

**Prepared Statement Of**  
**Mr. Craig W. Duehring**  
**Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense**  
**for**  
**Reserve Affairs**

**Before the**  
**House Committee on Veterans' Affairs**  
**Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity**

**Oversight Hearing On**  
**Transition Assistance Program**  
**and**  
**Disabled Transition Assistance Program**

**June 29, 2005**  
**2:00 P.M.**

**FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY**  
**NOT FOR PUBLICATION**  
**UNTIL RELEASED BY THE**  
**SUBCOMMITTEE**



## ***Craig W. Duehring***

### **Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Reserve Affairs**

---

Mr. Duehring is the Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Reserve Affairs. He also performs the duties of acting Assistant Secretary of Defense for Reserve Affairs in the absence of the ASD/RA. He was selected effective July 23, 2001.

As the Principal Deputy, Mr. Duehring serves as the senior deputy to the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Reserve Affairs in policy development and overall supervision of the National Guard and Reserve forces of the armed forces of the United States. He is the chief staff advisor to the assistant secretary for all functional areas and responsibilities assigned to the office.



Previously, Duehring served on the Bush-Cheney Transition Team and the Department of Defense Transition Team. He was the executive director of the Patrick Henry Center for Individual Liberty, a non-profit 501 (c)(3) educational and charitable foundation located in Fairfax, Virginia. Duehring was the endorsed Republican candidate for the Minnesota 2nd Congressional District in 1998. He is a 28-year military veteran, retiring as a colonel in the U.S. Air Force in February 1996. His final military assignment was as the U.S. Air Attaché to the Republic of Indonesia.

He is a decorated combat pilot, completing over 800 missions during the Vietnam War as a Forward Air Controller. Duehring has flown more than a dozen types of aircraft, amassing over 1,200 hours in the A-10 Thunderbolt II. His military awards and decorations include the Silver Star, the Defense Superior Service Medal, two Distinguished Flying Crosses, three Meritorious Service Medals, 27 Air Medals, two Air Force Commendation Medals, the Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry (individual award), and the Vietnamese Staff Service Honor Medal (1st Class). Duehring is also a recipient of the Air Force's highest individual award for leadership in the senior officer category, the Lance P. Sijan (SIGH-john) Award.

Duehring holds a bachelor of science in History and Sociology from Minnesota State University at Mankato, and a master of science in Counseling and Guidance from Troy State University.

He is a native of Mankato, Minnesota.



## **Introduction**

Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to speak before you today. It is my privilege to discuss the Transition Assistance Program (TAP) and the Disabled Transition Assistance Program (DTAP).

Congress, and in particular this subcommittee, deserves sincere thanks for its continued support of our efforts to ease the transition of our separating and retiring Service members, as well as those being released from active duty from the Guard and Reserves. Your interest and assistance on this matter, both individually and as an institution, are very much appreciated.

First let me restate our commitment to our separating Service members. It is more important today than ever that we take care of our military personnel and their families as they enter and leave active duty. The Department and the Military Services, in partnership with the Departments of Labor and Veterans Affairs, provide transition services; "Because it's right; because it's smart."

I know that you share our pride in the professionalism and dedication of today's Armed Forces. Whenever this Nation has gone to war, we demanded the best from those who serve. Today is no different. The Global War on Terrorism has forced us into a war, not of our own making or choosing. To meet this challenge, and to defeat the enemy, we are calling upon the total military forces of this Nation -- Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Marines, members of the Coast Guard, the Guard and Reserves, and their families. And, as in the past, we ask for commitment and a great deal of sacrifice from our Service members and their families.

We recognize that we must reciprocate by providing benefits and services to our military personnel who have earned them by virtue of their valiant and heroic service. One major way to honor their service is by caring for them and their families as they leave active duty.

### **Transition Assistance Program**

Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee let me begin by laying a foundation of the Transition Assistance Program with two important points. First, TAP was developed primarily for Active Component Service members and their spouses. Second, I think it is important, at least for the duration of this hearing, that we all operate with the same understanding of what is included in TAP from a DoD perspective. Within DoD, and I believe my distinguished colleagues from DOL and VA will back me up on this – TAP is one program consisting of four basic components. The four components are:

1. Preseparation Counseling – DoD has responsibility
2. DOL TAP Employment Workshops – DOL has responsibility
3. VA Benefits Briefings – VA has responsibility
4. Disabled Transition Assistance Program (DTAP) – VA has responsibility

Each agency is responsible for their component of the program, with DoD serving as the coordinating agency for the entire program.

