

STATEMENT BY

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BEFORE

BENEFITS SUBCOMMITTEE

COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AFFAIRS

UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SECOND SESSION, 107TH CONGRESS

**TRANSITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM AND
DISABLED TRANSITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM**

JULY 18, 2002

**NOT FOR PUBLICATION
UNTIL RELEASED BY THE
HOUSE VETERAN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE**

Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee, on behalf of the Soldiers and Civilians of the United States Army, I appreciate the opportunity to discuss the Army's Transition Assistance Program. The primary objective of The Army's program is to assist soldiers and their family members in transitioning successfully to the civilian community when soldiers leave military service. Displaced Department of Army (DA) civilians are also eligible for job assistance services. Many soldiers join the Army immediately after high school and have little or no experience in finding civilian employment. Recognizing the intrinsic value of transition assistance, The Army has made a significant commitment to institutionalize and continuously improve the program over the past 11 years. The Army provides soldiers with tools and training to assist them in marketing their unique military skills and experiences successfully in the civilian sector. The transition information, benefits, and employment assistance provided through the Army Career and Alumni Program (ACAP) is recognized as an integral element of the Army's personnel readiness life-cycle functions.

Since the program's inception in 1991, ACAP has provided services to over one million eligible individuals - 944,000 enlisted soldiers; 88,000 officers; and 68,000 family members and displaced DA civilians. This fiscal year (through June) transition services have been provided to over 57,000 soldiers (51,000 enlisted and 5,000 officers) and over 1,000 family members and displaced DA civilians. With 44 government employees and 204 contractors, there are full service ACAP centers in 50 worldwide locations to include 15 in Europe and two in Korea. In addition, regional and remote ACAP services are provided on a routine basis at 35 more locations.

Consisting of three primary components, ACAP is specifically designed to efficiently and effectively provide consistent delivery of professional transition services regardless of location. Preseparation Counseling is first provided to all separating soldiers to ensure a full understanding of transition benefits and available services. Mandatory for these soldiers, Preseparation Counseling must be accomplished no later than 90 days prior to separation or retirement. In the event of expeditiously processed separations, Preseparation Counseling is completed as soon as possible but not later than the date that the soldier is separated.

Preseparation Counseling leads directly into the second program component, Transition Assistance Referral. Eligible individuals are referred to a wide network of Army installation service providers, targeting specific needs identified during the preseparation counseling process. Two examples of these service providers include the Army Continuing Education System for education benefits counseling and college admissions and Army Community Services for relocation and financial management assistance.

The third program component involves Employment Assistance Training for individuals who seek specific job assistance. Professional counselors first provide an overview of the job search services and tools available. Stateside individuals are next scheduled to attend the two or three day Department of Labor Transition Assistance Program (DoL TAP) workshop. While overseas, transitioners attend job assistance workshops taught by ACAP Center counselors using DoL TAP materials. The ACAP professional staff follow up with one-on-one counseling and access to skill building tools enabling the production of high quality resumes and cover letters and exploration of

career alternatives and occupations. Finally, the ACAP Home Page (www.acap.army.mil) serves as the customized portal for direct access to carefully selected job search and transition-related information as well as links to the most relevant web sites created by the government and private sector.

While 100 percent of all soldiers receive pre-separation counseling, the employment assistance portion of ACAP is voluntary. ACAP counselors do however strongly encourage soldiers and family members to take full advantage of all available employment tools in ACAP Centers to include participation in employment workshops. This fiscal year (through June 30), 55 percent of separating soldiers have participated in these workshops. Recognizing the critical value of the employment assistance services in successful transitions, The Army has established additional performance goals: 62 percent separating soldier participation in employment assistance services with at least three visits to the ACAP center. Individual user satisfaction is extremely important and is monitored closely. All individuals participating in ACAP services are asked to complete satisfaction surveys at the end of the transition process. The program has consistently received high marks, averaging four plus (4+) on a scale of zero to five with five representing the highest satisfaction.

