

Obama: Investment in Veterans Produces Tomorrow's Leaders

AMERICAN FORCES PRESS SERVICE (JUNE 20, 2014)

WASHINGTON—The promise of a better tomorrow made to U.S. military veterans of World War II seven decades ago with the signing of the original GI Bill is the same promise the nation is keeping with its newest veterans and their families through the Post-9/11 GI Bill, President Barack Obama said in an opinion piece published today on the website of the *Military Times*.

And, such investment in today's military veterans will produce the leaders America needs tomorrow, the president observed in his op-ed.

Today, the president also proclaimed June 22, 2014, as the 70th Anniversary of the GI Bill of Rights. The text of the president's op-ed follows:

"You pick the school, and we'll help pick up the bill.

"That's the basic promise America made to our veterans of World War II 70 years ago with the signing of the original GI Bill. It's the same promise we're keeping with our newest veterans and their families through the Post-9/11 GI Bill. Now as then, investing in the education and skills of our veterans is one of the smartest investments we can make in America.

"For some eight million World War II veterans, the original GI Bill meant the chance to realize a college education, get on-the-job training, or buy their first home. They became teachers and small business owners, doctors and nurses, engineers and scientists. One of them was my grandfather. A soldier in Patton's Army, he came home, went to college on the GI Bill, and raised his family. In his later years he helped raise me, too.

"The GI Bill also transformed America. With the careers it sparked, the homes it helped our veterans buy, and the prosperity it generated, it paid for itself several times over and helped lay the foundation for the largest middle class in history.

"Like generations before them, our men and women in uniform today deserve the chance to live the American Dream they helped to defend. That's why, under the Post-9/11 GI Bill, we've already helped more than one million veterans and family members pursue their education.

"Now, with our troops coming home from Afghanistan and a new generation of veterans returning to civilian life, even more will be eligible for this opportunity in the years to come.

As Commander in Chief, I want everyone who is eligible to know what the Post-9/11 GI Bill can do for them. A good place to start is benefits.va.gov/gibill/, which has important information on the benefits available, including assistance to help pay for tuition, housing and books, and how to transfer benefits to a family member.

"As veterans and their families think about which school is right for them, it's worth considering several factors.

"Does the school adhere to our Principles of Excellence? We created these standards to protect our veterans from dishonest recruiting and predatory practices. For example, does the school provide students with a clear statement of all costs? Does it provide students with a point of contact for financial advice? Does it provide a clear educational plan, so you get what you pay for? So far about 6,000 colleges and universities have signed on to our principles and pledged to do right by our veterans and their families.

"Does the school foster an environment that supports veterans? Under the "8 Keys to Success" we unveiled last year, there are specific steps colleges and universities can take to truly welcome and encourage veterans on campus. For example, is there a culture of inclusiveness that invests in veterans' academic success? Is there a centralized place on campus that coordinates services for veterans? Are faculty and staff trained to understand the unique needs of veterans and how to best serve them? So far nearly 400 colleges and universities have joined this effort to help our veterans complete their education and get their degree.

"Even with the Post-9/11 GI Bill, will you still need student loans? The high cost of college is leaving too many students, including veterans, in debt. That's why, even as we work to make college more affordable, we're doing more to protect students from crushing debt. We're making it easier to automatically reduce the interest rates our service members and veterans pay on their student loans. Congress can also do its part by passing legislation that would allow veteran attending a state college or university to pay in-state tuition, regardless of their residency.

"Finally, when you go looking for that civilian job, are you taking advantage of the latest resources? Our improved transition assistance program helps our newest veterans and their spouses plan their new careers. We're making it easier for veterans to transfer their military training to the licenses and credentials needed for civilian jobs. We're matching veterans looking for jobs with companies looking to hire veterans and military spouses through our Veterans Employment Center, online at ebenefits.va.gov. Every company in America needs

ASA(ALT) Launches First Writing Competition

ARMY NEWS SERVICE (JUNE 30, 2014)

Karen D. Kurtz

WASHINGTON—The Principal Military Deputy to the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Acquisition, Logistics and Technology (ASA(ALT)), Lt. Gen. Michael E. Williamson, announced a new writing competition today to encourage critical writing focused on Army acquisition issues.