The reason this second point is germane is, as all too often, visitors to our military installations reviewing the transition program conclude that the Military Services have different transition programs and none are the same. The confusion comes from

differences in how each Service delivers TAP. The Military Departments use diverse methods of program delivery, but they all provide the same program – preseparation counseling, DOL TAP Employment Workshops, VA Benefits Briefings and DTAP. How a Military Service packages and delivers the four components of the program can vary by Service, installation, and in the overseas areas of operation.

Let me also note that the Military Services provide more than preseparation counseling. Each of the Services has established permanent employment assistance centers (part of TAP) as required by public law. These centers provide follow-on employment assistance once the Service member has attended a DOL TAP Employment Workshop. Some of the follow-on assistance provided includes the actual preparation of a resume and cover letter, use of the internet to search various Job Data Banks, and most important, one-on-one counseling and review of resumes by highly qualified counselors.

With this basic understanding in mind, let me turn my attention to why we are here today.

One of the greatest successes in the Department of Defense is the Transition Assistance Program, commonly referred to as TAP. Simply stated, TAP's mission is to prepare Service members and their families for a successful transition to civilian life. Through this program, the Department provides an extensive array of services and benefits designed to equip separating Service members with basic skills, tools, and the self-confidence necessary to prepare them to join the civilian workforce of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. As you are well aware, not all separating Service members leave the military and go directly into the workforce. Some decide to continue their education. Others may

enter business for themselves, or obtain professional credentials that enable them to meet the various licensing and certification requirements of their chosen profession. And some realize, while going through the transition process, they are not really prepared to leave the military and choose to reenlist. Whatever their decision may be, our goal is to provide them with as many options as possible, so they can make an informed decision about their future.

### **Some TAP Accomplishments**

Let me highlight a few of our TAP accomplishments in recent years.

- Assisted the Department of Labor in developing the Military Resume Writer, which is an automated tool for use by separating military personnel. It allows them to put their resume on-line through a DOL associate web site to America's Job Bank called DoD Job Search. This associate Web site directs separating Service members and veterans to the same Web site as employers who are interested in hiring separating Service members and veterans.
- Assisted the Department of Labor in the first phase of their assumption of responsibility for conducting TAP Employment Workshops overseas. The Department will continue to assist DOL in any way possible as they move forward, in the near future, to provide TAP Employment Workshops at all overseas locations.

- DoD, DOL, and VA provided TAP services and briefings on board the USS Constellation, the USS Enterprise, and the USS George Washington as they returned to their homeports after deployments.
- The Army is going to open an Army Career and Alumni Program (ACAP) Center at the Walter Reed Army Medical Center in the near future.
- The Navy plans to open a fully operational Transition Assistance Management Program (TAMP) Office at the National Naval Medical Center – Bethesda.

### **Guard and Reserve**

As you know, the Department and the Military Services provide outstanding transition assistance to the Active Component. The Guard and Reserve present special challenges for transition assistance based upon the almost immediate deactivation and return to their family and local communities. Upon demobilization, Guard and Reserve members, like their counterparts in the Active Component, receive the mandatory preseparation counseling. The preseparation counseling briefing explains the transition benefits and services to which they are entitled as a result of their service. Topics covered include employment, relocation, education and training, health and insurance, finances, and disabled veterans benefits.

With the support of our partners from the Departments of Labor and Veterans Affairs, every effort is made to ensure Reserve Component Service members receive a Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act (USERRA) Briefing as well as a VA Benefits Briefing prior to their release from active duty and during the

demobilization process. These are in addition to the mandated preseparation counseling briefing.

However, the Department, as noted in the GAO Report, recognizes there are inconsistencies in the delivery of USERRA and VA Benefits Briefings for the Guard and Reserves, and these inconsistencies vary from installation to installation. In some instances units are being deactivated at locations other than an Active Component installation such as from a National Guard Armory. When this occurs, providing transition service becomes problematic. In other cases, individuals may be “falling through the cracks.” We believe such occurrences are rare and isolated, but even one, is one too many.