Seeking an efficient, economical solution for consistent delivery of quality, standardized transition services, The Army conducted a comparative cost analysis in 1996 to ascertain whether it was more cost effective to provide pre-separation counseling and job assistance training with the use of Department of Army civilians or with contractors. The study concluded that a centrally managed, Army-wide contract was more cost effective. Subsequently, the ACAP contract was competed and awarded

in accordance with Federal acquisition regulations. Outsourcing has an added benefit that allows The Army to respond to changing requirements with greater flexibility by providing transition services on an “as needed” basis at worldwide locations.

Further enhancing efficient program operation and deployment, The Army has leveraged automation to ensure a consistent, cost-effective delivery of standardized transition services. Allowing individuals to work at their own pace and schedule, the ACAP XXI system provides state-of-the-art, fully automated, preseparation counseling; interactive, engaging video workshops; and research tools. An especially effective tool, the “interview” module offers individuals the opportunity to film themselves while participating in simulated job interview scenarios. This interactive tool allows them to build confidence by practicing and refining their interviewing skills.

The Army augments DoD transition assistance funding in order to successfully meet Army demographic demands. A high percentage of soldiers possess military occupational specialties that are not always thought to be readily transferable to civilian occupations. ACAP services are especially critical to individuals in these military specialties to ensure they can “civilianize” their military skills and experience to successfully compete in the private sector. In a related effort aimed at improving post-military employment opportunities for soldiers, the Army launched a new credentialing initiative, GI to Jobs, in April 2002. Aimed at non-degree seeking soldiers, GI to Jobs offers expanded opportunities for soldiers to earn civilian credentials related to their Army Military Occupational Specialties (MOS). The Credentialing Opportunities On-Line (COOL) web site identifies the education, experience, and testing needed to earn professional certification or licenses for hundreds of civilian jobs related to specific

military occupations. The COOL website provides counselors, soldiers, family members, and employers with information on Federal, State and proprietary certification and licensing requirements for each MOS. The GI to Jobs initiative is also being integrated with another initiative focused on post-military employment - the Partnership for Youth Success (PaYS) program.

In June 2000, the U. S. Army Recruiting Command (USAREC) and ACAP established PaYS, an Army initiative to partner with industry. The PaYS program offers recruits a non-binding employment agreement with a specific company prior to joining The Army. After successfully completing their tour of enlistment, PaYS participants transition directly to employment with the pre-selected PaYS employers. The employers who participate in the PaYS program know the value of Army training as well as the value of the dedicated service experiences of The Army's soldiers. USAREC and ACAP manage the program through web-based technology to maintain visibility of both the soldiers and companies participating in PaYS. Current partnerships include Lockheed Martin, General Dynamics, the Pepsi Bottling Group, Goodyear, State Farm Insurance and Bellsouth. To date the number of soldiers enlisting with the PaYS option is 6,792.

Recognized as a Personnel Readiness Program, ACAP not only supports retirements and separations but also has a significant impact on The Army's recruiting and retention efforts. Well versed on ACAP services, recruiters are able to tell potential recruits and their families that The Army will provide them with tools and assistance at the proper time to assist them in successfully transitioning to civilian careers. The Army also recognizes the importance of ensuring that soldiers who are considering separation

make educated, realistic decisions on the value of reenlisting to obtain additional military and civilian education, professional certification/licensure and military job experience which can significantly improve their marketability before they separate. Last fiscal year, 3,906 soldiers who initiated the transition process decided to reenlist instead. Through May of this fiscal year, 2,559 soldiers have reversed their initial decision to separate. These reenlistments represent not only a significant cost savings for the Army, but a clear WIN-WIN for the soldiers, families, and The Army.

