

**COMMISSION ON THE NATIONAL GUARD
AND RESERVES**

HEARING ON EMPLOYER AND FAMILY SUPPORT

FAMILY SUPPORT

FEATURED WITNESSES:

**ALICE CAPEHART,
ANG FAMILY READINESS GROUP VOLUNTEER,
113TH AIR WING, DC AIR NATIONAL GUARD**

**LAURA COSEGLIA, DIRECTOR,
FAMILY SUPPORT, 512TH AIRLIFT WING,
DOVER AIR FORCE BASE, DELAWARE**

**MICHAEL EVANS, REGIONAL MANAGER,
U.S. ARMY RESERVE, FORT SNELLING, MINNESOTA**

**JILL MCMILLIN, FAMILY READINESS GROUP LEADER,
2ND BN, 224TH AVIATION REGIMENT,
VIRGINIA ARMY NATIONAL GUARD**

**AMIE MINICH, NAVY FAMILY OMBUDSMAN,
NAVY OPERATIONAL SUPPORT CENTER, RICHMOND, VIRGINIA**

**ANDREA ROLLINS, MARINE CORPS RESERVE KEY VOLUNTEER
ADVISOR, 2ND BATTALION, 25TH MARINE REGIMENT, 4TH MARINE
DIVISION, MARINE FORCES RESERVE, GARDEN CITY, NEW YORK**

**2:00 – 4:00 P.M.
THURSDAY, MAY 17, 2007**

*Transcript by:
Federal News Service
Washington, D.C.*

ARNOLD L. PUNARO: Okay. If our witnesses are ready, we'll get started. Is everybody ready? Okay.

This afternoon – the Commission will come back to order. This afternoon we turn our attention to the other or another critical influence of recruiting and retention in our Guard and Reserve: family members. As we noted at the outset of our hearings here in the last couple of days, there are some signs of fraying or troubling indicators on the horizon like the significant drop in favorability amongst spouses and others to continue participation in the National Guard and Reserve, which is reflected in the Defense Manpower Data Center survey results.

Family separation is difficult on all family members, regardless of service or component, particularly in times of high operational tempo and repeated deployments as experienced since 9/11. Guard and Reserve families often face unique challenges, however, because they live in their local civilian communities often at considerable distance from any military installation, so they frequently – and I would say more often than not – don't have the support network of activities and services available to the majority of active duty family members live on or near a military base.

We heard that from the governors particularly loudly who feel a keen obligation for their personnel as they're getting ready to deploy and put their Guard and Reservists in their states and send them overseas. When they come back home, they don't come back to Fort Bragg, they don't come back to Camp Pendleton or Camp Lejeune or any of the large military installations. They come back to the hometown drill center and then they disperse out in the communities all over the states, particularly in smaller states, and they say that's a very, very difficult challenge because they want to make sure these Guard and Reserve personnel are taken care of just like the active duty military personnel are and their families when they come back from their deployments.

Furthermore, the Guard and Reserve don't have the experience and familiarity with how to work their way through the military bureaucracy, whether it's in – a lot of people have trouble with that – whether it's finding a physician who'll take TRICARE here, verifying DEERS eligibility, understanding a leave and earnings statement, or locating quality childcare. The demands on these, quote, “suddenly military,” end quote, families can be extraordinary as the National Military Family Association noted in its most recent report on the cycles of deployment survey data, quote, “Despite extensive efforts by National Guard and Reserve leaders and family program staff to expand their outreach and information efforts, National Guard and Reserve families were the most vocal of all survey respondents regarding their need for additional information.” End quote.

So this afternoon, we're seeking the input of Guard – of Reserve and Guard family members to get as broad a perspective on family concerns as possible. We ask each Reserve component chief to provide as a witness an individual who has specific responsibility to serve as a critical link between the Reserve component family members and the command itself. By the way, we have met extensively with family members all over the country, so while this is a formal hearing today, we've been out and about and we've met with the Guard and Reserve members of all ranks. We've met with their family members in a many, many different locations.

When we started out, the models the Commission was most familiar with was the Marine Corps key volunteer in the Navy ombudsman programs. But we soon learned, not surprisingly, that six Reserve components don't all do it the same way. Some rely heavily on a robust volunteer network as the Marine Corps and Navy do, while others have hired paid staff to serve that function, although their exact roles and titles may differ, the individuals on this panel work in day-to-day contact with Guard and Reserve family members to help them find the assistance they need and sometimes just to provide a sympathetic ear and friendly voice.

So I want to welcome this afternoon Mrs. Jill McMillin, Family Readiness Group leader, 2nd Battalion, 224th Aviation of the Virginia Army National Guard; Michael Evans, regional manager of the Army Reserve Family Program – what area are you from, Michael?

MICHAEL EVANS: Atlanta.

MR. PUNARO: Atlanta, okay. Mrs. Amie Minich, Navy Reserve Ombudsman, Navy Operational Support Center, Richmond, Virginia; Mrs. Alice Capeheart, Air National Guard Family Readiness volunteer, 113th Air Wing, D.C. Air National Guard; Ms. Laura Coseglia – did I pronounce that correctly?

LAURA COSEGLIA: Coseglia.

MR. PUNARO: Coseglia, director, Family Support, Air Force Reserve, 512th Air Wing, Dover, Delaware; and Mrs. Andrea Rollins, Marine Corps Reserve key volunteer advisor, 2nd Battalion, 25th Marine Regiment, 4th Marine Division.

So we welcome you. We ask each of you to describe the primary concerns that you hear from family members, the major categories of programs that you are asked to assist with, and how you go about finding that assistance. Finally we would welcome your suggestions on systemic problems that need to be fixed through changes to all policy. Thank you again for being here today. You provide a vital lifeline for Reserve and Guard families.

I would note that the chairman of the Joint Chief of Staff General Peter Pace issued a statement last Friday, May 11th, recognizing the Friday before Mother's Day as Military Spouse Appreciation Day. It was a much deserved tribute. And I noticed also in

the audience we have the spouse of one of our Marine Corps Reserve general officers Major General Drew Davis, Margaret Davis. Welcome, and who's been a very heavily involved and I know the Marine Corps key volunteer network for many, many, many years. So we're glad to have you here with us today as well.

Again, General Pace's tribute was much deserved. Spouses, parents, and other family members of our men and women in uniform deserve the nation's respect and gratitude. We hope you'll tell us in the hearing what the biggest challenges are that those families face when their loved ones are called away to serve a grateful nation. So again, we appreciate you being here this afternoon, and why don't we just start over here and go from left to right or right to left, depending on which way you're facing.

Mrs. McMillin?

JILL MCMILLIN: Gentlemen and lady – oh, there is one there. (Laughter.) That's okay.

I have come here today to speak about my experience as a Family Readiness Group leader of the 2nd Battalion, 224th Aviation Regiment, Virginian Army National Guard. The 224th Aviation is an air assault battalion that was recently deployed in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom from October 2005 to February 2007. It has approximately 400 soldiers broken into six companies. There are three Black Hawk Air Companies, one Aircraft Maintenance Company, one Ground Maintenance Company and one Headquarters Company. One of the three air companies was detached and reattached to the 159th Aviation Brigade and deployed from November 2005 to October 2006, not joining the main body. My husband Lieutenant Colonel Rob McMillin took command of the battalion in February 2003 and thus began my role as the Battalion FRG leader.

In April 2003, shortly after I took over, I attended a Basic Family Readiness Group Leadership Training, which was what was offered by our family programs. At that time, the FRG responsibilities in most of our units and certainly ours was centered on planning summer and holiday events, fundraising at the unit FRG. Our meetings were like every other month, whatever worked, and I had a whole two volunteers that I saw pretty much every other month. Appreciating that this current structure was similar to what had always been in place, but would not support a deployment, it was time that the realization that our current military world was, that it was a matter of if we were deployed, not really – I mean, it wasn't a matter of "if," it was a matter of "when."

So with that in mind, I had a proposed plan to the unit that I sent out through my husband and asked for some help in restructuring our FRG. It was well-received. At the time we all met, there was approximately like 15 volunteer spouses that showed up and very interested in helping us come together and create something that would last over the entire deployment, not just for right now. At that time, we had not gotten orders to deploy, but that was – the works were the air, I think. Once we all met, we discussed – our research really centered around everybody's good and bad deployments, whether they

were with this unit or others, and we came up with five areas that we needed to address to restructure our whole program.

The first was that we had a need for information communication structure that was similar to the military side. Our plan from that was to organize our Family Readiness Group as the same as the battalion. So we had a battalion FRG leader, which was me, and then five company coordinators and then our sixth company that added in later was the one from Maryland that went with another unit overseas.

Number two, we needed to decide a consistent way to communicate our chain of concern. In the past, we had phone trees. They were really inefficient. So we decided to use technology and come up with our primary means of communicating via e-mail with newsletters in a deployment time so that we could get to all family members everywhere who went on to the e-mail. And then phones if it was for a crisis or something that really couldn't be handled over the internet because it wasn't appropriate.

We had a very large single soldier population and very actively involved parents so we added to our group as our plan a specific parent coordinator, and she was responsible for just doing parent issues: get on the internet, finding support for the parent. They were still part of our chain of concern in that they got company or battalion information, but then they further got more parent support group and were hooked up with each other to help each other because their issues were much different or similar but different than those of us that are spouses.

The other problem that we faced or that we consider was that our soldiers and families live all over Virginia and Maryland, being that it was a helicopter unit. It wasn't your local hometown, so they weren't really close. We're spread all out, and that even became more apparent when we were deployed because we were adding in soldiers throughout the entire deployment from all over the United States.

That being said, our plan for our meetings to make it as accessible as possible was that we would have a planned day and time so that people could plan ahead, and then also provide childcare so in the time of deployment we didn't have to find childcare or the parents, moms didn't have to find that.

And then the other one was predominantly of our own unit. We also had a need to have a social network. We recognized that we don't have that because we don't live on a post. So we thought that we would be able to get regional coordinators that would provide within the state where we had clusters, they would provide some type of either a social or even support, dinner, something.

So that was how we rolled out our plan, and after we agreed upon that, I went to the National Guard Bureau Family Programs. They have a national volunteer workshop in the summer. I attended that with the knowledge that I had and then went to the courses there that was appropriate to what we had come up with our plan, came home and by that time we did have a date for deployment or mobilization, and so I scheduled with the

commander, the battalion commander, which was kind of easy to do. We had a family day with the battalion commander and all the soldiers and it was briefings from TRICARE, Red Cross, finance, legal, Family Readiness, and then the unit's mission. So this way we felt like everybody would be before we left on the same sheet of music.

It was at that time that we rolled out our company coordinator's role formally. Moving through that process, the next harder thing was to marry up my company coordinators and my company commanders and making sure they had a good relationship, at least in communication prior to deployment.

The unit was mobilized to Fort Dix in October, and we were doing great because they're running still stateside. We got very few calls. The unit actually deployed over to Iraq in January, 2006, and once the unit left the country, then we became getting a lot of e-mails and calls. The way we handled it was how we had originally planned. We had encouraged through our newsletters, made sure everybody knew who their company leader was. All the information would funnel through the company commanders or the company coordinators, and if they could handle it, they did, by referring them either to the military if it was a military question or rear detachment, or it was TRICARE, legal – something that we were not appropriate to answer – we would send them to our family assistance center designate.