### **DoD Partnership with DOL and VA**

The full scope of TAP goes beyond what we in the Department offer our separating Service members. As I just mentioned, TAP also includes services and benefits available from the Departments of Labor and Veterans Affairs. For that reason, the Department has enjoyed a long-standing partnership with these agencies since the beginning of TAP. Another challenge before us as it relates to the Guard and Reserve is how and when do we provide timely transition services. Although Preseparation Counseling does not appear to be a major issue during demobilization, the Department is concerned that the time allotted for Preseparation Counseling at many locations is insufficient; thus, the TAP counselor is not able to provide a quality Preseparation Counseling Briefing. The Department will continue to work with the Military Departments down through the chain of command at demobilization sites to standardize

the time allotted for the delivery of the mandatory Preseparation Counseling for the Guard and Reserve.

Mr. Chairman, from my review of the GAO Report, I believe the real areas of concern for this Subcommittee center on employment assistance, VA Benefits Briefings, and DTAP for the Guard and Reserve.

The Department of Labor's 2 ½ day DOL TAP Employment Workshop is appropriate for the Active Components. Given the assumption that the overwhelming majority of our Guard and Reserve members have jobs when activated and mobilized, the Department supports DOL's USERRA briefings as the most appropriate type of information that should be provided upon demobilization. For those who were unemployed at the time of their activation, the Department will work with DOL to consider other options, such as a DOL employment workshop following demobilization. Potentially, this could occur during one of the unit's drill weekends. On the surface this may seem to be a great solution; however, there are many issues that have to be resolved before we go down that path. I will address some of those issues later in my testimony. For both individuals who are unemployed and those who want to consider career changes even though they have a job to return to, I am confident DOL would refer them to a One-Stop Career Center nearest to their hometown.

The final two components of TAP, the VA Benefits Briefing and DTAP, fall under the same scenario as the DOL Employment Workshop. Since these components are the responsibility of VA, I will defer to my distinguished colleague from VA to discuss in more detail the information and services they provide and ask them to share with the

Committee some of the challenges they will face if called upon to provide these briefings after demobilization.

### **Focus of Hearing -- Guard and Reserve**

Mr. Chairman, I am keenly aware that there is great concern by this Committee as well as the entire Congress about the breadth and quality of services and benefits being provided to our Guard and Reserve personnel as they return home. DoD, the Military Services, DOL, and VA are working diligently to ensure these brave men and women are not left behind or left out.

The Military Services are making every effort to provide Preseparation Counseling to all returning units at the demobilization sites. And, as already noted, the Department will take the necessary steps to standardize the time allotted to TAP counselors so they can provide the quality Preseparation Counseling Briefings our Guard and Reserve personnel deserve.

However, the reality is that our returning Guard and Reserve personnel are only at their Demobilization station for a period of three to five days. Given their high anxiety to return home to their families and loved ones, the Department must carefully balance that desire with the need to provide them with the kind of information they need and deserve. The Department realizes that the demand for more time to get things done at demobilization sites, although well intended, has probably exceeded the capabilities of the demobilization process to meet those demands.

That is why the Department concurs with the recommendation for Executive Action contained in GAO Report, GAO-05-544, entitled: "*Military and Veterans*'

*Benefits: Enhanced Services Could Improve Transition Assistance for Reserves and National Guard.* The recommendation states:

***“To ensure that members of the Reserve and National Guard have the opportunity to benefit from transition assistance, we recommend that DoD in collaboration with DOL and VA, determine what demobilizing Reserve and National Guard members need to make a smooth transition and explore the logistical options for providing that assistance, such as opportunities for employment workshops before or after their demobilization and providing timely information about the need to apply for certain benefits while still on active duty.”***

To that end, the Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Military Community and Family Policy, Mr. John Molino, is taking the lead in collaboration with our partners from DOL and VA to form a “Demobilizing Working Group” whose focus will be assessing the needs of Guard and Reserve Service members during demobilization. They will make recommendations to the senior leadership of all Departments concerned, on how we can collectively improve transition assistance in the demobilization process for Reserves and the National Guard. The “Demobilization Working Group” will work under the umbrella of our existing Transition Assistance Program (TAP) Steering Committee, a standing committee with representatives from DoD, the Military Services, DOL, VA, and Department of Homeland Security that meets on a quarterly basis and is chaired by the Department of Labor.

