and success. This free program involves monthly personal visits with a certified parent educator. During these visits, the educator shares age specific information and activities that encourage development. Group parent meetings are held to discuss popular parenting topics along with weekly playgroups. At least once each year developmental and health screenings are conducted using standardized screening tools and vision and hearing checklists. Parent educators also link families to service providers, agencies and other local resources that offer services beyond the scope of PAT – Heroes at Home.

At Eglin AFB, FL we are also testing another DoD-wide program: the Coming Together Around Military Families initiative. This program is designed to strengthen the resilience of young children and their families who are experiencing trauma, grief and loss as a result of a

Service member's deployment. The program provides training for professionals working in child care, mental health, health care and A&FRCs. These professionals play an important role in supporting families with very young children who experience the emotional or physical loss of a parent due to deployment, illness, injury or death. This program will also provide parent resources and training for base professionals as well as outreach efforts to Guard and Reserve communities. Activities include a Coming Together campaign that will include messages to parents on supporting young children through deployment, relocation and other transitions.

Community Partnerships for Support

Within the DoD, our Exchange and Commissary partners also provide numerous services for families of those deployed. The commissaries actively participate in all pre-deployment briefs and at A&FRC briefings aimed at Guard and Reserve families. In addition, the new Defense Commissary Agency Internet initiative, the Virtual Commissary, is primarily designed to take the commissary to those Guard and Reserve families who do not live near a commissary and to those deployed to forward areas. This program when fully operational will allow authorized patrons to order from a selection of commissary items at commissary prices, plus a fee for shipping, handling and delivery, to be delivered to their location.

The Army and Air Force Exchange Service (AAFES) provides support directly to deployed personnel with approximately 450 associates currently deployed in support of Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom. AAFES also offers programs that allow family members and other US citizens to show their patriotic spirit. AAFES sells prepaid calling cards at www.aafes.com to anyone wishing to donate to "Help Our Troops Call Home." Since the inception of the program in 2004, more than 192,000 cards have been purchased to help service members stay in touch with family and friends. There is also a link on the website

for purchasing gift certificates for deployed troops that can be redeemed in any military exchange in the world. Americans have generously contributed in excess of \$1.7 million for these “Gifts from the Homefront.” AAFES also provides the Patriot Family Connection which allows the American public to send troops messages of support that are seen and heard in exchanges throughout the contingency theater and overseas.

Working in partnership with the civilian community, Operation Military Child Care (OMCC) provides child care fee assistance for National Guard and Reserve who are activated or deployed and whose children are enrolled in non-DoD licensed child care programs. OMCC provides help in locating licensed child care options in the member’s community and offers reduced child care fees through a subsidy. Members are eligible to participate during the period of deployment and for 60 days after their return. OMCC also provides a subsidy for 60 days while a non-military spouse is looking for work

Also in partnership with the civilian community and DoD, AF programs provide families of severely injured military members with assistance to find and pay for safe, licensed child care services for a period of six months during their period of recuperation. The program is available nationwide wherever the injured member is receiving either in-patient or out-patient medical care.

Spouse Employment

Military families often require two incomes to achieve their aspirations, similar to American families as a whole. Frequent moves can inhibit a military spouses’ ability to start and sustain a career, even though approximately 80 percent of military spouses have some college. Our spouses often suffer long periods of unemployment and, therefore, loss of income.

Another issue that affects the financial stability of military families is that spouses are often not eligible for unemployment compensation after PCS moves. Statutes or policies of many states view a spouse leaving a job due to a military move as a voluntary separation when, in fact, they have no choice in the matter. Granting eligibility to working spouses who relocate due to PCS provides a much needed financial bridge for military families both during mandatory moves and while spouses seek suitable employment at the new location. Of the states with active duty Air Force Bases, 12 offer full unemployment compensation to military spouses who PCS, others evaluate on a case-by-case basis, and 5 offer no unemployment compensation to PCSing spouses. DoD, through the Quality of Life Liaisons, is working with senior military leadership to educate State legislators on the need to promote legislation that will support full unemployment benefits for PCSing military spouses.

