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AMERICAN FORCES PRESS SERVICE (AUG. 5, 2008) PANEL RECOMMENDS CHANGES TO MILITARY RETIREMENT

Jim Garamone

WASHINGTON—A panel looking at military compensation has recommended dramatic changes in the military retirement system.

The recommendations are part of the second volume put out by members of the 10th Quadrennial Review of Military Compensation (QRMC).

The first volume, released in March, looked at cash compensation. Retired Air Force Brig. Gen. Jan D. “Denny” Eakle was director of the panel, and she briefed the press during a Pentagon news conference Aug. 5.

Eakle said critics of the current military retirement system say it is not equitable, it is not flexible, and it is not efficient.

“There is a perception that the system we have today is inequitable because only 15 percent of all enlisted personnel and less than half of officers will ever receive anything in the system,” she said.

Reserve Component personnel also believe the current system discriminates against them, especially at a time when Reserve forces are being called on more, she said.

The retirement proposal would offer a defined benefit, defined contributions, “gate” pays, and separation pays.

The defined benefit would be 2.5 percent of the average basic pay for the highest 36 months of the individual’s career multiplied by the number of years of service, with servicemembers vested at 10 years of service. Payments to retirees would begin at age 60 for those with less than 20 years of service and at age 57 for those with 20 years of service or more.

Servicemembers could opt for an immediate annuity, but the payout would follow the Federal Employee Retirement System methodology: a 5 percent penalty per year for early withdrawal.

The defined contribution portion would be an automatic government-funded Thrift Savings Plan. Servicemembers would not have to match any government payment. The government would not put any money in for the first year, but would put in 2 percent of base pay for two years of

service, 3 percent for three and four years of service, and 5 percent for five and more years of service. Again, this would be vested after 10 years of service.

The military also would make “gate pays” to servicemembers who reach specific years of service. These would vary by years of service and skills, Eakle said.

“This is a payment made for achieving a particular year of service,” she explained. “And within the Services, they would have the flexibility to vary this by years of service as well as by skill. That way, they could begin to shape the skills by dragging people further into their career by offering them an incentive.”

Finally, the system would include separation pay to servicemembers that would also vary by years of service and skills.

“The separation payments would be made available by the Service to members that they wished to entice to leave,” Eakle said. This would be a permanent tool Services would have available, she added.

The panel used a Rand Corporation computer model to test the recommendations, but Eakle said the panel members would like a large-scale test in the Defense Department.

“Therefore, the recommendation of this QRMC is that the Department of Defense conduct a multi-year test of the system,” Eakle said. “The way the test would work is this: All four Services would be asked to identify some skills that have different types of retention patterns—some that stay not very long, some that stay longer periods of time—and ones they wish to influence.”

The test would offer people in those skills in the first eight years of service an opportunity to volunteer.

“If someone was selected for the test, they would be paid all of the Thrift Savings Plan that they should have earned up until that point, and it will be put in their TSP account for them,” she said. “The program’s vesting rules would, in fact, apply to all those individuals. So should they achieve 10 years of service while they are in the test, they would fully own it.”

At the end of the test period, people who are in the new system who wish to revert to the original retirement system would be allowed to do so, she said.

Any change in the retirement system would require action by Congress. DoD officials said they will carefully examine the panel's recommendations and then decide if they should move forward. The study will take at least six to 12 months, so any decision would be made by the next administration, DoD officials added.

Garamone writes for American Forces Press Service.

AIR FORCE PRINT NEWS (AUG. 13, 2008) EVALUATIONS RELEASE HIGHLIGHTS VPC-GR EVOLUTION

Master Sgt. J.C. Woodring, USAF

DENVER—When the new online evaluations process for coordinating performance reports launched in July, it quickly became a shining example of the capabilities of the virtual Personnel Center—Guard and Reserve.

Since it launched, nearly 1,400 Reservists and Guardsmen have begun coordinating the online performance reports, and the first was successfully loaded into the Automatic Records Management System on July 24.

“This is a great example of the vPC-GR’s capability to let our airmen submit their forms and have a systematic visibility on their status throughout the chain of command,” said Dave Gallop, Air Reserve Personnel Center’s Directorate of Personnel Data Systems director.

The earlier version of the process, which was only available to Reservists, would let performance reports be uploaded into vPC-GR, but there wasn’t the online coordination or visibility.

“Commanders could have reports in coordination without knowing their status,” said Lt. Col. Doug Ottinger, ARPC’s Directorate of Future Operations director. “Now, Guard and Reserve commanders can know exactly where all their reports are by looking on vPC-GR.”

At the genesis of their Web-based services in December 2005, ARPC officials allowed customers to request a copy of their 20-year and mortgage letters and print them from their own computer. Also, officers could submit a letter to the promotion board or request promotion board counseling.