The “Demobilization Working Group” will also have representatives from the Guard and Reserve, and the demobilization and personnel communities.

I mentioned earlier that I would address some of the issues that must be dealt with before we proceed. You will also hear some of these same themes repeated later in my remarks. Some of the issues and challenges the “Demobilization Working Group” will tackle are:

- Assessing the needs of demobilizing Guard and Reserve Service members.
- Evaluating various logistical options for providing assistance.
- Assessing whether timely information about the need to apply for certain benefits while still on active duty is being provided at all demobilization/deactivation locations.
- Identifying gaps in the current system.
- Determining the right time to provide information.
- Determining how much it will cost and who will fund the program, if information is provided after demobilization and during a drilling weekend.
- Determining what the deactivation time line for scheduling briefings will be -- 30 days, 60 days after demobilization – we just don’t know right now.
- Deciding if spouses should be included in post deactivation briefings.
- Identifying the resources, needed to support the Guard and Reserve transition requirements, whether before or after deactivation.

- Developing other options to address the needs and concerns of our Guard and Reserve members.

As you can see, this is a complex and difficult issue before us, but not one that is insurmountable.

In the interim, DOL and VA have assured DoD that, upon request by a deactivated unit, they will fulfill such requests and provide TAP Employment Workshops and VA briefings at unit locations. The Department will continue to improve the process and the delivery of these services to all our Service members and their families. That is the challenge for TAP before the Department, the Military Services, DOL, and VA today.

### **DoD Initiatives**

DoD has several initiatives under consideration that are designed to address some of these issues. The focus of these initiatives is improving transition assistance for both Active and Reserve Component Service members. Let me cite just a few and enumerate on some of the challenges associated with some of them.

**First** – The Department has a revised Directive on Transition Assistance for Military Personnel out for coordination and comment. The key changes in the Directive will:

- Incorporate the change in law that make Reserve Component Service members serving 180 continuous days on active duty and their families eligible for TAP. DoD is in compliance with the law but the language is now being included in DoD policy.

- Mandate the availability for Active Component Service members separating and retiring, who indicate they want to attend a DOL Employment Workshop (and where there is no DOL presence, a Military Service Employment Workshop) to attend these workshops in their entirety. However, this mandate has two very important issues that must be resolved:
  - First – If this mandate is applied to the Guard and Reserves before being released from active duty, during the demobilization process, then, the Department has to be prepared to lengthen the current demobilization timeline and expand the mandate to include the Reserve Components. Or, the Department has to decide to apply the mandate to the Guard and Reserve but authorize its compliance after demobilization, during a drilling weekend. That leads to the second issue --
  - Second, can DOL fully support this mandate for the Active and Reserve Components?
- Mandate all Active Component separating and retiring Service members attend a VA Benefits Briefing and those with a service-connected disability, or those who think they have a service-connected disability, attend DTAP. The same issues mentioned above relating to the DOL Workshop, apply to this mandate and impact our partners at VA.
- Now, let me throw the final ingredient into the mix. These mandates that the Department wants to implement, present even greater challenges to

DOL and VA for our Service members stationed overseas. They will have the greatest impact on Active Component Service members stationed overseas. Let me point out to the Subcommittee that we do conduct demobilization for some, but not very many, Reserve Component members at overseas locations. Let me briefly cite a couple of the challenges confronting DOL and VA in providing DOL Employment Workshops, VA Benefits Briefings and DTAP to separating and retiring Service members overseas.

- First – There are Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) issues that must be resolved before DOL and VA can be authorized to operate in foreign countries on a permanent basis at military installations where DoD and the Military Services have a transition presence. This problem exists today. DOL is working to resolve these issues country by country – but it is a slow and difficult process.
- VA’s challenges are: 1) providing 12-month coverage overseas; 2) getting SOFA authorization from each country where they need to operate on a permanent basis; and 3) expanding their coverage to cover all installations where DoD has a transition presence.

**Second** – The recent General Accounting Office Report “*Military and Veterans’ Benefits: Enhanced Services Could Improve Transition Assistance for Reserves and National Guard*” noted several actions directed at improving program content. Developing a separate “Preseparation Counseling Checklist” for members of the

Reserve Components was one initiative. The new form was approved effective June 15, 2005. The Military Services will move as quickly as possible to implement the new form.