And that's how we handled most of stuff, and up front it was mostly things like DEERS and just getting the right people in the right spots, getting people used to their new role as mom, dad – you know, the whole bit. After we had finished that, the unit actually arrived in their duty station and we got mostly calls of concern. Are they okay? Are they there? We can't – we haven't heard from them, which you would have expected. This is where having that relationship prior to with your company commanders and company leaders worked out just famously, because we were able to have e-mail or conversation, and we were able to get that information back to our families relatively quickly. And considering we had been building over about a six-month period of time and e-mail communication networks, so it was easy to find me, it was easy to find everybody. We were everywhere on every communication that we could do.

Let me see. Once we got everybody in country and we got through the first couple of months and everybody is kind of getting into their roles of things, the five most prevalent issues that we found in no particular order – and they were not the ones that required most of our time, but they were the ones that we repeatedly got – initial pay problems with inaccurate information in DEERS; Red Cross messages, just both ways, either we would have someone needing to contact or they would have somebody that they needed to send home and we needed to be there to be able to help the family; personal relationship problems: child support, benefits, custody, separation, things that we – that there were hard, but we didn't have to take care of those, we test those; a lack of knowledge of benefits available and where to get help; and then just family morale support of their current situations, increasing stress, appreciating the amount of workload that everybody was facing on their own, healthy coping, people would call up not feeling

very good and we would direct them where they needed to be, and then most were just needing to talk, just needed to have someone to talk to, especially in the evenings.

As leadership, our top challenges that we felt were inconsistent communication methods between the families and soldiers that always set up the haves and the have-nots and this and the thats, and the who's got this. So that was very frustrating for us because some family members were able to communicate daily, whereas others were not for weeks. I mean, my husband and I, we only spoke once a week and that was pretty good. We did e-mail because he had access to that being the commander. So I was okay with that, but it was very hard at the beginning because the wives or the family members would talk and they were feeling like I'm not being called, you know, and so that was hard. There really wasn't a resolution for that because there was nothing that you really could do unless it was a safety concern, then we could stick our nose into it, I guess, a little bit.

The media was a particularly stressful period because you felt like you needed to watch the TV, but then you didn't want to. As the leader, it was pretty assumed that I would keep up with the media because I was going to get calls and I needed to be able to address them, so I did do that. We emphasized as much as we could "no news is good news," and that sort of worked. Having new soldiers added to the unit after mobilization was hard for us to keep up with because it was hard to keep up with those soldiers and their family members. I think we did a pretty good job, but I think we could have done better, maybe with some more support. Again, the company commanders would e-mail the new soldiers and contact them. We would do the best we could.

And then fourth, for the leader – the volunteers was it was hard to follow up on longer term issues or things that were trying and then also be able to take care of your kids and mowing the yard, and the bills, and so we found that particularly stressful because we didn't have enough hours in the day, and we felt like we were taken away from our own families knowing that we felt, you know, obligated to do this.

As a leadership group in whole we were very concerned and I think all the families were of the safety of our soldiers and their not knowing, I think that's the hardest because you don't know – they know what's going on and they're pretty well-versed, but we always had a plan and we had a plan on how we were going to handle a crisis and we just really never wanted to enact it, and we blessedly didn't have to. I had a great support from our chief of staffs office and Family Programs, they were available to us. So I feel very blessed in that realm that I was able to make it through and we were not paralyzed by the fear and concern if a helicopter went down. We were pretty good about figuring out if it was the right amount of man or right amount of men crew or – and then we would get validation from the higher-ups when so needed.

I guess throughout the whole deployment, we had – we did fairly well, I think, as a group of people. There were things that we could do better. I think our deployment really did a – did well because of our communication. There was really – by the end of the deployment, there was very little that we couldn't accomplish on either side. We

were very, very good at it, and we had gotten very good at it, but we were very grateful to end it as well.

The stresses that were predominant in the family members of the soldiers at that point were as you had mentioned earlier, the no local post for access and support and even knowing how to, and the need for a strong support system prior to actual deployment. I think if personal families don't have a good network prior to they're really lost during a deployment, which would be nice if we as a group could do that for them, help them. The general community and the school ignorance on the current roles of the National Guard is particularly frustrating. They still kind of think that, you know, we're weekend warriors and that we don't do the missions that we do overseas and that's frustrating as a spouse, I guess. And then you do become instantly military.

There was little or no funding for regional programs, so we were basically – a lot of our postage came out of our pocket and a lot of the work and stuff that was done was done by us and that was somewhat frustrating to have to earn money and then you really weren't allowed to because of the rules. So it was very difficult. No compensation for the volunteers that took their time, oftentimes their salaries or their family income went down because their soldiers are in the National Guard. It's not the same salary. And they were doing a regular job and then they would be on active duty and that's a significant loss in their income, and so it was frustrating, I think, for us because there's nothing we could do.

And things that we think could be done that would help the families: financial compensation: government pay for volunteers are reimbursed for expenses for internet, small things, nothing too large; have a standardized battle book for our FRGs nationwide – something that they could work off, so that we're all working on the same sheet of music because Red Cross, things like that are centralized, they all are the same; have a validation and recognition of the importance of having a well-run, organized FRG at the national command. I think we felt that in our communities and we felt in within ours, but I think that the public at large or the commanders that we need to value this equally to what's going on in the field.

I appreciate that they need to spend more time, but I think that if we could do that, our soldiers would be able to do their jobs knowing that their families were cared for. It's also a recruitment and retention thing. That would be nice. And then an increased education for our teachers in the community on the new National Guard versus their perception and how that affects them.

And I think I've run my time, I'm sorry.

MR. PUNARO: That's fine. Do you have anything else you'd like to say?

MS. MCMILLIN: The only thing that I did find throughout our deployment – and I would be very brief – is that we also had a lot of donations coming in and that was very hard. So we – that could be something that could be taken care of at a state level

possibly, but we ended up having a donations coordinator making sure that these folks got “thank you” notes, and that we were recognizing them appropriately because you can’t take and not give, and that was very kind and it was very nice that they did that.

We also found that having like a fundraiser or a T-shirt person just to do the little things from the soldiers -- that was like a whole job in itself. Our newsletters were very helpful to families. People hung on to that because there were articles from the soldiers in our newsletters and we made it so that they would appreciate some of the humor, and I think at this time in our lives, I think that the National Guard is always in a state of deployment. It’s just in what phase you’re in, and I don’t think you can go back to business as usual when you get from a deployment because you’re really in the preparation stage for another deployment because you don’t ever know. So I think it’s more important now than ever to have a well-organized and supported FRG so that our families don’t have to have something new dropped in their lap. They just go. They know and they go.

That’s all, and thank you.

MR. PUNARO: Great. Thank you. Now, to get a clarification. You are a volunteer volunteer. You had your job by virtue of the fact that your husband was a commander. Is that correct?

MS. MCMILLIN: I got my job by marriage, yes. (Laughter.)

MR. PUNARO: Right. So as the command changes over, does the –

MS. MCMILLIN: Does it all fall apart? Hope not.

MR. PUNARO: – does another person become the key volunteer lead for that unit?

MS. MCMILLIN: What actually – we were very blessed and I think you can do it two different ways. You can have your company coordinators as the company commanders’ wives. We did not have that. We didn’t require that. It was not something -- we actually had people who were stable folks in the unit. They’re of – the air companies actually had warrant officers’ wives because we had warrants, enlisted, and officers.

So we’re very fortunate that our stability, but actually six months into our deployment I started a transition plan and so every key role, except for the two that we couldn’t get which were regional and a youth coordinator, we have already replaced and then my successor has already been named and we – she was actually a part of the group as a company. So we’re just moving into the next phase. So check us in a year. See if it works. (Laughter.)

MR. PUNARO: I'm going to ask person the same question just so we have a baseline. Now, this question is – and as my wife would say, being married to a marine is a full-time job – did you have a full-time job other than your key volunteer job and so it's a full-time civilian job as well or not?

MS. MCMILLIN: I did not.

MR. PUNARO: You did not.

MS. MCMILLIN: I actually was – I was in a part-time role and I had another volunteer position that I turned over when my husband took over command because I knew the realities of that.

MR. PUNARO: Okay.

MS. MCMILLIN: We did have two leaders, however, that were full-time moms with full-time jobs.

MR. PUNARO: Right. Okay, thank you.

Mr. Evans?

MICHAEL EVANS: Chairman Punaro and distinguished members of the Commission, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you to talk about Army Reserve Family programs. On behalf of General Jack Stultz, chief of the Army Reserve and our 205,000 warrior citizens and their families, I welcome this hearing and its focus on Army Reserve families.

Mr. Chairman, we recruit soldiers, but we retain families. Throughout our century of service to the nation, our warrior citizens have never experienced the operational tempo we are in right now. Our paradigm has changed. As today's Army Reserve, it is imperative that we not overlook the contributions of our Army Reserve families make to the total force.

The Army Reserve recognizes that soldiers and their relationship with their spouse and their family is critical to the overall effectiveness of the soldier when they are deployed. You've already touched on this a little bit in your opening statement about our geographical dispersion and the lack of facilities and services available to our families in the cities and towns where they live. Unlike families of active duty soldiers, our Army Reserve families do not live on or near military installations. They live in a community without a significant military population.

It's been four years since we implemented a deployment cycle support plan for soldiers and their families. It consists of a series of activities at different stages of the mobilization. One of these activities is mobilization education and awareness briefings to ensure soldiers and families understand different benefit and entitlement changes. Right

now, we are hearing a lot about challenges associated with reintegration and we do not have the resources or manpower available to develop a comprehensive post-mobilization reintegration plan. We need additional resources to provide additional program support in the crucial six months post-mobilization.

We know our programs are successful because our families are telling us that it works, but our programs have been seriously underfunded. Most of our volunteers are spouses, the very people we are in desperate need of reaching. An assessment of Army Reserve Family programs in 2004 found a number of shortcomings and gaps in our programs. One of the shortcomings and gaps was we relied too heavily on volunteers to do some critical tasks upon mobilization. The report also found that resources were not prioritized in most instances and lacked command emphasis.

Command support varies widely and though no commander says family programs are unimportant, their commitment is not regularly or consistently emphasized to their subordinates. In general, there's an overall lack of accountability at that unit level to make sure that they implement these programs to be successful. A number of focus groups were conducted by Walter Reed with soldiers in theater and found that more than half of those contacted during these focus groups reported that they were neither satisfied with Family Readiness Groups or rear detachments. Part of that dissatisfaction is that family programs are understaffed and cannot presently meet the diverse needs of families and the geographic dispersion that we're facing. We need to change that.

Our family programs are designed to serve families where they live. Because our families are geographically dispersed with the lack of services and facilities, we must market our programs to families through our website, through magazine articles and referrals. We partner with the active component and the Army National Guard, as well as community based organization such as 4H, VFW, American Legions to reach our families.

Our most visible success has been the initiation of children's programs. The Army Reserve realizes the unique pressures children of Army Reserve families face, especially when a parent deploys. You also mentioned in your opening statement about the "suddenly military" kid syndrome. We addressed that as well. Our child and youth services programs are designed to reduce the conflict between parental responsibilities and soldier mission requirements. The most significant issue families have raised when one or both parents are mobilized with the Army Reserve is childcare. Some of our programs to address this issue include Operational Military Childcare, which helps families buy down the cost of childcare during deployment.

We utilize state-licensed or regulated childcare service in their communities at reduced rates. Operation Childcare is a nationwide voluntary community-based initiative that provides short-term respite care while soldiers are back on R&R leave. Operation Military Kids focuses on children of "suddenly military" families. Part of this process is the educator training program that helps educators understand these unique challenges faced by our kids out there in the communities.