Differing licensing requirements can limit advancement or deter re-entry into the workforce at a new location. DoD has identified locations where there are licensing barriers and is developing policy recommendations for licensing and credentialing requirements across states for high demand, or shortage of, careers and jobs. We need to encourage states to sponsor model programs to assist military spouses and develop policies that promote timely transfer of employment, including elimination of cross-state certification barriers, and adopting high quality alternative certifications when possible.

To assist spouses in the employment process, the Air Force Spouse Employment Program provides consultation and resources to help spouses quickly reenter the job market at new locations. A&FRC staff provide information and referral at both the losing and gaining installations to prepare spouses for each new job search. Staff network with local employers and human resource professionals to insure the most up-to-date job search information is available.

For young spouses, the program assists in career planning for a mobile lifestyle and provides resource information and education on virtual career potentials.

Financial Management

The A&FRC Personal Financial Management Program provides education and one-on-one counseling for all financial related issues from basic budgeting to consumer education to investing. Nationally certified financial consultants on staff at the A&FRCs provide mandatory financial education during basic training and at First Term Airman Centers. Information on payday lending and other interest-based loans are part of that training. Additional education opportunities are provided during transition and relocation seminars. A myriad of workshops for other audiences and the general public include investment planning and the AF Thrift Savings Plan.

The Air Force Aid Society is the official charity of the Air Force. In addition to emergency financial assistance, the Air Force Aid Society provides education grants for spouses and family members. They also provide over \$2 million of Community Enhancement Programs yearly. As well as the phone cards for deploying members, those programs include: Bundles for Babies (financial planning for parenthood), Car Care (preventive vehicle check-up and oil changes for deployee's spouses), Wellness and Respite Care, Youth Employment Skills, Spouse Employment Training, and numerous child care programs.

Counseling

The A&FRC professionals offer services that provide information, foster competencies and coping skills, and offer consultation and assistance that help Airmen and their families deal with the competing demands of the Expeditionary military mission and family responsibilities. Additional services offered enhance the well-being and readiness of Airmen and family members

and include personal and family readiness counseling, financial planning and management, emergency financial assistance, spouse career planning and development, and transition and relocation assistance.

To help ensure they are prepared, all deployed Airmen are required to attend pre-deployment counseling. Spouses are strongly encouraged to attend. These one-on-one or group sessions are focused on personal planning, combat stress education and prevention, dealing with separation, children's issues and community resource access. A&FRCs also provide one-on-one and small group consultation as requested for Airmen, spouses, and families during the entire redeployment process. In addition, many installations, through combined efforts of A&FRCs, Chaplains, and Family Member Programs, offer day-long or weekend retreats and other events as part of redeployment for families and couples.

Reintegration Programs

Reintegration and redeployment support begins for Airmen while in the AOR when Chaplains or mental health staff provide initial information and resources and Airmen complete a post-deployment health assessment. Families can begin reintegration planning by working within spouse support groups and with A&FR staff focusing on developing communication skills and realistic expectations for the reunion process and homecoming. At home station Airmen complete formal redeployment processing and take advantage of programs and services to help them reconnect with family workplace, and community.

The need for an Airman and Family Readiness presence in the AOR has long been a subject of discussion. As a pilot program we have deployed two members, one civilian and one military, for a period of 120 days to Al Udeid AB, Qatar. Their focus is on deployment support issues, reintegration, connectivity with families back home, Air Force Aid Society issues and

relationship building. They work in close concert with Chaplains and Life Skills to provide reintegration services to assigned personnel, as well as to personnel returning from Iraq and processing through Al Udeid. Significant work will also be done in the area of personal financial management—both one-on-one counseling and classroom instructions—and in other areas such as Transition, Relocation, Employment Assistance counseling and skill building. The positive impact of this initiative cannot be overemphasized. Not only will we be able to assist our Airmen and their families with common deployment issues, we will also provide a significant resource to deployed leadership and Airmen by providing standard A&FRC support in a myriad of areas where assistance is needed even at a deployed location. Our presence will be a force multiplier and, ultimately lessen the workload on A&FRCs Air Force-wide and facilitate a smooth transition back to home station for our deployed Airmen.

Air Force Survivor Assistance Program and Palace HART

The Air Force Survivor Assistance Program aims to provide the best possible individual service to Airmen who are seriously wounded, injured, or ill and families who have lost a loved one. The heart of this program is the family liaison officer (FLO) who is assigned to each patient for the duration of their need. The FLO serves as a single point of contact between the family and the numerous helping agencies. Our FLOs assist the family in arranging transportation, child care, or even care for a family pet. They do whatever is needed for as long as needed to help reduce the stress on the Airmen and families during this difficult time.

