

Chairman Boozman, Ranking Member Herseth, and distinguished members of the Subcommittee:

My name is Karen Moore and I am representing the Family Support Center at Ellsworth Air Force Base which has responsibility for the Transition Assistance Program. Thank you for the opportunity to offer remarks regarding transitioning military members and their families.

### **Transition Assistance Program**

The Transition Assistance Program at Ellsworth is responsible for providing services to separating or retiring military and civilian personnel and their families transitioning into the private sector. Mandatory pre-separation counseling is provided IAW Public Law 101-510 and AFI 36-3022. Military members are required to attend an individual counseling session or small group briefing no less than 90 days prior to separation/retirement. Public Law 107-103, Veterans Education and Benefits Expansion Act of 2001 authorizes retirees and separatees to participate in transition activities as early as 24 months for retirees and 12 months for separatees before date of separation (DOS). There are exceptions for short notice separations. TAP workshops are offered monthly. Family Support Centers augment seminars with classes on the employment search process. At Ellsworth in 2005, 706 members retired or separated and in 2004 the total was 395.

### **TAP Workshop**

The TAP workshop is a coordinated effort between the Federal and State Departments of Labor Offices in South Dakota, the local career center, the Veterans Administration, Pennington County Veteran's Service Office, the Vet Center, and Ellsworth's Family Support Center. All of these offices meet on a quarterly basis to look at local and national employment trends, and review classroom presentations and critiques from the past quarter's seminars. If changes need to be made, it is a group effort. The close working relationship between TAP workshop presenters ensures a comprehensive, quality workshop.

The Family Support Center provides program oversight for TAP and the logistics of the workshop. The Center also provides classroom facilities, notification and registration of participants, ongoing publicity, and is a secondary source of National Veterans Training Institute (NVTI) certified facilitators. Typically our TAP workshops include members of other Services. South Dakota Army National Guard sends retiring members on a regular basis and in 2005 made up 13% of class participants. Class size ranges from 12 to 47 participants. Spouses are highly encouraged to attend. TAP is held on a monthly basis, but is surged as needed. The TAP workshop covers such topics as: strategies for effective job search, interviewing, effective resume development, self-assessment, dress for success, and opportunities for federal employment. As well as a program for retirement and separation planning, TAP is also a reenlistment tool. It was reported at the National Transition Assistance Program Conference that 18% of military who attended TAP decide to reenlist.

### **Exit Surveys**

The Transition Assistance Program exit questionnaire required by AFI 36-3022 captures customer input on the quality of base-level transition processes. A 5-point scale (with 5 as the highest score) is designed to analyze aspects of Ellsworth's TAP program and provides the following synopsis from 2005:

1. Overall quality of Transition services by the Family Support Center: 4.6
2. TAP Workshop Satisfaction: 4.3
3. Availability and timeliness of the 3 day workshop: 4.4

4. Information received on Veteran's benefits: 4.6.
5. Commander/supervisor support for attending transition activities: 4.2
6. Overall value of the skills and knowledge gained from the Transition Assistance Program: 4.5

Ellsworth workshop attendees in 2005 listed the top 3 reasons they were leaving the Air Force:

22%: current job dissatisfaction

13%: family reasons

10%: planned retirement

### **Disabled Transition Assistance Program (DTAP)**

The Disabled Transition Assistance Program (DTAP) was specifically developed for service members who are separating or retiring with medical disabilities. At Ellsworth the briefings are open to anyone planning to file a claim. The program provides members with specialized information and application procedures about the VA Vocational Rehabilitation Program. DTAP also explains how to obtain individual counseling on learning how to handle a disabling situation. Presenters are from the Department of Labor and VA. Briefings are held once a month following the TAP workshop. In 2005, 157 transitioning military members attended.

### **Feedback**

Historically, TAP receives a lot of positive feedback. During the TAP workshop, participants complete an exit survey to determine the impact of participating in the program. An email address is requested so a follow-up can occur at the 90-day mark. Although the return rate is not optimal, the overall consensus of those who do respond was that TAP does meet their needs. One retiree wrote, *"I feel personnel should attend the TAP Workshop 2 to 3 years prior to separation. Then again just before they separate because this workshop has so much information to help with your decision on what you want to do after you separate."* Another retiree wrote, *"It would have been beneficial for me to get a more realistic picture of the job market in the area in which I retired. I found it much harder to find a job than friends and associates led me to believe. Prior to acquiring my current position, I was turned down for many positions due to over qualification. On a positive side, going through the TAP seminar, allowed me to use resources such as job placement and the VA. Bottom-line, retirement is an individual responsibility but we need TAP to force us to consider situations we have been sheltered from during our military careers. Thanks."* A separatee commented, *"Now I make \$25 an hour working on military aircraft as a contractor for a Major Aircraft Manufacturing Company called Lockheed Martin. TAP helped my transition into the civilian world more than I can explain."*

### **Desired Additions to Transition Assistance Program**

#### **Benefits Delivery at Discharge (BDD) Program**

Ellsworth could greatly profit from the opportunity to participate in the Benefits Delivery at Discharge (BDD) program. BDD is a joint initiative between the Veteran's Administration and the Department of Defense to assist service members file for a service-connected disability. The compensation benefit application normally takes 170 days to process but when BDD is in place, time is reduced by 100 days to 60 or 70 days. The medical information needed to begin the VA file carries over from DoD to VA seamlessly. In addition, if a service member is found to be disabled, additional applicable vocational rehabilitation and employment services may be initiated much sooner after retirement or separation. This would benefit not only active duty members stationed at Ellsworth but the Guard and Reserve in South Dakota.

## TAP Workshop

Instead of making the TAP workshop mandatory, we propose four options:

1. TAP be available at anytime in a military member's career. Why should an Airman have to wait to plan for his or her future? Sometimes individuals are separated on short notice and do not have the opportunity to attend the TAP workshop.
2. The TAP workshop could be utilized more as a retention tool. First and second term Airmen attend a briefing called "Decision Time" given by the Career Assistance Advisor. This is a opportunity for military members to look at their options for staying in or leaving the military. During the briefing, attendees could be encouraged to attend the TAP workshop to help them make an informed decision.
3. Provide an electronic version of the TAP manual online. This could include websites managed by the VA, NVTI, DOL, and the various Services. The Air Force, for example, could post the manual on AF Crossroads, our official community website. With so many of our servicemen and women deployed it is imperative for them to be able to access this information while in the field. Multiple postings would make the manual available anytime. Spouses could access the manual this way as well.
4. Currently, AF civilians impacted by restructuring or reduction in force can also receive transition services and attend the TAP workshop. Consideration could be given to developing a civilian TAP course. Civilians are a part of the total force

As it was an adjustment to come into the military, retiring or separating is a major adjustment as well. Our Air Force members carry integrity with them to the last minute of service and beyond. Sacrifice is a word that is not spoken but expressed everyday in a military member's commitment to their country. We owe them the resources and information to make the most of their military career and to pave the way for a successful move into the private sector when and where they choose. Additionally, the dollars spent on training our Airmen are reinvested into local communities throughout the country when they successfully move from the military to the private sector.