As we implement the Army Force Generation Model, which adds some predictability to the mobilization of Army Reserve soldiers and their families, it is necessary that we receive additional resources in manpower and funding for family members to attend these mobilization awareness briefings so they understand some of the challenges that they will be facing.

There is no argument that multiple deployments create stress on the family and on the marriage. One issue that we have heard often is that soldiers are leaving the military because of the stress deployments have on the family. The change in healthcare coverage going from an employer-sponsored healthcare program to TRICARE and their lack of understanding of the program creates many challenges. Finally, the stress of not knowing when or if the deployed spouse will return home safely adds to the already elevated stress of the family.

Mr. Chairman, General Stultz took command of the Army Reserve one year ago. I know in the past 12 months he has had the opportunity to meet with soldiers in theater and their families here at home. He has repeatedly mentioned that it is an honor to serve with what he believes are this century's greatest generation. If we are to retain these great soldiers and future leaders, we must make a commitment to our soldiers and their families. Full funding for Army Reserve Family Programs will enable the Army Reserve to continue to serve this great nation as an operational force.

I thank you for the opportunity to share with you the status of our family programs, and I look forward to any questions.

MR. PUNARO: Thank you. Now, you're listed as a regional manager. What is your status with the Army Reserve?

MR. EVANS: Sir, I'm paid staff.

MR. PUNARO: Are you an army reservist on active duty, or are you a civil service employee, or what's your –

MR. EVANS: I'm a Department of Army civilian employee, sir.

MR. PUNARO: Department of Army. Now, does each of the Army Reserve units – do they, say, like an Army Reserve truck company, or an Army Reserve composite battalion, would they have a lead key volunteer for that individual unit, or do they have paid staff as well? What's – you're regional level – what's like – what's the equivalent of the Army National Guard, Mrs. McMillin?

MR. EVANS: Yeah, in 2001, just to answer your question, we had 22 paid full-time staff in Army Reserve Family Programs, and we relied heavily on volunteers at the unit level to implement family programs. So in theory, each truck company would have a Family Readiness Group with volunteers to provide services and support to families. But

reality was – and that was found in our assessment – is that the volunteers, even though they had great intent, some of those critical tasks that and things that we needed done, they weren't able to accomplish. They were spouses with full-time jobs trying to take care of the home front while the soldier was in theater, and quite frankly, they couldn't do it all.

MR. PUNARO: So what – how did they do it today then?

MR. EVANS: Increased staffing. Today, we have 181 full-time family program staff and the hope is that we grow with more paid staff out there in the units, the battalions to help our soldiers and families.

MR. PUNARO: Okay. Great. Thanks.

Ms. Minich?

AMIE MINICH: Good afternoon, Chairman.

MR. PUNARO: – pull that microphone over to you, then pushing that button. There you go.

MS. MINICH: Sorry. Thank you.

Good afternoon. My name is Amie Minich and I am the ombudsman volunteer for our Navy Operational Support Center in Richmond, Virginia. I have 196 reservists out of our center. We cover three states. We have Virginia, Maryland and North Carolina. I currently have 49 soldiers that are deployed. I am making contact with all of the family members every four to six weeks to make sure any issues or questions or problems that they have are being addressed and that they're being helped.

I have been in the ombudsman program since 2000 when I left civilian life and married my husband who was a chief in the Navy. He had 19 years in when I met him. My first duty station was in Jacksonville, Florida at -- (unintelligible) -- Southeast, and I started in October 2000, and the first big issue I had to deal with was September 11th. At that point, I saw just how unprepared we were to support our family members. The first big wave of deployments that we had after September 11th we were scrambling for resources and in the years since then, we have come a long way. Our resources across the board have greatly increased. They are much more user-friendly, and we are able to find information for our family members much easier and much faster, thanks to the resources we have available.

One of the biggest resources that we have is Military OneSource. This is an excellent resource for everyone regardless of your military affiliation. They serve everyone. They have an 800-number available 24 hours a day, seven days a week and is answered by real people. You don't get a menu prompt, you don't get voicemail, you get a real person. They all are very friendly. They are very helpful and they are very eager

to assist you with whatever question or concern or problem that you might have. That is a resource that I use almost on a daily basis for someone. And the website is very user-friendly, and that is also available to anyone regardless of location.

The – excuse me – the next resource that we have as far across the board joint resources that encompasses all factions of the military is called ISFAC. It is the Inter-Service Family Assistance Committee. Now, this is a relatively new resource for us, but they provide assistance to families of service members, active and reserve, from your closet military source regardless of your military affiliation or location. The committees coordinate resources of the Department of Defense, the United States Coast Guard, the National Guard and your family service centers at the time of mobilization deployment – excuse me – and disaster, they are available for disaster relief. They coordinate every available resource that they have and they put it all together and they have just this huge pool of information that you can pull from for anything that you might need.

One of the biggest questions that we as ombudsman get is: how do I find a qualified TRICARE provider when I'm not close to a military treatment facility? All of my family members are more than 50 miles away from a military treatment facility. So I strictly have all rural family members. And getting into TRICARE and learning more about it as I've gone on along, TRICARE information is very outdated for the family members. And this is my biggest negative that I've found so far. The information is not up-to-date. When you call for assistance, they have great people that will help you on the phone, but it's – you have to get through the menu system first. It's not user-friendly. The website is not user-friendly. So this is the biggest issue in my opinion that we need to address.

We have to be able to get this information to our families in an easier, friendlier way. We have to make it more readily available to them. It's hard to find a civilian provider when you don't know what you need to look for when you get your listing of providers. You could go through the list and from personal experience I got a directory for my area approximately a year ago and the first ten people I called no longer participated with TRICARE. So that was frustrating enough to just make you throw up your hands and say, I'm all done. And so this is the biggest issue that I deal with personally as far as getting phone calls from family members also.

Then, just being able to be available. The ombudsman program on the Navy Reserve side is strictly volunteer. So we're moms, we have part-time jobs, we have full-time jobs, we have, you know, families in every age range so we make the time to volunteer because we genuinely care about what we're doing. And from my personal experience, we have come a long way and as long as we continue to grow with sharing our information through all branches of service, our program will only get stronger, and I think we're headed in the right direction with that.

So just please continue to support our family advocacy programs that we have available, and our ombudsman and our key volunteers, and keep having these meetings so we can get better ideas of what is needed and what we're doing very well with.

Thank you.

MR. PUNARO: Thank you. I take it you are a volunteer volunteer?

MS. MINICH: Yes, sir.

MR. PUNARO: And you're also serving in this capacity not by virtue of your husband's assignment.

MS. MINICH: No, I actually – I started by default. When we first moved to Jacksonville, there was not a person available to be the ombudsman and so one day my husband came home and he said, honey, I volunteered you to do this. (Laughter.)

MR. PUNARO: Aha.

MS. MINICH: And I said what is it and what do I do, and he said, well, I don't know. You'll find out when you go in and talk to the CO. So I went in and I talked to Admiral – (unintelligible) – at the time was our commander, and he said, well, this is the only information I had, and he handed me a couple pages and said, good luck. So I've started from the ground up.

MR. PUNARO: Now, do the Navy units have volunteers by unit?

MS. MINICH: Yes.

MR. PUNARO: As well?

MS. MINICH: Yes.

MR. PUNARO: You're kind of the overarching for a specific region –

MS. MINICH: I am the reserve center ombudsman –

MR. PUNARO: Reserve center, okay in a particular center.

MS. MINICH: – in the Navy Operational Support Center ombudsman. I have nine units under myself – under the wing of the reserve center, and right now we only have six unit ombudsman. The other three units have less than 30 members and so I just kind of take care of any issues that might come up with them.

MR. PUNARO: And do you have any kind of other employment?

MS. MINICH: When I first started, I was a full-time salesperson, and then I had my son and needed to be home.

MR. PUNARO: Okay.

MS. MINICH: So I worked part-time and now I'm home all the time with my two little ones.

MR. PUNARO: Great. Thank you. Okay.

Ms. Capehart?

ALICE CAPEHART: Good afternoon. My name is Alice Capehart and I'm a volunteer for the District of Columbia National Guard, which is a unique position in that we both are joint Army and Air, so I volunteer sometimes both Army and Air.

To the members of the Commission on the National Guard and Reserves, it is indeed a privilege and pleasure for me to speak to you briefly as a volunteer for the Family Readiness Group Program. I have learned much about and have gained a great deal of respect for the men and women who lead and serve this organization, and I must tell you that I am probably a two and a half year volunteer. I recently married. My husband was already in the Air National Guard and I'm a full-time worker, but he also said, well, you need something else to do – (laughter) – and so why not? And volunteerism has always been a part of my life, so it was just another arm of something that I wanted to do.

I know that the Guard's mission is always ready for mobilization and plays a vital role in our nation's defense. Like the Guard, the Family Readiness Group too parallels that vital role: always ready for mobilization. The question is: how do they do this? Well, they provide the arena whereby families are prepared for the stresses related to deployment through family group meetings, informative trainings and fun-related outings. These outings and skilled training sessions help, in my opinion, to minimize family anguish, fear and distress.

The Family Readiness Group offers a myriad of services such as mental health and financial planning services, marriage counseling, and other family intervention that is needed. Therefore, our service members leave for their mission assured that their families will receive reliable and family support from the Family Readiness Group, which in turn acts as a stabilizer for the service member.

For example, when I walked through the doors of the Family Readiness Group support center for the first time as a stranger, I was sincerely and courteously greeted with warmth and compassion, and I have observed that this is an ongoing thing, not just for me, but for all of the family members that enter through those doors. One immediately appreciates the assistance and concern offered as they began to help a family member. The energy, the enthusiasm, the resourcefulness and the skill in which they are served is exemplary. I'd like to share a couple of stories or maybe two or three short stories of my experiences.

First, I met a young lady who recently was married, like me, but perhaps not as aggressive or as outspoken as I am and she was new to the District of Columbia community. She at the time was not employed, knew very few, if any, people, and was somewhat shy and withdrawn. As she was adjusting to her new community and seeking employment, her husband received orders that he was soon to be deployed, and in her words, she said, “I went off. I was angry. How could they do this to me? I’d moved away from my family. I’m in a strange place, and now he’s going to be deployed.” Enter the Family Readiness Group organization.

They were there. They provided that immediate friendly support to defuse that mistrust and anger that she felt. Consequently, her self-esteem and confidence has been boosted. She found that employment and she is now supportive and understanding of and can be a life partner to her husband, and understanding of his mission.

A second story. I attended – my husband and I attended a retreat perhaps maybe almost three years ago now, and we met this couple. We learned a lot. They learned a lot about us and we sort of shared our experiences and how we could improve our families, our relationships with each other. I found that they had four children. The wife was the military person; the husband was a civilian. What I noticed that when I went to the center that I missed seeing her and found that she had been deployed to Iraq. He was left with four children, teenagers, preteens. In his words, he said that the family support center became my lifeline. Sometimes budget constraints are stretched to the – (unintelligible) – and they have – that they were there to help me when we had a shortfall.”

Well, when she returned, we had another meeting, and they were asked to share their experiences. They shared their experiences as how well they were able to communicate and help their marriage. He also said that if it hadn’t been for the Family Support Center, I don’t know what I would have done. My children became involved in activities, which helped me after school. And he was working. So this was one of those positives of the Family Readiness Group.

Another story – it has been my experience – and I’m a 30-year veteran teacher – that young people are affected by events and life changes a bit differently. Our children are vulnerable and it’s important that we make them feel safe and secure. Enter our youth component of the Family Readiness Group. I feel that it’s a vital arm of that program.