“As the United States draws down from major conflicts and manages the ongoing ramifications of sequestration, public conversation surrounding acquisition is being driven by Members of Congress, think tanks, and the media with limited input from the workforce itself,” said Williamson. “I’ve created this competition as a way to help shape the public dialogue regarding Army acquisition through critical writing.”

The competition is seeking maximum participation, especially by members of the defense acquisition workforce. Authors may write articles, opinion pieces, essays from 750 to 1,500 words on U.S. Army acquisition in one of four categories including lessons learned; future operations; acquisition reform/Better Buying Power; or innovation.

The submitted works must be original, not previously published, and completed during Fiscal Year 2014. Four award winners will be selected, one in each category, with four additional works selected for honorable mention. The deadline for submission is Sept. 15, 2014, to Karen Kurtz at karen.d.kurtz2.civ@mail.mil. Additional detail is provided in the ‘call for submissions’ at <http://usarmy.vo.llnwd.net/e2/c/downloads/353658.pdf>.

to know—if you want someone who will get the job done, hire a veteran.

“The original GI Bill helped produce a generation of leaders, including three presidents, three Supreme Court Justices, more than a dozen Nobel laureates, and two dozen Pulitzer Prize winners. Once again, the investments we make in our newest veterans today will produce the leaders America needs tomorrow. On this 70th anniversary, we pledge to uphold that promise once more and keep our veterans and our country strong for decades to come.”

Military Members Encouraged to use Soldier for Life: Transition Assistance Program

ARMY NEWS SERVICE (JULY 16, 2014)

Chrystal Smith

WIESBADEN, Germany—As news of the reduction in force reaches thousands of soldiers, it’s important to know that the Soldier for Life: Transition Assistance Program, formerly known as Army Career and Alumni Program, is still a key resource in place to help with the transition to civilian life.

Transition and accredited financial counselors are standing by ready to assist soldiers, as early as 18 months before exiting the military.

“If there’s any chance you may get that call, even if you think getting out is possible, start,” said Angela Roelofs, Soldier for Life: Transition Assistance counselor, who explained that it is mandatory for active duty and Army Reserve soldiers with more than 180 days of continuous active duty who are leaving the military, to use the transition program.

Those who know they will separate from service must start no later than 12 months (and up to 18 months, and retiring soldiers 24 months) before the expiration term of service date. And even if one is not sure, soldiers are advised to begin using the resource just to be sure.

“Start it anyway just in case; it’s not like you have to get out,” said Stephanie Talcott, accredited financial counselor with the program, dismissing the myth that if a soldier begins to use the transition assistance program’s resources that he or she must separate from the military. “This way they can see all the options in front of them and make an informed

decision. And if they find they don't have to get out or are not getting out, and then they can simply stop using the resource."

"Many underestimate the difficulty of navigating the job market," said Roelofs. "If you come to [Soldier for Life: Transition Assistance Program], you are better prepared."

The transition assistance process starts with an initial counseling to introduce one to the transition program. Then soldiers sit with a counselor to develop an individual transition plan. Once the process is initiated, the career counselor will assist the service member with writing and reviewing resumes, cover letters, job searching, and interviewing techniques. Throughout the transition process a number of workshops and briefings are offered to inform service members of their benefits and entitlements through Veterans Affairs.

The mandatory workshops and seminars include:

- Transition Overview and Military Occupational Specialty Crosswalk Workshop
- Financial Planning Workshop
- Department of Labor Employment Workshop
- A Benefits Briefing
- Individual Transition Plan Review
- Career Track Course

Advanced résumé writing assistance, federal job application assistance, and Veterans Affairs seminars are offered as additional options through the program. Career track courses—education, entrepreneurship, and technical training—address the different paths available after leaving the military and offer specific guidance relative to each pathway.

Confidential financial counseling is offered through the resource to give military members and their families guidance on topics such as insurance, taxes, adjusted income, and comparison of income minus allowances for clothing, housing, or subsistence.

"I counsel you on what you need," said Talcott, explaining the necessity of performing a cost and benefits analysis with military members, and helping some realize how much income will be needed to maintain a similar quality of life after separating, as well as evaluating personal credit reports. "We try to get that fixed before they leave, so they can enjoy what they work for."