The program receives strong command support to encourage soldier, family member, and displaced DA civilian participation. All eligible individuals regardless of grade are afforded the opportunity to participate, based on unit mission requirements and individual desires. Although the current high OPTEMPO makes finding time for transition services more difficult, installation ACAP managers make every effort to be an integral piece of commanders' training schedules and pre-deployment processing. They also adjust ACAP work schedules to eliminate any conflict with unit operational requirements where possible. The recent action by Congress to allow earlier prepreparation counseling enables soldiers and commanders to schedule ACAP participation around mission requirements. Before units deploy, ACAP staff provides pertinent transition assistance information to soldiers and supervisors, responding to questions and proactively managing concerns about the impact of deployment on transition preparation. During deployment, ACAP Centers also provide assistance by using email, fax, and telephone communications as necessary. Services are also provided to soldiers in forward-deployed areas. Responding to commander requests, ACAP professionals have traveled on 108 occasions this fiscal year, including visits to

deployed soldiers in Saudi Arabia, Kosovo, and Kuwait. Soldiers were provided the full menu of ACAP services, allowing them to initiate their transition process as daily mission requirements permit. The benefits of ACAP are fully reinforced through leadership development opportunities, to include informational briefings for all newly assigned installation Commanders and Senior Non-Commissioned Officers.

Statistics indicating how many soldiers actually found employment as a result of ACAP assistance prior to or just after departing the Army are not available. However, the Department of Labor has reported that Army unemployment insurance costs decreased by 48% (or \$82.4 million) from fiscal year 1994 to fiscal year 2001. During this same period, United States unemployment level decreased only 25% and Army end strength decreased only 11%. One conclusion to be drawn from these statistics is that the decrease is in large part a result of those soldiers who fully utilize ACAP employment services and require less unemployment compensation benefits by obtaining employment faster. During fiscal year 2001, the average ACAP cost-per-client was \$166.

In 1995, the Army Research Institute (ARI) conducted a study of the effectiveness of ACAP employment services, e.g., resume/ cover letter preparation, interviewing skills, career planning, individual job search. Their conclusion indicated that ACAP did benefit both the Army and separating soldiers. ARI specifically cited that the estimated average difference in yearly earnings between separating soldiers who attended an ACAP workshop and all of the 12 job assistance services and those who did not attend an ACAP workshop and received only two job assistance services was about \$7,300.

The Transition Assistance Program is the result of a strategic partnership between the Departments of Defense, Labor, and Veterans Affairs. Detailed in a Memorandum of Understanding, this partnership provides comprehensive informational workshops that broaden Army's capabilities to provide a truly comprehensive program. Army is also fortunate to have representatives from the local State Workforce Agency and Veterans Affairs located on many of our installations. Utilizing local Memoranda of Understanding, the representatives of these organizations work together to create and deliver a meaningful and informative program for soldiers, modifying delivery of services as necessary to eliminate duplication.

On a routine basis, ACAP receives numerous inquiries from Federal agencies, major corporations, and local companies that seek to communicate employment opportunities to veterans. These employers recognize Army soldiers demonstrate a strong work ethic and possess critical leadership and management skills as well as the self-confidence and motivation necessary to be exemplary assets. Employers often advertise these job opportunities on the ACAP Home Page. Each ACAP center also markets and sponsors job fairs and career days where soldiers can talk directly to prospective employers. On an average annual basis, ACAP hosts 370 job fairs/career days with over 5,366 employers and 68,857 participants. This environment is ideal for soldiers to experience first hand the tasks of researching employers, validating resumes, and interviewing. During the past year, ACAP has worked with representatives from the Office of Personnel Management, the United States Marshals Service, the United States Border Patrol, the Transportation Security Administration, and most recently, the Federal Aviation Agency, in their efforts to recruit employees.

In closing, I thank you for the opportunity to come before this subcommittee to provide an update of the Army's Transition Program. I would also like to thank this subcommittee for their work on the Veterans Education and Benefits Expansion Act of 2001. Provisions of this act allow soldiers to initiate transition processing up to two years prior if retiring and one year for those separating. This extended window will assist supervisors in balancing mission requirements with the need to provide transitioning soldiers adequate time to capitalize on the professional transition services that are available in ACAP. The Army is fully committed to providing quality transition assistance to departing soldiers, their family members, and displaced DA civilians. When America invests in its soldiers, their families and Army civilians, we invest not only in Army readiness but also in the future of a stronger, more productive Nation. Thank you for your continuing support.