At one of the retreats that I attended where the youth were participating, two of the young people gave brief accounts of their affiliation with the Family Youth Support Program, which has changed their perspective. And as I heard mentioned, young people in a school setting – because you are part of the National Guard – and the civilian children, they know perhaps that your father or your mother may be going somewhere, but it doesn’t affect them. It’s just something and you know it.

So when young people come together with like experiences, they feel that they then can let their hair down, they can express their thoughts, their fears, and their

successes. And one was a young lady whose mother was deployed, one was a young man whose father was deployed. And they gave their testimony as to how being involved in wholesome activities with like-minded young people, that this has caused them to grow. They were still anxious about their parents being away, but they also had something else to look forward to. And as a result, they were able to get up in a mixed group, express themselves, and they were grateful for the opportunities afforded them through the family readiness group program.

Finally, as a volunteer, I realize full well the responsibilities and importance of this organization. They strive to provide essential services to the families, and the Family Readiness Group Center often acts for those who entered through those doors as a respite from the stresses of everyday living. I mean, be grateful for the opportunity to be a part of this group. And I hope that in some small way, I have helped to advance and carry out their goal and mission, which is mission first, and families always.

I am indeed grateful to be a part of this. Because I work and because I travel from where I work to this area because my husband was assigned to the DC National Guard unit, when I am here, I am able to go in and whatever help is needed, and I can fill in. This is what I do.

MR. PUNARO: Great. Thank you so much. And you are a volunteer volunteer. And anybody that knows anything about teaching knows that you have more than a fulltime other job.

Now, the center you referred to, are the personnel that man and run that center –

MS. CAPEHEART: They're paid staff.

MR. PUNARO: They're paid staff. And they're augmented by volunteers then.

MS. CAPEHEART: Yes.

MR. PUNARO: Now, where is that center located? Is it like at the DC Armory?

MS. CAPEHEART: Well, we have the DC Armory and one at Andrews Air Force Base.

MR. PUNARO: Right. So is that true for the Guard nationwide? Do they have these kind of centers all over the country or is this maybe unique to the DC Guard? We don't know. Okay, we'll have to check that out. Again, thank you. This has been very helpful. And I'm going to show the witnesses what a chicken I am. I'm going to call on Laura next. I'm not going to try to pronounce her last name. Laura?

LAURA COSEGLIA: Mr. Chairman, distinguished members of the commission, I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today to represent the Air Force Family Readiness Program. My name is Laura Coseglia, and I have served in family readiness

for the past 14 years. I currently work at the 512 Airlift Wing out of Dover Air Force Base in Delaware. And we have 1,768 military families coming from 38 different states.

Today, I would like to discuss the following issues – one – the inception of family support; multiple deployments; financial issues that we're facing; geographically separated families; technology; reintegration; and the total force initiative. Family readiness positions were funded at reserve installations in 1992 following the lessons learned from Desert Shield and Desert Storm. What that study showed was that our families were not prepared for the deployment cycle. Our reservists were definitely prepared to do that jobs that they were trained to do, but the families that were left behind were not totally familiar with the military process, and again, to be faced with the separation.

Family support manning was built, I believe, on a peacetime initiative, and has remained unchanged, yet our reserve families have been players in every major conflict, and continue to volunteer in unprecedented numbers. The 512 has activated 1,300 airmen for Operation Desert Storm, 420 following the events of 9/11, 960 airmen for Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom. Since 9/11, our airmen have served over 969,000 days of active duty. And in this fiscal year alone, we have served 4,480 days of service.

Many of these families have served on multiple deployments. This has increased the individual emotional stress as well as stress on the family as a unit. I have seen increased financial difficulties stemming from poor financial planning, no financial planning, or families who have become recently separated or divorced. Single parenting is also a big concern in the program now, because we have now more parents who are single that are serving, so they have special concerns that we need to address.

The financial issues from a leadership perspective, I think, it is a readiness issue, and I think one of the things that we're seeing now is that security clearances are now being delayed because of some of the financial issues that our families are facing. So it's something that we do need to take a look at. The challenge, I think, in family readiness is a continued need for service to support our reserve families who are currently serving on active duty and getting those families who are not ready or who are not currently serving ready to perform their duty, because we know it's going to happen sooner or later.

Family readiness, I believe, has become a 365-day operation. It's causing burnout and fatigue on the directors who have had no additional fulltime manning to meet the growing demands of our families, and the expectation to deliver new services that have recently been added – reintegration, pre-separation counseling, dealing with the families affected by BRAC, and responding to natural disasters. Fortunately, throughout the Air Force Reserve Command, we have had volunteer groups like the Key Family Member Program to help augment our services to families. So while that is a blessing, again, we have to realize that the taskings that we give volunteers to do cannot be those that are specialized.

I think our families are becoming fatigued as well and that their morale is negatively affected as they try to manage additional stress and responsibilities that come with these multiple deployments. Families that are geographically separated from our installation are of special concern. How do we reach out and keep them connected to our military family? One answer may be technology, but I think our websites have become so sanitized and security so tight that we have created a barrier for our families to reach needed resources. Again, I think we need to readdress base websites so that families can access needed information from the unit that they're assigned to.

Under the Air Force Personnel Delivery System Transformation, the Air Force is now shifting from an 85 percent customer service to an 85 percent web-based program. This transformation brings additional stress to our families as they now try to manage everything from pay to retirement. Keep in mind that not all military families have computers in their homes or access to Internet providers. Families want people who they can reach out and touch, whether it's to find out information on an entitlement, or someone to listen to.

The next area of focus is reintegration. Typically, a reserve member returning home from a deployment completes his or her end processing the same day they return. Since our members are returning as individuals and not as groups, they are required to go door-to-door to receive the required signatures before leaving. As you can appreciate, the only thing the airman longs to do is to return to his or her family. The frame of mind for discussing reintegration issues is of little value at this point in time. While reintegration information is provided to the family, typically 30 days prior to the member's return, the little that we are able to put forth before the service member may fall on deaf ears. There is not a mandatory time for us to meet with our airmen to follow up with resources and needed information. Families need help in the transition process and many times, this help is needed weeks or months after they separate from active duty. The medical screening process and mandated post-deployment questionnaires are completed by the member with the attitudes that if they give the wrong answer, this will extend their time on active duty. I think this entire process needs to be reviewed, and we need policies that will ensure we are setting up appropriate timelines for briefing reintegration and for follow-up.

The last challenge I would like to address is the total force concept. Being in an associate wing, I can tell you that this is a work in progress. I don't believe that the active duty is funded to support reserve families on a day-to-day basis, nor do I believe that they fully understand the challenges that our families face. Balancing work, family, and the military commitment requires that family readiness agencies are prepared to work with families regardless of what status they're in.

Family readiness must remain proactive in educating families on readiness issues and preparing them for the eventuality of the long separation that they may endure. This means that we have to support our families 365 days a year. We really can't wait until an airman volunteers for duty or that they are activated before we begin the process of preparing for the separation. I think this fact alone separates us from active duty and the

fact that family readiness must continue to interact with families between UTAs so that the readiness piece is in place by the time the family begins their active duty service.

The structure of the reserve program, the increased ops tempo, and the need for our citizen airmen dictate that we continue to provide family readiness support on a continual basis, so that we can address the needs of our families effectively and resolve issues at the lowest possible level, heading off crisis situations and curtailing early return home by the service member due to family crisis. As additional forces deploy in support of our new strategies in Iraq, family support personnel will need to respond for the growing demand for services in support. Leadership, I believe, must remain engaged and supportive of families, something that I think they tend to get away from. The fact that we are now deploying as individuals and not as large groups, I think that has lent itself for some complacency by leadership and we need to reengage them in the process.

Our families are in need of deployment support – I think again – now more than ever. And I think we have to keep the process of educating our families on how to handle the military lifestyle and how to access needed resources. We have to do that every single day. As reserve families are out in their communities doing their civilian jobs, we have to get them thinking about the fact that at some point, they will be asked to serve their country. And if they haven't done it already, their time is coming. In order to meet all of the needs and to strengthen all phases of our deployment, I think we're going to need additional funding and an ongoing commitment to the families. Thank you again for this opportunity, and I'll be happy to answer any questions.

MR. PUNARO: Thank you. And just so we all understand, you're at an active duty air force base, Dover. Your associate wing is basically a reserve wing married up with an active wing.

MS. COSEGLIA: Yes, sir.

MR. PUNARO: So is the family support organization supporting both the active and reserve at the same time, or is it two separate organizations?

MS. COSEGLIA: There are two separate organizations. There is an active duty family support center and there is myself that represents the Air Force Reserve.

MR. PUNARO: And are you fulltime?

MS. COSEGLIA: Yes, sir.

MR. PUNARO: Right. So you are an employee of the Air Force Reserve?

MS. COSEGLIA: Yes.

MR. PUNARO: Right, okay. Thank you. Andrea?

ANDREA ROLLINS: I don't think I need to say anything, because they've already talked about it all.

Good afternoon, it's a privilege to address the commission on the –

MR. PUNARO: Push that mike over a little closer so they can pick it up. Thank you.

MS. ROLLINS: To address the Commission on the National Guard and Reserve regarding reserve family concerns and support. My name is Andrea Rollins and I am the key volunteer advisor for Second Battalion, 25th Marine Regiment. My husband, Lieutenant Colonel Jeff Rollins, is the commanding officer of 225. Our family has been actively engaged in the global war on terror since Jeff's first activation in December 2001, when his unit was attached to 2nd Marine Division in support of Operation Enduring Freedom, Noble Eagle. In 2003, 225 was mobilized again and sent to Iraq with 1 MEF in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. During those activations, I served as the key volunteer coordinator for Company E, 225. The battalion is currently anticipating another deployment in 2008.

I am joined today by Mrs. Margaret Bergen Davis, our Marine Corps key volunteer network subcommittee advisor. The Marine Corps utilizes the same family readiness programs for both active duty and reserve units. So our KVN subcommittee oversees the program for all marine units and families, no matter what their status. Within the Marine Corps, our family readiness programs actively involve family volunteers to ensure that the information reaches all family members. The KVN is responsible for communicating with the marine families, providing information and referral as needed, as well as passing official word from the command to the families as directed by the CO.

The need for active communication increases dramatically when news of an impending activation is passed. The success of the family readiness program during the deployment may depend on whether the communication structure was functioning properly before the deployment. Marines and families who feel they have a capable support structure in place will ask questions and seek out resources from a proactive, pre-emptive posture before situations reach a crisis level. During our battalion's last deployment, the family issues that were voiced most often concern lack of communication with their marines, lack of preparation for dealing with such issues as Tricare coverage and access, obtaining ID cards, insulation support, resolving pay issues, and even casualty notification processes.

Since that deployment in 2003, the resources and information available for our key volunteers to provide to the families has grown exponentially. Now, we have the Marine Corps' moto-mail program to supplement communications with deployed marines. We have Military One Source to assist our families with resources searches, translation services, and even counseling services. We have programs offered by patriotic companies and organizations that provide free summer camps, free or reduced

amusement park admissions, and care packages for our marines. We have improved visibility and access to DOD programs, such as employers in support of the Guard and Reserve. And our Marine Corps units have embraced early family preparation through pre-deployment briefs, family days, and utilization of the KVN to spread word of new resources to the families.

Our families still have needs, and the one issue we hear voiced the loudest is Tricare concerns. The need to address the weakness in this program cannot be overstated. Adequate healthcare coverage is critical to reserve families. They face the unenviable task of transitioning from their existing healthcare programs to Tricare and back again in a 12-month period. This is not a small task. Tricare is a difficult and unwieldy program, even to active duty families, yet our reserve families are expected to navigate the Tricare maze with minimal access and assistance, while also dealing with the stresses of deployment.