Program managers said they have the flexibility to offer information and services for what soldiers want to know.

"Helping people be situated before they leave the Service is a huge deal," said Talcott.

"It matters because you owe it to yourself," said Kathy Palmer, Soldier for Life: Transition Assistance Program counselor. "You've given so much to the Army, and they are giving you time to think about and take care of yourself."

Air Force Focuses Fourth Round of VERA/VSIP on Headquarters Reductions

SECRETARY OF THE AIR FORCE PUBLIC AFFAIRS (JULY 18, 2014)

WASHINGTON—In an effort to lead its force management actions with voluntary programs, the Air Force announced a fourth round of civilian workforce shaping measures beginning July 21.

This follows the recent Air Force announcement on headquarters organization and staffing reductions. Those changes are designed to eliminate redundant activities and improve efficiencies while also satisfying previous secretary of defense direction to reduce management headquarters costs and staff levels by 20 percent.

Voluntary early retirement authority and voluntary separation incentive pay will be used to realign and rebalance the civilian force during the round IV program. Round IV is largely focused on Headquarters Air Force-assigned civilian employees, primarily located in the national capital region. Civilians at some major command locations who could be impacted by these changes will also participate. The remaining MAJCOMs will participate in a subsequent round.

Civilian employees will receive VERA/VSIP interest surveys from their local civilian personnel sections on or about July 21. Applicants approved for this round of VERA/VSIP must separate no later than Sep. 30.

"As the Air Force works to streamline the management framework regarding basic organization structures and associated business practices, some civilian positions at the Headquarters Air Force level will be eliminated," said Heidi Liebel, the acting chief of the civilian force policy division. "The Air Force is committed to minimizing the adverse impacts of restructuring on our civilian employees, hence the use of VERA/VSIP to offer voluntary early separation or retirement incentives."

There will be at least one more round of civilian workforce management as soon as all the MAJCOMs have the final details of all the changes associated with the 20 percent headquarters management review and reductions associ-

ated with realigning and consolidating functions under the Installation and Mission Support Center.

“The Air Force recognizes the invaluable contributions of our civilian workforce, but also must manage the fiscal constraints under which the Department of Defense is operating,” said Brig. Gen. Brian Kelly, the director of force management policy. “We are focused on fine tuning the force while taking care to minimize the effect on our current permanent civilian workforce and their families.”

The processes available to rebalance or reskill the work force include using reduction-in-force procedures to determine overage employee priority placement rights into vacant positions, as well as providing the flexibility to waive qualifications and provide retained grade and pay if placed in a lower graded position. In that regard, the HAF and other participating bases will begin their preparations for submitting their requests for approval to use reduction-in-force procedures in an effort to place employees in continuing permanent positions.

“We are committed to using voluntary separation programs as much as possible before pursuing involuntary options,” Kelly said. “As we progress toward the end of the fiscal year, it is apparent the HAF will need to rebalance skills of the workforce into vacant positions.”

For additional information about civilian employment, voluntary separation programs and other personnel actions, visit the Air Force Personnel Service website at <https://gum-crm.csd.disa.mil>.

Distance Learning Needs Re-Tooling, Captains Tell Chief

ARMY NEWS SERVICE (JULY 18, 2014)

David Vergun

FORT LEAVENWORTH, Kan.—It was to be a panacea. It could save money and reduce the carbon footprint by eliminating travel costs, decrease the need for infrastructure and perhaps even instructors, while allowing students to learn on their own time, in their own spaces, on their own devices.

In its rush to embrace progress and technology, the Army, the Defense Department, and organizations across America adopted distance learning, at least as far back as the 1990s, when computing power and the Internet promised to connect people and institutions in virtual ways that were previously unimaginable.

Now, captains across the Army are telling their chief of staff that distance learning can be a powerful tool, but its be-all-

promise may be a stretch, and its method of delivery may need some re-tooling.

The captains were participating in Solarium 2014. Seven teams, each with about 15 members, discussed issues that included education, training, talent management, culture, mission command, and vision and branding. The teams discussed issues for a month online and then during two days at Fort Leavenworth before providing their findings to Gen. Ray Odierno, July 11.

The Army is over-reliant on distance learning and “it’s a growing trend of being the sole method of education” delivery, said Capt. David Spencer of the education team.