**Third** – The GAO report also noted that for full-time active duty Service members, the Department had drafted an updated counseling checklist. The updated “*Preseparation Counseling Checklist*” for active duty Service members was also approved effective June 15, 2005. The updated form will enhance program content and provide an improved Preseparation Counseling Briefing. The Military Services will move as quickly as possible to implement the updated form.

**Fourth** – The Department is staffing two Memorandums:

a. The subject of the first one is: Command Support – Transition Assistance Program (TAP) for Active Component Service Members

b. The second memorandum’s subject is: Command Support – Transition Assistance Program (TAP) for Demobilizing Reserve Component Service Members. The intent of both memorandums is to reiterate the Department’s commitment to TAP for both the Active and Reserve Component service member.

The challenges that I lay before you by no means discourage us or deter our commitment to move these policy mandates forward. We owe it to our Service members to prepare them, to the extent possible, for their return to civilian life.

### **Good News – VA and DOL**

That being said, I would now like to turn your attention to and share with you some of the good news on things taking place among DoD, DOL, and VA.

DoD is working with VA through a number of collaborative efforts such as the Benefits Executive Council, the Health Executive Council, the Joint Executive Council, and Seamless Transition.

VA is working closely with the Military Services at the major demobilization sites to ensure that VA representatives are part of the briefings provided to returning Service members. VA continues to place a major focus on Service members being separated or discharged for medical reasons. They have placed Veterans Service Representatives and Social Workers at key military installation medical treatment facilities where severely wounded Service members from Iraq and Afghanistan are frequently sent. They include Walter Reed Army Medical Center, National Naval Medical Center-Bethesda, Eisenhower Army Medical Center, Brook Army Medical Center and Madigan Army Medical Center.

Our work with the Department of Labor includes the DoD-DOL Policy Steering Group – a collaborative effort that deals with Recruitment, Retention, and Re-Entry issues for Military Personnel and their spouses; and, as I have already mentioned, the TAP Steering Committee. In addition, under Secretary Chao's Recovery and Employment Assistance Lifelines Initiative, commonly referred to as REALifelines, DOL has placed personnel at Walter Reed Army Medical Center and the National Naval Medical Center-Bethesda. Because of the success of this initiative they are expanding REALifelines to Madigan Army Medical Center and Brooke Army Medical Center. REALifelines is a new approach to ensure that wounded and injured Service members

and their families get the support they need to be successful and competitive as they return to the homes and lives they left in service to our country and the cause of freedom.

DOL is also working with several States conducting pilot programs to provide employment assistance services to our returning Guard and Reserve personnel.

And just before his departure from DOL, the former Assistant Secretary of Labor for Veterans Employment and Training Service, the Honorable Frederico Juarbe, Jr. sent a letter to the Department's Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Military Community and Family Policy in anticipation of the report by the GAO, which is the basis for this Hearing today. In his letter, former Secretary Juarbe told Mr. Molino that one of his last acts before leaving DOL was to initiate contact with The Adjutant General of each state in an effort to determine their needs. He asked for the Department's assistance to help notify the Chiefs of the various components of the Armed Forces Reserves about the employment assistance programs offered by DOL VETS.

Mr. Chairman, I don't want to take all of the thunder from my distinguished colleagues from VA and DOL, so let me stop here. I am sure they are anxious to tell you first hand about their initiatives for providing TAP and DTAP services to our Guard and Reserve members.

Our Service members have, and continue to perform, magnificently while enduring many hardships since 9-11, in support of Homeland Security, Iraqi Freedom, and Enduring Freedom. For their unselfish and loyal service to this great Nation, and on the behalf of the President and the Secretary of Defense, I want to thank them for their devotion, loyalty and esprit de corps while facing the enemy at home and abroad.

The Department remains steadfast in its commitment to offer separating Service members, retirees, Guard and Reserve personnel, and their families a quality Transition Assistance Program well into the future. WHY? One might ask; “because it’s right; because it’s smart.”

In conclusion Mr. Chairman, on behalf of our Service members and their families, thank you and the members of this Subcommittee for your support during these demanding times. I stand ready to answer your questions.