Tricare issues include benefits and process problems, such as denials for covered services, delayed referrals, and deduction waivers that are never applied. Access issues include problems finding medical specialists who accept Tricare, or the frustration of finally finding a participating provider just to find out they're not accepting new patients. Additionally, the high costs of continuing coverage for families needs to be addressed. Reserve families may not be able to return to their previous health coverage, if the marine reservist is unable to return to his or her employment due to business failures, et cetera, and transitional coverage beyond the 180-day temp period needs to be more affordable for those families,

The stress of deployment on our marines and their immediate and extended families is very real. But their resilience is nothing short of astonishing. They handle the disruption of their civilian lives, the stress and worry of deployment, and sometimes even financial difficulties caused by loss of income. And what they ask for in return is simply communication and support. My written testimony includes other concerns voiced by our families, along with some of the programs developed to help address them. As key volunteers, we will continue to do our part educating marine reserve families about the resources available to them. Or for those military families who may not be fortunate enough to have a key volunteer to personally guide them to the right resource, they need your support in getting timely information about existing and new family support programs to all the reserve families across America. Thank you for listening and hearing their concerns.

MR. PUNARO: Thank you. And you're a volunteer volunteer, correct?

MS. ROLLINS: Volun-toll, but yes.

MR. PUNARO: Volun-toll, yeah. And we see the volun-toller battalion commanders in the audience. Welcome as well. 225 is spread in more than one city; do you have key volunteers at the company level?

MS. ROLLINS: Yes, sir.

MR. PUNARO: So that's your network?

MS. ROLLINS: I'm the adviser. We have a battalion key volunteer coordinator, and I'm her adviser.

MR. PUNARO: Okay, I see. But in other words, when the battalion changes out with a new battalion commander, a new key volunteer would roll in. Is that the way it works?

MS. ROLLINS: Yes, sir.

MR. PUNARO: Yeah, and do you have other fulltime activities as well?

MS. ROLLINS: Other than being a mom – but that's –

MR. PUNARO: Right, no we already ceded the fact that being a marine's wife is more than a fulltime job. We admit that. Okay, great.

I'm going to turn first – thank you all for your testimony and getting that baseline of facts out there – Commissioner Patty (sp) Lewis chairs our personnel and family subcommittee. And she's going to have the lead for a lot of these issues, and actually has another meeting to go to, so I'm going to turn to her for the first set of questions.

PATTY LEWIS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you all. This has been very, very valuable. I'm going to start with one issue that two of you have addressed already, and that is Tricare.

If I could just get from each of you an idea of how and where you get your information about Tricare? Is the system user-friendly? And what suggestions you would have for information flow. And if we can, Andrea, I know you have some strong views, so we'll start with you, if that's okay.

MS. ROLLINS: I think the big thing for me with Tricare going from instant fulltime military family – and especially as a female and with a child – your OB and your pediatrician, you have relationships with those doctors. And if they don't accept Tricare and you're thrown out there to find a participating doctor. And if you find one, that's great, but what if they're not accepting new patients? What are you going to do? So as far as getting information on Tricare – like she pointed to – basically, calling them, and pressing every button you can until you can get a person.

MS. LEWIS: Did you have the option of continuing with private sector healthcare?

MS. ROLLINS: My husband's employer had it one way each time. One time, we did not have the option of his civilian healthcare, and the other time, we did.

MS. LEWIS: Do you think if the department was to offer some sort of stipend or assistance that the employers would be more willing to continue that healthcare, and might that provide more continuity of care?

MS. ROLLINS: Absolutely, yes.

MS. LEWIS: Okay.

MS. ROLLINS: I don't know if I answered all your questions.

MS. LEWIS: No, that's fine. Thank you.

MS. COSEGLIA: I actually don't run into a lot of Tricare issues. We have a Tricare representative that is right on the installation, so I think they have that face-to-face contact.

MS. LEWIS: The same thing that because I have not had an opportunity to use Tricare, that is referred to – we had someone that takes care of that sort of thing.

MS. MINICH: Our Tricare issues have been because all of our families are away from the military treatment facility – is having updated provider directories. The directories are outdated, and I know it's time-consuming and it is not cost-effective. But a lot of our families don't have the computer access, so they could go online and look up the list from the Tricare website. They rely on that actual physical directory.

MS. LEWIS: And they're primarily standards users?

MS. MINICH: Yes.

MS. LEWIS: I know that's been a significant issue over the last several years.

MS. MINICH: That is the biggest issue that we have right now and that I hear about is not being able to find a participating advisor.

MS. LEWIS: It's been a real Catch-22 because the managed care support contractors didn't really have a responsibility in that regard, but DOD felt that – so there was a lot of finger-pointing for quite a while, but I know Congress has taken some action to try to rectify that situation. Thank you, Mr. Evans?

MR. EVANS: From our environment, with the geographic dispersion of our Army Reserve soldiers and their families and our cross-leveling issue – soldiers reassigned from California or New York into a unit in Michigan – the mobilized families can't come to a mobilization briefing to learn about Tricare benefits and entitlements.

And that whole transition from an employer-sponsored healthcare program to Tricare, learning the rules, enrollment, and understanding the system is a great challenge for our families when they can't come and hear the briefing. And we do the information referral and we refer them out to Tricare health benefits advisor in their area to help the families. It's a big challenge – that transition to a program they're unfamiliar with and then transitioning back to an employer-sponsored healthcare program.

MS. LEWIS: I believe it was a year ago that Congress mandated reserve component ombudsmen for Tricare issues. Is that in place anywhere that anyone is familiar with?

MR. EVANS: I'm familiar with healthcare benefit advisors in some locations.

MS. LEWIS: I'm sorry. That's correct. First it was for the active force, and then a year or two ago, Congress acted to implement that for separate advisors for reserve-specific issues. And I don't know if it's had an opportunity to get in place or not, and I think that might be something that might be helpful if it gets there.

MR. EVANS: And I know that we do have some of those, and when families call us with Tricare issues, we would then refer to our health benefits advisors. I'm not sure of the number we have or where they're all located.

MS. LEWIS: Thank you. Ms. MCMILLAN?

MS. MCMILLAN: We actually did not have a whole lot of Tricare calls, but my expectation – or my explanation to those – predominantly that the unit that was mobilized there actually civil service working in that role. So we had a large amount of people – myself included – offered to keep our insurance, so we didn't have to. Polling through my companies, the biggest problem was really calling – I think you had mentioned that – getting through to someone who could help you. But once you did, it was okay. We had no complaints on the physician side, and we had no complaints on accessing or using it.

But we also have a lot of soldier's wives who have their own insurance working, so I think it's a unique situation. But we had no complaints – like five.

MS. LEWIS: Thank you very much. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

MR. PUNARO: Thank you, Commissioner Lewis. Our next questioner who also is going to focus on Tricare is Don Stockton. But I can tell the panel, I know Patty is going to be dashing out of here. She is probably one of the real experts in the company in this area. And trust me, we're going to do what we can to fix it. It's a monster bureaucracy. The active duty has a lot of the same problems. I've lived through it as a reservist myself. So we know the problems, and we are bound and determined to work with the system and work with the department to try and fix it. It's outrageous that the kind of money – we're spending upwards of \$40 billion a year for healthcare for our

military that we can't have a decent call center for people to call in and get useful information. That's just outrageous.

MS. LEWIS: Mr. Chairman, I remember a conversation with you in the early to mid-80s when I first worked for you about the CHAMPIS (sp) program. I hope we can make some progress. (Laughter.)

MR. PUNARO: Well, we fixed that one; we got rid of it. I hope we didn't put something worse in its place. Commissioner Don Stockton. Thank you, Patty.

DON STOCKTON: Good afternoon. And first of all, I want to thank all of you for your hard work in the family support arena. It's so terribly important to all of you, to all of our members of the National Guard and Reserves. They wouldn't be effective without your very important support. And I want to focus just a little bit more on Tricare, because that was one of the – at least two of you mentioned that was one of your principal problems you had. And you said, fortunately, you didn't have quite so many problems in that regard.

But most of you should know – if you don't – that beginning in October of this year, we will have this new program, Tricare Reserve Select, that will be available to all reserve component members that need it and desire it. And so, I guess, if we've had some Tricare problems and issues in the past, it would be helpful to this commission if you could make some concrete suggestions about how we can not only identify the problems, but more important, identify the fixes to those problems. So if you can reflect on that just a little bit about some of the problems you've had or have been brought to your attention. And that what are the suggestions that you might have to fix those problems for the future. Because we need to know those things. And why don't we start down here, because you said that was one of your primary problems.

MS. ROLLINS: Yes, sir. And I'm not sure if this is a possibility, but as a mom, and as a woman, I think, if there is any way reserve family cannot keep the doctors we already have in place and still have Tricare and not have to spend – I mean, I remember hours on the phone trying to find out if I could keep the doctors or not. And then, you go there and it's – well, the prime and the standard – it's so, so confusing. And I'm not a brilliant person, but I'm not stupid either. But it's difficult; it's very difficult. So if there's any way that, okay, you're going to Tricare. Gosh, it's almost like you've got a disease all of a sudden that you can't keep the doctors you have. I don't know if that's a possibility but that would be great.

MS. COSEGLIA: Okay, again, the only suggestion I would have again is the selection of physicians is a primary concern. People don't want to have to go out and find new doctors, new pediatricians. And so, if they could remain in place with the folks that they have, I think that would make them happy. And again, the call center question – I mean, calling in and not being able to access a person for questions.

MS. CAPEHEART: I'm not that familiar with Tricare, but I wanted to share something with you. Having worked in a large school system, when we get a new insurance agency, what they do – and I don't know whether or not this can transfer as an example – they hold training sessions, and they poll them maybe, four, five, or six times when they want us to buy into a new insurance agency. They have the representatives there on hand; they allow you – and hold them at convenient times – after work – not during the day when everyone else is working.

So they allow families to be able to come in. They sit down. They have the representatives discuss the pros and cons of the insurance, and then they allow those that are going to buy into the insurance to be able to ask questions, and perhaps clear some of the problems or some of the issues, especially when we are balking at moving from something that we've already tried and true that we liked, and I'm going to an insurance that I don't like, and I'm not sure whether or not they're going to be able to keep my physician, because it's important to me that I keep the physicians that I already have. And they have on-hand, the directories, you can take a look at them. If they are not up to date, they make sure that they are up to date.

So in essence, I am saying, any kind of new program that you are entering, especially when it affects your health, your overall welfare, there should be some centers or some sessions designed so that the participants can have at least an opportunity to hear and to be able to ask questions that would affect them.

MR. STOCKTON: And we certainly ought to be able to do that well before the effective date of that coverage – before October the 1st, in other words.

MS. MINICH: My suggestion would be increase the information that is available to your call centers, because if you get frustrated with the menu prompt system, and you finally get a real person on the phone, nine times out of ten, you'll hear, I'm not sure the answer to that, let me get your name and your number, and I'll check it out and I'll call you back. And that was one of the biggest complaints that I had gotten when I first started hearing about Tricare issues.

And then, the next thing, as Andrea said, switching between your civilian insurance provider to your Tricare provider, and then having to switch back again. If there was some kind of a insurance program available for the reservists that they could maybe keep all the time that was affordable, so they wouldn't have to worry about switching back and forth. Because a lot of children especially don't like going to the doctor anyway, but then when you have to switch them from a doctor that they're used to, to one that they're not sure about, you have a really hard time keeping them with being okay going to the doctor.