Part of the problem, he said, is a perception that “millennials only learn through social media and IT devices” like smartphones and tablets, “but that’s an incorrect assumption.”

Soldiers completing online courses are “not mastering the subject,” Spencer pointed out, citing several examples of soldiers he knows who didn’t get much out of their distance learning experience, including one who’d completed a Reserve captains career course online.

The solution, he said, is to “integrate distance learning with brick and mortar institutions.” That could mean meeting periodically in a classroom to reinforce the distance-learning experience. The formal classroom setting involves valuable collaborative learning and human-to-human interaction that distance learning doesn’t offer.

Distance learning by itself, though, does have its place, he conceded, but for it to be successful, “you’ve got to tie an educator on the back side to answer soldiers’ questions, guide, and facilitate.”

The educators don’t have to man phone banks 24/7, he added, but they do need to be available at least at certain times so soldiers have someone to turn to, rather than just being left out on a limb when they are wrestling with a concept or theoretical construct.

Spencer said Solarium 2014 could have been set up as a conference call event, but he and the other captains agreed that the human interactions were the most valuable.

“Your thoughts mirror studies and feedback we’ve been receiving on distance learning across the board,” Odierno replied.

The Army is beginning to address the distance-learning gap, he continued, beginning here at the Command and General Staff College, where instructors are now facilitating distance-learning courses. "This is a first-ever. Now we've got to put that in all the distance learning courses."

Odierno added that access to distance learning courses shouldn't have roadblocks, such as requiring Common Access Cards. Soldiers should be able to access coursework on their own tablets and other devices.

Capt. Jayson Williams of the training team said overall content and structure of training, whether distance learning or classroom, is good—and would improve given the points Spencer made—but format could be a lot more user-friendly.

For example the Army Training Management System is currently using an analog delivery format, but version 7.0, which is coming soon, "will be digital and sharable," he said, adding that he likes it that the system's leaders are soliciting feedback from soldiers.

However good classroom or distance learning might be, though, there's no better training than live, hands-on, Williams said. "All of us were impressed with the realism and quality of the combat training centers, which are very good at preparing soldiers" for real-world contingencies.

Williams added that he was a skeptic of the Army's increasing use of virtual and constructive simulation training, but after he experienced what it can do and how it can better prepare soldiers for the live experience, he became a convert.

Capt. Adam Malaty-Uhr said that while all those suggestions are good, soldiers are often confused about what type of coursework or training they need to take for self-improvement, to increase their combat readiness, or improve their chances for promotions.

"There needs to be a central place to go for identifying opportunities," he said, explaining that information is spread out across Human Resources Command and centers of excellence websites, All Army Activities and Military Personnel Messages, and so on—none of which are particularly user-friendly.

There are some "80 content repositories" out there, he added, but their "search functionality is essentially beyond our capabilities. Soldiers need to see at a glance what types of training and education opportunities are available to them and which are required at any given time.

Another idea, Malaty-Uhr offered, is that the Army could come up with a Pandora-type search engine that could suggest training or education opportunities that might interest them based on their needs and preferences.

Odierno said the problem of not knowing what training and education are required is even bigger for company commanders because they must also know what their soldiers need, so they can better advise them.

He said the issue is even more challenging for Malaty-Uhr, since the captain commands a National Guard company that's dispersed across the entire state of Illinois.

"I'm frustrated by our inability to integrate technology, especially in terms of access and search," Odierno acknowledged. "We have some self-limiting factors bureaucratically. We tend to classify everything and that makes it impossible to access.

"We need to build apps that are easy to download and integrate and do many of these things you mentioned," he continued, "so yes, I've got it. I've got to get some innovative IT people who want to think out of the box to help us solve these problems."

The private enterprise needs to get involved in developing these technologies, Malaty-Uhr replied, because "frankly sir, we don't trust the Army to execute this appropriately, to develop something that is really meaningful and really changes the dynamic of how we learn as individuals and how we learn as leaders."

Odierno said he was impressed by all of the captains' recommendations and conceded that a lot of work still needed to be done.

But the captains were not yet finished offering the chief their thoughts and recommendations and Odierno said he was eager to hear them, even if they differed from his own.