When an Airman is wounded, ill, or injured in the war zone the Survivor Assistance Program swings into action. Within hours, we begin tracking medical status and evacuation plans to regional medical facilities or back to the United States for treatment. At each stop along the way we ensure a FLO is there to meet the Airman and assist with any needs he or she may

have. This often includes arranging local transportation and accommodations for family members, working through required paperwork, as well as being a friendly face for the Airman. When families travel to visit their seriously wounded or injured relative in a strange town, the FLO is there to provide needed assistance. The FLO is not expected to be the expert in each area, but is trained to find the right answers for the families he or she is working for. Our FLOs provide a critical resource to deal with the unfamiliar routine of the recovery process and prevent the Airman from being lost in the bureaucracy.

Our service reaches worldwide to ensure all of our wounded, injured and ill members are equally well cared for. For example, then Staff Sergeant Israel Del Toro was badly burned as the result of an IED attack in Afghanistan. He was in intensive care and in a coma at Brooke Army Medical Center in San Antonio, TX, and remained in that condition for four months. In the meantime, his wife and family needed to be relocated from Italy, where Sergeant Del Toro was stationed. His wife was not a US citizen and her application for registration, which had been filed at the US Embassy in Italy, could not be located. In keeping with the motto of “whatever the family needs,” the FLO worked with the State Department to locate immigration paperwork for the spouse, worked to process her application, made housing arrangements for the family, and provided temporary lodging for other relatives. The FLO also secured permanent housing for the family on Randolph AFB, arranged the shipment of their household goods, organized a crew to assist placing their furniture in their new home, and picked up their car from the port. In addition, the FLO retrieved the family dog from the airport, enrolled the spouse in driver education and English classes, and arranged transportation for hospital visits, shopping trips and many other needs. Sergeant Del Toro’s story illustrates how important the Family Liaison

Officer can be to a family and is typical of the dedication and devotion our Air Force FLOs exhibit when they are taking care of one of their own.

Unfortunately, the extent of some injuries does not allow our wounded heroes to remain on active duty status. We have taken steps to alleviate many concerns these brave warriors have regarding their future careers after they suffer debilitating injuries. The Air Force began the Palace HART (Helping Airmen Recover Together) program a few years ago to provide long-term case management assistance to severely wounded Air Force members who are not able to remain on active duty. Like the FLO, the Palace HART Program assigns a Community Readiness Coordinator (CRC) when service member casualty notification is made. The CRC works closely with the FLO to ensure the combat related injured or ill service member and their family receives complete information and entitlements. Our CRCs provide these Airmen and their families with individual transition, employment, relocation, financial, and other forms of assistance, and ensure Palace HART members and their families are referred to the correct benefit agencies for assistance. Additionally, the CRCs advocate for these members with government and civilian agencies to ensure they are making a successful transition to civilian life. We have made a commitment to follow-up on our medically separated or retired wounded members for a period of 5 years. This will help ensure they are receiving the assistance they deserve for the sacrifices they made for all Americans.

We continue to work through the Services, the Department of Veterans Affairs and other agencies, both governmental and non-profit, to ensure a seamless transition from Active Duty service and the military medical system to their communities and VA and local medical services. Some medically separated or retired members do not desire continued employment with the Air

Force. However, these men and women in uniform have much to offer their communities. The Air Force will keep its commitment to these members and their families.

I am extremely proud of the hard work and dedication our personnel put forth daily to not only prepare our Airmen for deployment but also ensure we are supporting their families before, during and after. The stories and insights I've shared with you today demonstrate that our professionals never forget the importance of what we are charged with accomplishing. Through innovative systems and programs, the hard work of our dedicated personnel, and the support of the community, we continue to provide critical mission capability for our commanders and vital support for our members and their families. The entire Air Force support team makes our mission, and therefore the Air Force mission, happen every day all over the world. We recognize this would not be possible without tremendous support from the Readiness and Personnel Subcommittees. We thank you and look forward to working with you as we press forward in helping to sustain America's Air Force.