MR. EVANS: One of my comments would be to somehow look at the various programs that we have right now – Standard Extra Prime and now Tricare Reserve Select – and look at all of those programs and maybe offer standardization or consolidation of those programs into one program versus three or four different programs. And I'll also

echo Mrs. Capeheart's comments about education and awareness before the family member has to look into Tricare. Because that's one of the biggest challenges – it's a system they're not using; they haven't used; and all of a sudden, they learn about it as the soldier is deploying. And that adds to the stress.

MS. MCMILLAN: My question would be from a different focus, because we did have expressions of physicians that were participating that are no longer. Mine would come from a different angle. Is there something that Tricare is not providing for the physicians that they don't want to participate? I mean, is the compensation so poor that they are not interested? And if that's the case, is it an opportunity for there to be a bridge so that there can be maybe a different plan. I also wear a nurse's hat so –

MS. LEWIS: I think there are some issue with the information that is required for the claims different than what some of the industry standards are. And I know there's been a lot of focus and attention paid to that over the last several years. When I was still on the committee, Mr. Chairman, we included legislation that required the department to standardize its information requirements on those claims so that more providers would be interested in participating. The department still has some unique information requirements, and hasn't quite gotten to the point to make it readily accessible to all providers. And I think that's still a work in progress.

MR. PUNARO: By unique information requirements, that's Commissioner Lewis' very charitable way of describing a lot of worthless paperwork the Department of Defense requires that no common sense business would want. Is that correct, Commissioner Lewis?

MS. LEWIS: I think you've got it, sir.

MR. PUNARO: Yeah, okay.

MR. STOCKTON: And I think it's pretty clear too that the providers under Tricare often times are not offered the full reimbursement for what they normally would be paid otherwise. And so I think that's one of the very strong problems with respect to those providers – accepting Tricare for the coverage.

That's my only question. To all of you again, I appreciate your hard work and, in many cases, your volunteerism.

MR. PUNARO: Let me jump in and ask my first question here, and let me give you a little premise for this question. First, I'm a big believer in volunteers. I think that's a very important part of government service, of military service. I notice particularly in the infantry side of the house, the Army Guard and the Marine Corps Reserve, the battalions – it doesn't surprise me one bit that it's tied to volunteers and networked through the battalion and the companies, because that's kind of the way the infantry organizes. And you know, it's different for different services and it makes a lot of sense.

If you're an Air Force unit on an active duty air force base, you've got a lot of support that you wouldn't have in some cases.

The other thing that is interesting is the background for this question. The question is basically going to be do you believe that we need to go to a greater mix of fulltime, paid personnel to support the families as well as volunteers? That's really going to be what my question is.

But I back it up, because people say, well, wait a minute; that's just going to cost the reserves more and the reserves will be more expensive. But if you go to Camp Le Jeune, North Carolina – I'll speak from my own experience in the Marine Corps – they have a childcare center run by the government for military families that need childcare. So that's a cost to the federal government to support the active duty family when they're deployed or whether they're at Camp Le Jeune that you don't have in the reserve. They have childcare. We pay over a billion dollars a year – the taxpayer does – to run childcare centers on our major military installations.

They have a DOD dependent school system. We pay over \$2 billion a year to run the DOD dependent school system for schools at some military bases. And so, they had that there. They also have a huge medical treatment facility. They have shops. They have recreation.

So there is an expense, even though the Marine Corps units – you take a counterpart battalion in the 2nd Marine Division; that battalion is going to have a set of spouses that are key volunteers just like we have in the reserves. But those key volunteers have and they'll have a Tricare rep there at the Navy hospital there at Camp Le Jeune. They've got some assets available to them that you don't have in 225 at your back doorstep.

So what I want to find out from y'all, from your own personal experience – don't consider the issue of whether it's cost-effective or not – one of the things that we have to determine as a commission that Congress has asked us to recommend is, is this concept of an operational reserve – and by operational, as you pointed out Ms. McMillan, it's not just when they're deployed. When they come back, they're getting ready to deploy again, or they may go to a hurricane; they may go to a fire. And as you pointed out for the 25th Marines, you've had what sounds like two deployments in about three years. Is that correct? Same unit? Yeah, so 25th Marines' dwell time hasn't been real great back here in the United States. So we're seeing a lot more of that.

So the question is – is that operational reserve – is it feasible? Does this make sense for people that are going to be citizen soldiers, marines, airmen? And is it sustainable? Sure, you can do it once or twice. But could you do it over a 20-year continuum and maintain – and the battalion commander is shaking his head no, and that was the answer we got from the employers this morning. So let the record reflect. And your counterpart that testified before our committee way back in September in San Diego from the 24th Marines basically did not think it was sustainable either, because he saw

that they had to go to 21 different cities to get enough marines to make up one battalion to deploy. He thought that cross-level – and he called it evil.

You're getting more of a lecture than a question. But anyway, this will be an important question if I ever get to it. The question is, is it feasible and is it sustainable? If the families are not going to support it, it's not sustainable. And the question is, given all the competing demands and complexities – Tricare alone is extremely complex – do we need to go to a system that is a combination of volunteers as well as fulltime paid personnel like we have in the Army Reserve? I'm not suggesting one is better than the other; I'm just saying, given the realities of the world that we're in. Why don't we start over here with you and then go that way?

MS. MCMILLAN: I think that would be an outstanding idea to have a combination. I think you would need to have some volunteers at your unit level, because you need that for camaraderie; you need that for many different – you're experiencing the same things. There is a lot of reasons to have volunteers. But I think that the unimaginable amount of time required, resources, and just the fact that – I actually have three small children under the age of nine – nine and below – when we started the deployment. And I had them; they're in sports. We live on a lot of land to mow. I was the mower. So I wore many different hats. I put a tractor wheel on a tractor because it needed to be done.

I mean, there's so many demands on our families. I had many leaders who stepped up to the plate, but they also had fulltime jobs. And I think that if we could have a combination where you don't lose some of the cohesiveness of a unit, but you could also have some of the mundane things – I didn't need to address and stamp newsletters; I could have had some support. And we did eventually gain that, but there were a lot of things that I did that really would have been a nice centralization. Plus, you would have experts doing the same thing. We reinvent the wheel so very much; it's sad, because there are so many units who could do that.

MR. PUNARO: These are the common tasks I believe Mr. Evans probably was referring to, just basic things.

MS. MCMILLAN: Yeah, I vote yes.

MR. PUNARO: Yeah, you've already said you need more resources fulltime, correct?

MR. EVANS: Yes, short answer is Army Reserve Family Programs need more resources in staff and money to provide the services and support that our families deserve.

MS. MINICH: The Navy is in the process of hiring family support program administrators. We have Pat Nicholson who is our family program support manager. She does an excellent job. She has resources all over the country. So she is in the

process of finding five people that will be paid staff that will be there for us to be our question and answer people. So we're in the process of getting that – keep funding that for us, because we do need those people available that can answer the bigger questions that we might not have the time to research and give a good thorough answer on.

MS. CAPEHEART: I think a combination. I think you need volunteers because they are the heart of a lot of programs. But for stability and accountability, you need a paid staff so they can be there and this can be a cohesive factor, yes.

MR. PUNARO: Laura?

MS. COSEGLIA: Yes, no doubt. A volunteer program is what has sustained, I believe, reserve families throughout this entire process. So I think you need a nice combination of both. The problem that we do have is constant turnover of volunteers. So we do have that issue – volunteers are great, but sometimes it's hard to sustain them over long periods of time as well.

MR. PUNARO: Okay, and Andrea, as a Congressional commission, you're authorized to give your professional, objective opinion independent of the battalion commander's views.

MS. ROLLINS: Did you see that little slip?

MR. PUNARO: I've been around a long time.

MS. ROLLINS: In the Marine Corps, the PWSD and the INI would probably equate to the paid position what you're speaking of. However, on a personal note, with the key volunteers, I don't know how I could have personally made it through the two deployments – pretty much back-to-back – without the key volunteer network and the impending third one coming up. We're just getting ready as the KVs to gear up for that, so our work is getting ready to get crazy. So without volunteers –

MR. PUNARO: Okay, you make a key point, that's right. I guess I would argue the Marine Corps does have paid because Colonel Davis – then-Colonel Davis, now Major General Davis – and I put in place a program in 1995 we called the peacetime/wartime support team. The concept was basically – this was before the activities for all the Marine Corps Reserve geographically at all our drill centers that the unit needed to worry about being trained and deployed and going and fighting and not worrying about what they were going to do when they left. So we brought in and had drilling reservists who would then be the ones that would mobilize, run the reserve center. They lived in the community and have all the family connectivity, not the inspector instructors that train the reservists on a day-to-day basis. They deploy with the units as they should for the most part.

So in essence you're right, we actually probably on the Marine Corps – I would argue – we actually do have some paid staff, because – now they're drilling reservists –

but they are paid by the government for the specific job of maintaining connectivity with the community and the families. So we probably aren't as volunteer as I thought. So that is very helpful, very good information.

Commissioner Thompson?

MR. THOMPSON: Well, first I want to thank you for being here. In particular, I'm pretty pleased with what I heard in your testimony about the improvements that evidently have occurred since I was recalled to Desert Shield. During the – I live in a small rural community in Missouri. I was a naval reservist about as far away from salt water as you could get. And my family received zero contact from the Navy in the 11 months I was gone. And so, what you have testified to, the way you have webbed your way into connecting the families is really important. And I was going to kind of talk to how you talk to isolated families, because I felt pretty isolated in Missouri at the time. But I think you pretty well answered that part of what I was going to ask.

So I'm going to shift gears a little bit – in the laws that created reserves, we have a category called ready reserves.. Within that, it's the selected reserve, and then the individual ready reserve. Then, there is this critter called standby reservist, and then retired reservist. Now, I assume that all of your families – this is an assumption; I want to make sure that I'm correct – all of your family service and support is directed to the selected reserve. Is that a fair statement, the drilling reservist subject to recall? Do your services provide any effort toward the individual ready reservist who is not a drilling reservist but also subject to recall? Do you put any time and effort into networking to that community of reservist? Okay, I didn't think so.

MR. EVANS: Commissioner Thompson, Army Reserve Family Programs, we do have a network of paid staff who do nothing but outreach to individual ready reserve families who are affected by mobilization, yes, sir.

MR. THOMPSON: But after mobilization, is that when you try to network with them?

MR. EVANS: Yes, sir.

MR. THOMPSON: Yeah, okay. But you all are kind of – the Army didn't really manage the IRR to any great extent until they kind of needed manpower here recently. Is that a fair statement?

MR. EVANS: I believe that would be a fair statement, yes, sir.

MR. THOMPSON: Okay, now there's another critter in the category of reservist called an individual mobilization augmentee, we've been told about. And I think, I don't know that Navy does too much with those folks, but I know Army has that category. Marine Corps has that category. Now, looking at your family support again, do you spend much time focusing on those folks that are not unit-attached? You have a unit

structure from which to use, and you do too, am I correct? You have a wing, which is a unit orientation. And you have one, a unit orientation, am I correct? And you have units also in the Naval Reserve center?

MR. MINICH: Yes, and our CO just returned from an IA, so we are putting in place a program tailored for IA families.

MR. THOMPSON: Okay, and so I'm assuming that you've got your plate full with what you're doing. So if we start using increased numbers of individual augmentees or individual ready reservists, that's going to add extra pressure to what you're already feeling in terms of providing family support?