The wealth of formal educational opportunities needs to be spread around better throughout the Army, Capt. Kerney Perlik told the chief.

Officers come into the Army with the advantage of having a university degree, she said. There are opportunities throughout an officer's career to get advanced degrees.

"As officers, we have so many opportunities," Perlik said. "For my next assignment, I'm going to graduate school and then back to West Point to teach."



SOLARIUM 2014

Capt. David Spencer and Capt. Kerney Perlik discuss their team's education ideas and solutions just prior to presenting them to Chief of Staff of the Army Gen. Ray Odierno, during Solarium 2014, July 11, 2014, at the Lewis and Clark Center on Fort Leavenworth, Kan.

Perlik said that as an aviator, she feels bad for her squadron where half of the leaders are warrant officers who don't have the same opportunities she has, not to mention the many non-commissioned officers who are in the same boat.

"Educated leaders are force multipliers," Perlik said. Without a good civilian education, "we have a gap in our ability to produce adaptive leaders."

The form that education takes doesn't necessarily need to be traditional degree programs at universities, she said. Vocational programs would work too.

For example a vocational certificate for aircraft mechanics would not only make them more proficient in their specialty, it would make them more marketable in the civilian world, she said. Similarly warrant officers should be given the chance to attend courses at Sikorsky or training offered at other companies.

Also, "our team loved the idea of warrant officers or NCOs getting their teaching certificates and teaching at an inner-city schools."

All good suggestions, Odierno replied, adding that while teaching inner-city kids is admirable, the Army needs to protect its own investments as the forces and budget downsize. So teaching at the Advanced Leader Course or Senior Leader Course might be preferable.

"But the thought process you have is on target," he added. "It's about incentivizing really good NCOs and also incentivizing certain assignments that I believe are really important for us. The problem for the Army is every time you take people out, it creates a readiness issue, so how many you take out needs to be looked at. But it can be done."

Williams said the Army needs to be more creative and resourceful in its training and education efforts.

The Army does a pretty good job of training, he said, but more focus needs to be on how to train and manage training. Also, more training needs to focus on developing critical thinking skills. And, training should be as practical as possible so it can be readily transferred to real-world situations.

A lot of good training-with-partners opportunities are being missed, he continued.

For instance there are National Guard units near Fort Drum, N.Y., that could train with the 10th Mountain Division. Also, there are police units and SWAT teams who sometimes use Army ranges. Why not integrate training with them and encourage building relationships.

To make that happen, he said would require “breaking away all the restrictions and impediments” that prevent the Army from doing that.

The Army is beginning to move in that direction, Odierno replied. U.S. Army Forces Command just published policy “that aligns each division with National Guard units” for training purposes, and it “does exactly what you’re saying, so you should start to see more of that.”

Odierno added that training should also include multinational partners, although that’s getting harder to do because they’re reducing their military investments, just as the U.S. is.

The chief said Solarium 2014 was productive and that he’d take all their suggestions with him, implement as many as are feasible, and provide the captains with follow-ups on their recommendations.

Editor’s note: This is the final article in a four-part series on Solarium 2014. For more ARNEWS stories, visit <http://www.army.mil/ARNEWS>, or Facebook at www.facebook.com/ArmyNewsService.

Department of Defense Announces Progress on Design and Implementation of New Civilian Employee Performance Management System and Appointment Procedures

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE NEWS RELEASE (JULY 30, 2014)

The Department of Defense released its report to Congress yesterday on the progress that has been made implementing new civilian employee personnel authorities during the past six months.

As part of this implementation, the department will establish a three-level performance appraisal system for the vast majority of its civilian employees that will link organizational mission and goals to individual performance plans.

While the implementation timeline has not yet been determined, the department-wide performance appraisal system is one of many initiatives that resulted from Congressional direction to implement improved civilian personnel authorities. The department will continue to involve employees through the national level unions as we develop policy on the new authorities.

Additionally, the performance appraisal system will provide a fair, credible, and transparent system that links employee bonuses and other performance-based actions to the employee performance appraisal.

The department will continue to provide periodic progress updates, and is focused on training for supervisors and managers, as well as improving the skills and advisory capability of its human resource practitioner workforce.

For more information, view the department’s report at http://www.defense.gov/news/NDAA_FY12_PL112-81_report.pdf.