MS. MCMILLAN: Can I ask the clarification, are you talking about persons who would then be added to your unit, or these are people who have not – I mean, I don't understand the person.

MR. THOMPSON: Well, individual mobilization augmentee would mobilize individually – not as a unit – and would show up at some command somewhere to augment the manpower of that command.

MS. MCMILLAN: Okay, now we had several that we had of those persons who joined our unit somewhere along the process.

MR. THOMPSON: So you would just fold them into your arms and –

MS. MCMILLAN: Exactly. And what our hope, our plan was – and it was not 100 percent though we wished it could have been – whenever they entered into the system, whether they mobilized through Ft. Dix or from out in Texas or wherever they mobilized in from, they got to the unit. That company commander would send us a name and address and a family contact. And then, what we would do is divide them up through the company, put them on an email list, and give them a newsletter. We would do everything we could do or make a physical contact if that was requested by the soldier. That wasn't 100 percent.

MR. THOMPSON: Okay, you were saying that the biggest challenge was that – let's say the nucleus of the units would get their pre-family training and informational seminars and all that kind of stuff, and then the cross-lev and flow would come in and you would have to then catch up with those folks?

MR. EVANS: Commissioner Thompson, you bring up a good point, and I didn't get a chance to address this. But the last number I saw was about 60 percent of all of our soldiers join the unit for the purpose of mobilization. So they're coming from all over – they're coming from IRR, IMA, UAU category. They're coming from other units, through – (inaudible) – and overseas. They join this unit and then we have that challenge of trying to capture the soldier, capture the family data, and do our outreach to provide

them information and awareness on benefit and entitlement changes. And that's exactly right.

We go into a unit to do awareness briefings about Tricare, about SJA, about wills and powers of attorney. And there is only 40 percent of the soldiers there, and fewer families can attend because they're traveling greater distances to get there. So the information – there is a challenge getting that information to our families before deployment. And then, these other soldiers – the 60 percent – join the unit at mob station, after the unit has already left. So we do rely on a commander then to somehow provide that family data back to us, and it's not working in all cases – it's not working in most cases.

MR. THOMPSON: A real quick yes or no, and I'm going to try to remember the volunteers versus the fulltime staff here. Ms. McMillan, you're a volunteer. Did your service provide you with a laptop, a Blackberry, or any other kind of tool to help you do your job?

MS. MCMILLAN: No, sir.

MR. THOMPSON: Okay, and Mrs. Minich? You're a volunteer. How about the Navy? Did they provide you with a –

MS. MINICH: I have a cell phone that I –

MR. THOMPSON: That the Navy provided?

MS. MINICH: Yes, sir, to make phone calls with. I have a home computer, but I have a staff member at the NOS that is at my disposal as far as making copies, getting information for me, handling any mailings that I need to do, and I have office space there also.

MR. THOMPSON: Okay, Mrs. Capeheart?

MS. CAPEHEART: Well, I'm just a volunteer volunteer. I would have access to those kinds of things at the center is where I –

MR. THOMPSON: But you have to go to the center to get those things?

MS. CAPEHEART: Yes. I have my own, so if need be, I could work from home.

MR. THOMPSON: Okay. Mrs. Rollins?

MS. ROLLINS: I got a phone card.

MR. THOMPSON: You have what?

MS. ROLLINS: I have a phone card, a calling card.

MR. THOMPSON: A phone card, okay. Well, I'm just trying to get a feel of what kind of hardware and investment your services are getting your volunteers to help you do your job. Is it a fair assumption that it's not a whole lot? (Cross talk.)

MS. MINICH: I've been lucky though, and I've been told I can have whatever I need within reason. And because I do have everything at home, I don't require anything more than a cell phone. And that's strictly for the phone calls that I need to make to the families that are deployed, because we have a large number of our group. We only have 196 reservists and we have 49 that are deployed. And nine of those 49 are IAs.

MR. THOMPSON: Well, God bless you for what you do. And thank gosh you have the organization support is 17 years older than when my family experienced it. And it's doing a much better job.

MR. PUNARO: Great, thank you. Commissioner Eckles.

MR. ECKLES: Yes, I too want to thank each and every one of you for what you do, outreaching to our families of our service members that are doing an important job for our country. I am going to be very brief.

All of you either work or have worked in family support programs as paid employees or as volunteers. What is the one, single, most important thing that could be done to improve the family support program in your estimation? We can start down at the –

MS. MCMILLAN: The one single thing, pie in the sky. I think having some physical support like the chairman had said earlier. I think it's just too much. It's too much for the families to have people deployed and stuff. So I think having that one single support of someone consistent throughout our state or your area to assist you during a deployment especially, and then during the peacetime to help you get yourself organized and ready for our changing roles.

MR. ECKLES: Thank you.

MR. EVANS: Funding for additional staff – family program staff – down to battalion level to augment our volunteers who are working so hard to support our families.

MR. ECKLES: Thank you.

MS. MINICH: A better flow of information between all branches of the military. Each branch has their own tailored set of resources and information that is available. And I think if we had one system that would cover all branches and all of the ombudsmen

and all the key volunteers, that we could all access that information and be able to pick resources from any area in the United States, I think that would be fabulous.

MS. CAPEHEART: I agree with Amy, better communication, that cohesive group so that we can cross-talk across our various branches.

MS. COSEGLIA: I would go with the funding issue. Again, I think that our families, especially the reserve families, we need to keep in contact with them throughout the entire year. And I think that the only way that we can do that is by providing them resource materials that will help educate them on the military process.

MS. ROLLINS: And I'm going to echo a little bit on the communication, but I'm going to say communication to the families – getting words out to the families, because we are so geographically separated. There are so many programs out there available – Military One Source. I guarantee you, the majority of our reserve families don't know anything about it – or not even anything about it, but the amazing things that Military One Source can do for you. So more for lack of a better term, advertising and getting information about our resources and the things available to them as reserve families.

MR. ECKLES: Thank you. That's all I have.

MR. PUNARO: Okay. Commissioner Sherrard?

MR. SHERRARD: Thank you, sir. And I too want to echo our great, great appreciation for the great work that you're doing. And also the fantastic bill that you're not sending us for the great work that you're doing, because we couldn't afford to pay that. And most of the prepared questions I have, you've already answered. But I want to touch on two areas that I think I know the answer but to put it on the record.

Transition assistance – if I've understand it, when the members come back, the first thing they want to do is to leave, which I fully can appreciate and understand. But how can you make recommendations or suggestions to us as to how we could better get that information to the families with regard to healthcare options, educational opportunities, business transition, and the various things that are so critically important for everyone to understand when the member comes home. But in the haste of getting back into their lifestyle that they want to go back to, they're willing to sign that sheet of paper and walk out the door very quickly. Are there suggestions or comments that you could offer to us that we could look at possibly trying to institutionalize so that we could in fact make sure that everyone has the information? Because having been a commander, I know you can tell the member, but I'm not sure the member ever comes home and tells the family member. So I ask you as family members and as volunteers who have seen this process for comments and suggestions?

MS. MCMILLAN: Well, lucky for us, in the Army National Guard, we have pretty good size deployments, so you've got a lot of time to tell people stuff. My suggestion would be that probably three months out, that procedure, that idea that your

soldier is coming home, that information be given to our families, however that communication rides. And getting that information, likewise, if it's an option, depending on how the soldier is deployed – it depends on where they are and what their mission is – but if that's an opportunity a few months before they get home to get that information. They do have maybe a small amount of down time, one would hope. And I know they don't want to fill up their days with that, but maybe that would be a positive thing for them to look forward to, I don't know.

But the families are ready to grab hold of anything that gives them a sign we're almost done with this, so I think that would be an opportunity that could work for the families to give that attention.

MR. EVANS: I've got two ideas. The first is to provide information to the families about 90 days prior to the soldier's return. And the second idea is to fund family member travel to the demobilization station so they can show up a day or a half a day prior to the soldier getting there, or the military member getting there, and receive the information firsthand about expectations about that reintegration and some of the challenges that they're going to be faced with.

MS. MINICH: My suggestion would be along the same lines. Do a mailing 90 days ahead of that service member coming home. Say this is your opportunity to come in or contact us and ask questions or any concerns that you've had. And if they need information on what kind of transition assistance there is available in their area, tailor that information specifically to them. And I know Military One Source is a really good resource for that also right now. But just like Andrea had said, advertise it better. Advertise Military One Source better. There's a lot of my families that don't know it's out there and what they can do. And that's an excellent resource for transition.

MS. CAPEHEART: I'm not sure whether this answers the question, but perhaps we are fortunate, because we do have a transition assistance advisor, so that person is available to offer the suggestions that have been mentioned beforehand.

MS. COSEGLIA: Currently, we are mailing out reunion information to our families 30 days prior to the member coming home. What I would like to see – and I know that the military member probably would not be in favor of this – but I think having one day at the station prior to actually leaving to go home, and I didn't think about the travel of the family member up to that site, but it's an excellent idea. And we used to do the demobilization briefings when we deployed as big groups; we don't do that anymore. But now, I think if we could add one day onto the order, keep the member in place at home station, get the family up there, and give them the formal briefing that they deserve.

MS. ROLLINS: I agree with what everyone said actually. And I think the main thing again, going back to the geographic separation, everyone being so far away – I mean, I live in Virginia, and my husband's unit is in New York. Having funding available for families who are so scattered, and a lot of times, they've been through a long deployment. They probably took a hit financially. Can they afford to go up there?

And maybe a day prior is a good idea, because they're going to obviously go anyway to pick up their marine. They probably need a little more time, I would say, than a day before to maybe go through the post-deployment briefs and counseling sessions and whatnot that they may need.

MR. SHERRARD: Well, again, I would tell you that the things that our men and women in uniform are able to do are truly dependant on the great support that you and all your colleagues provide and offer. And we can't thank you enough. And it's a huge task that our nation faces, but I am confident if we have the likes of you out there supporting the men and women of our military that we are going to be successful in everything we do. And my hats off to you, I just wish we could pay you.

MR. PUNARO: Commissioner Stump.

MR. STUMP: And I'd also like to thank you. And apparently a couple get paid, the rest are volunteers. A specific question from Mrs. McMillan – in Michigan, we had a fulltime, paid person at joint forces headquarters for our family support programs. Do you have such a person?

MS. MCMILLAN: We actually do. And I think most of the National Guard, they have a family programs person. However, that position isn't – there is a piece of that down the group that is there for help as far as helping set up trainings. We've got wonderful education. But when it comes to where the rubber meets the road for deployments and all that stuff, there is no physical person funded or –

MR. STUMP: But you have the fulltime person that you could go to for looking for resources and so forth?

MS. MCMILLAN: Oh yeah, we have plenty of support for answers and questions and stuff, but for me to actually get physical support, other than our family assistance centers – which are very wonderful folks and they help us – but the actual running and managing and caring for our 350 soldiers' families during deployment, there is no one other than the volunteers that are there. I mean, there is no support place. There is very little money. It's like first come, first serve. We have found that. But that program does not have funding for that particular mission.

MR. STUMP: I see. And of course, before 9/11, we didn't have much in the way of family support programs. And obviously, when we're deployed, the family support program – the reservists are entitled to the same benefits of family support that the active duty people are. And they have found in – a DOD study in the year 2000 found that only 50 to 55 percent of the people even thought that they were aware or getting any of these sources from DOD. And I think we've made some great strides since 2000 in the family support program. But do you think that we have gone far enough in these family support programs or do we need more money for more fulltime support to bolster the programs furthers, so that at least we're on the same footing as the active duty people? Let me start here.

MS. MCMILLAN: If we anticipate our current deployment life or military life in the National Guard to remain or increase – I mean, if we’re going to continue to do our missions that we’re doing and also be a part of Operation Iraqi Freedom and other things – then yes, I would say that you need to increase that funding per state to have better programs, because the accessibility is always going to be difficult. And as we have more posts and bases closing and doing different things, it’s kind of an outpatient process, and we need to be able to get all of it two our families. And currently, I think the cart is behind the horse, so we’re making great strides. But 9/11 happened and then, oh my gosh, we’re playing catch up, because it’s just going to keep happening again.

And the stresses that are put on the families if there’s no resources available in place and you’re always depending on volunteers, I agree with one of the ladies down the way who said that your volunteers come and go. You need some stability in a program. And even your volunteers need some stability. But we need it on the grassroots level too.

MR. STUMP: Other than just the one person you’ve got at joint forces headquarters, you need within the units, maybe the battalions – at least a battalion level fulltime person.

MS. MCMILLAN: I would also suggest that we have many common concerns and a lot of equal things. I agree with the idea of having centers that could cross branches. I think it’s ridiculous to have several people being paid to do the same job for different services. It would be smart for us to have a one-stop shop maybe that could help us. And also, we’re in a community together. And I have found a marine wife who feels like I do, and our kids are in school together. And we never knew that until we both faced deployment. So I think that we do a lot of double-work, when we don’t have to in the National Guard and Reserves. I think we could utilize each other and cross-train folks on all the branches.

MR. STUMP: I believe that the flying units have a fulltime family support person too in each of the states. Do you do any coordination with fulltime person?

MR. MINICH: What we do with the Air Guard – because we’re supposed to be purple – so Air and Army work together, and they’re actually located close to where my husband works and drills. So I know her; I know their programs; and we are invited to participate and they do help us with ID cards and stuff like that. But as far as out in the community, this is pretty far from us – but actually out in the community it’s just depending on – in the National Guard specifically, if you have an armory, then why couldn’t that armory be a place where if you’re a marine – because the Marine reserves, they drill down in a different place. I mean, I just would think that the best utilization of resources are those that we could have. It just makes for that much more cohesiveness amongst all of us.

MR. EVANS: The increased resources would certainly help and I stated that a couple times. More staffing to augment our volunteers would certainly be beneficial.

MS. MINICH: Definitely more funding.

MS. CAPEHEART: It would be foolish not to say – (laughter, cross talk).

MR. STUMP: Everybody's fine except the Air Guard.

MS. COSEGLIA: Well, I don't see the Guard and Reserve actually cutting back on the use of our airmen in the very near future, so I think family support programs are more important now than ever. And I guess what I'd like to say is even though I'm fortunate enough to be on an active duty base, I still have to remember that until our people are actually on orders, we don't qualify for some of the programs that the active duty bases have. So while we're providing support to our families all through the year, we can't rely on the services of the active duties when we're doing that until our people are actually put on orders. So funding continues to be an issue.

MS. ROLLINS: We'll always take more money. And one thing, I think that would especially help in Marine Corps Reserve, there are a lot of resources available; there are certain counselors that will come to the pre-deployment briefs or the post-deployment briefs or family days. But there are so few of them and so many reserve stations across the country that there are only a handful of people that need to be in so many places. So I think if more funding were available, you could have more of the trained professionals that could go to the sites because they are so remote.

MR. STUMP: Well, great, thank you. One last question – a couple of you have referred to the Military One Source. Could you share with me the most frequent request for information or services that Military One Source can provide?

MS. ROLLINS: I know one from – I didn't personally use it, but I was recently at some training in Florida, and a Military One Source rep told us that she had a service member who was going to be deployed to Iraq, and typically, her parents took care of her pets for her. And that wasn't going to be the case this time, so they got on the phone with Military One Source, and they actually found that there was a such thing as a pet foster care, and set her up with someone to take care of her pets while she was deployed to Iraq. So they will do something like that.

MR. STUMP: Well, that's wonderful.

MS. MINICH: And I've used Military One Source personally for information on helping me deal with behavior changes in my toddler. I have a three-year old and a ten-month old, and I've used it personally for information on getting tips for my children.

MR. STUMP: Wonderful.

MS. COSEGLIA: I think the number one service for us has been the counseling that is available in the member's hometown, so they can do the face-to-face counseling right there in the township that they live.

MS. CAPEHEART: I was going to say counseling. I attended a conference, and they were talking about Military One Source, and counseling is one of the number one services that they said they got a lot of calls for.

MR. EVANS: I go out to pre-command course briefings and provide an overview of Army Reserve family programs. And one of those things I touch on is Military One Source. And I ask for examples from the group. And it's the six free sessions per issue counseling in their hometown that they can utilize for free. It's really beneficial.

MS. MCMILLAN: Counseling was our first and foremost, relocation and childcare – but I didn't personally refer those, but used it a lot.

MR. STUMP: Well, the one thing we're looking at is can we really continue this tremendous up-tempo that we now have with the reserve components. And I know we can't do it without the families' support and we can't do it without the employers. So there's a couple of them out there, and so, the resources you need, I think, if we're going to continue and try to make this an operation for reserves, we're going to have to have some more resources to help you all. So thank you very much for your service. And we're going to do whatever we can to help you.

MR. THOMPSON: Mr. Chairman, I've got one of my yes or nos that will take about 60 seconds.

MR. PUNARO: Okay, if it's –

MR. THOMPSON: 60 seconds.

MR. PUNARO: What's it relate to?

MR. THOMPSON: I'm interested to know, based on their rubbing elbows with all the families they represent if they can handle a one-year away –

MR. PUNARO: Okay, would you let me pose that? Okay, thanks. I have one last question, and I'm not going to ask it as short as Commissioner Thompson, because I want to precondition the question in that, first of all, I want to find out, on the Military One Source, is that run by the government or is it outsourced by the government, overseen by the government? Do any of you all know who actually runs Military One Source?

MR. EVANS: I believe it's Ceridian. But I'm not for sure. (Cross talk.)

MR. PUNARO: DOD funds it, but it's probably outsourced. So it's probably a private provider.

MS. MINICH: It's outsourced to a private corporation.

MR. PUNARO: Private corporation. And does the Tricare call center, is that outsourced? Or I guess that's run by Tricare probably.

MS. MINICH: Run by Tricare as far as I understand.

MR. PUNARO: Yeah, probably depends on how much money they're paying for the call center operations. That's usually what happens. Yeah, so my basic question – and the Colonel is not going to escape this question, because I'm going to have him come up and answer the same question – is we asked the employers today, as you know, we've talked about the operational reserve. Is it feasible? Is it sustainable? In our March 1 report, we basically said DOD has declared our Guard and Reserve to be operational, but they made no changes in the underlying laws, rules, regulations, process, procedures, or funding to make it operational. So we know if we want it to be operational, we've got to make those kinds of changes.

So let's hypothetically say we're going to make some of those changes, maybe we will, maybe we won't. We don't know whether we think it is feasible or not at this point on the Commission standpoint. That will be in our final report in January.

Then the question is, is it sustainable? And one of the key questions is, will employers support? And basically, the question we put to the large employers and the small employers on the earlier panel was, if you are an employer of a guard or reserve man, and you're looking at in a 20-year career, that individual being gone for at least a year three or four times, would you support that? And they all had their own answers. So that's the question I'm going to put to you – not as an individual, not as, for example, Andrea, what you may think in terms of Colonel Rollins' situation; but more from the families – this question is really you representing all the families that you have to deal with, knowing the tensions, knowing the concerns they have, is it feasible to expect that the families are going to support an operational reserve where that means in a 20-year career, that individual is going to be deployed at least a year, three to four times? Why don't we start with you?

MS. ROLLINS: You're going to start with me on the tough one. Honestly, I would have to say no. I think they've been through a lot already, and they know what's coming up, at least in our battalion. A lot of them have volunteered to go again with other battalions or other units as individual augmentees. And when they got back, they dropped down to the IRR because either their wife said or somebody in the family said, you know what – you told me two times or you told me three. You're done. So I would have to say no.

MR. PUNARO: Okay, great. Laura?

MS. COSEGLIA: No.

MS. CAPEHEART: I really don't know.

MR. PUNARO: Okay, Amy?

MS. MINICH: I would have to say yes.

MR. PUNARO: Michael?

MR. EVANS: Some are going to support and some are not going to support.

MR. PUNARO: Jill?

MS. MCMILLAN: Yes, with stipulations. Those would be at least giving them a four to five year break in between deployments if at all possible, and minimizing your point of mobilization to your deployment and back to home again in a 12-month period.

MR. PUNARO: Great. We're going to take advantage of having a battalion commander here. We had in September three battalion commanders. I don't want to put you on the spot. And if you prefer, you can talk to us privately. But I would like to get your views on the record in terms of this sustainability question. You've been in the Marine Corps reserve. You've been in these operational units. You were giving us some hand and eye signals in answer to the questions anyways, so would you be willing to answer that question on the record?

LT. COL. GEOFF ROLLINS: Yes, sir.

MR. PUNARO: And your answer is?

LT. COL. ROLLINS: It's not sustainable.

MR. PUNARO: C'mon and step up a little bit and speak in the microphone, if you could.

LT. COL. ROLLINS: Yes, sir. It's not sustainable. The families have already – I'm already losing junior officers and staff NCOs now that have done two and three deployments. They can't do anymore. And they're either being told that by their employers or by their families.

MR. PUNARO: Right, and basically, in the Marine Corps Reserve right now, particularly in the 4th Marine Division, I mean, we basically have a dearth, or we don't have very many company grade officers at all, do we?

LT. COL. ROLLINS: No, sir.

MR. PUNARO: And we talk about get well programs all the time, but I haven't seen anything that's bringing any company grade officers into our infantry battalions, have you?

LT. COL. ROLLINS: Just myself and my staff cold calling people, sir.

MR. PUNARO: Yeah, so that problem is not being fixed then.

LT. COL. ROLLINS: No, sir.

MR. PUNARO: Okay, great. Thank you very much. Well, let me see if anybody – is there any question we didn't ask that you wish we had and would like to answer before we close out here? Or anybody have any alibis or closing comments you would like to make? If not, let me on behalf of the commission, as everybody has said, thank you again from the bottom of my heart for the tremendous service that you as individuals are doing for our country and our nation, and for the families that you are representing, but also for the service of your individual spouses or whoever that are serving in the military in times of harm's way. There is no question in our minds from all the years we've looked at these issues in terms of military personnel, the family situation is the driver. It frankly is the driver in almost any employment situation you're in – it's the driver in the civilian job. But more importantly, it's the driver in a military job. And if the families aren't willing to make the sacrifices and provide the support, it's going to be very, very difficult.

And you've given us some great ideas. Whether we have an operational or strategic reserve, we need to do a heck of a lot more, and provide a heck of a lot more resources to basically support the families, particularly given the geographical challenges that we have in the Guard and Reserve, and the kind of challenges we have when units are cobbled together from all over the country and the families aren't all in one location. Again, in the 25th Marines, just in your battalion, your units are in at least five cities, I would suspect. They're not just in one city.

LT. COL. ROLLINS: That's correct sir. We have marines in nine states.

MR. PUNARO: Nine states. So you're spread out, so that's just one relatively small unit. So again, we thank you. We look forward to staying in touch. If at any point in the next number of months, you think of some other things you'd like us to know about, don't hesitate to get in touch with us. If you hear that we're up to doing something goofy, call us up; put us on report. Again, thank you so much for your great service and your testimony here today.

Commission will stand adjourned until June.

(END)