This happened before the real push by Air Force officials to meet a secretary of defense mandate for the military to catch up and use more technology to free up limited personnel resources. In the personnel world, Air Force of-

ficials were required to transform the way they delivered personnel services.

“We wanted to create a system where any of our customers could log in and request any service we provide at their convenience from anywhere in the world,” said Craig Carter, a software engineer in DPD. “Then, we could get back to them with a response within a reasonable timeframe.”

ARPC specialists began filling online requests for documents since switching to new software in October 2004, Carter said.

“The 20-year and mortgage letters process was our first process that didn’t require anyone to do anything on the back end. The computer did all the work for us,” he said.

A vast majority of the requests, like duty history changes and address updates, need a person to handle the issues before they can be closed. These are referred as Tier 1 transactions and are normally completed by customer service counselors who work in the Reserve Personnel Contact Center. If special attention is needed, it is referred to Tier 2.

“These letters are examples of Tier 0 service at its finest,” Ottinger said. “The customer knows what he wants and the computer automatically gives it to him.”

While not all the processes can fall into Tier 0, the six Air Force civilian developers still are working to make services easier for customers.

In the past couple years, ARPC developers launched online processes for customers to apply for retirement and nominate airmen for decorations.

One of the most significant changes to the system came in December 2007 with the launch of the vPC-GR Dashboard. This tool gave people a centralized place to see anything that was being processed in the system, he said. Specifically, it gave leaders and people in key positions within the organization the ability to see the status of transactions within their area of responsibility.

“With where we are around the world in many different and varied areas, giving our members access is crucial ... so they know and have a comfortable feeling that their records are right,” said Lt. Gen. Charles E. Stenner Jr., chief of Air Force Reserve and commander of Air Force Reserve

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Command. "Personnel services delivery transformation ... is helping us keep pace in line with the ops tempo of today's world and how we deploy around the world."

So far, the vPC-GR has processed tens of thousands of transactions since its first official capability—duty history updates for the Reserve—was launched in March 2006.

While most of the items that the developers have planned are enhancements to existing applications, there are still a couple Air National Guard-specific applications in the works like requests to separate.

"As developers, we have total control over vPC-GR applications and our case management system," Carter said. "If an urgent change is needed based on customer feedback, mandated changes, or to fix a problem, we have the local talent and flexibility to make these changes quickly."

As the military transitions to the Defense Integrated Military Human Resources System, Carter said he doesn't see his role disappearing when they flip the switch.

"Very few programs meet all of their customers' needs when they first hit the street. We'll be prepared to provide development support for customer processes during the transition to DIMHRS and migration to the new consolidated case management system," he said.

"All of the online applications we're creating are helping us get comfortable with using online transactions, which will continue to increase as the military transitions to DIMHRS," said Senior Master Sgt. Melody Mohigh, Reserve change manager.

"We want to make it as easy as possible for our customers," Ottinger said. "As we receive feedback from the field, we evaluate it to see if there is anything we can do to make it easier for our customers as a whole."

Woodring writes for Air Reserve Personnel Center Public Affairs.

AIR FORCE PRINT NEWS (AUG. 18, 2008) UPDATING EDUCATION JUST CLICKS AWAY FOR CIVILIANS

RANDOLPH AIR FORCE BASE, Texas—Air Force civilian employees who wish to update education information in their civilian personnel records have a new, easier way to do so: through the MyBiz Web site.

MyBiz is the self-service module in the Defense Civilian Personnel Data System. Instead of faxing their transcripts and waiting for someone to update their record, employees can now do it themselves.

"The Air Force, in conjunction with the Department of Defense, has been working to streamline and automate the manual processes of updating education, training, and special qualifications (certifications, professional licenses) into a Web-based self-service capability," said Kathryn Houston from the Civilian Future Operations Branch at the Air Force Personnel Center.

"Now, in addition to updating work and home telephone numbers, e-mail addresses, handicap codes, ethnicity and national origin, and language, employees can update their education through MyBiz, and it is immediately reflected in their personnel record. In the future, MyBiz will provide even more update capabilities."

The goal is to provide faster and smarter service to employees by giving them the ability to go in and update their important career information themselves, so it can be immediately reflected in their personnel record.

Prior to this change, employees could update some personal information, but not education. They had to follow a process that included completing sections of an OF 612 and faxing copies of transcripts to the Air Force Manpower Agency, who then put the information into the system.

Now, employees can update their own education information. They will be required to provide personnel a transcript only if personnel has a legal or regulatory requirement to verify the education entry, for example, if, based on the qualification standards, a position requires a degree or a specified number of course hours (this is often referred to as a "positive education" requirement).

For more information, visit AFPC's "Ask" Web site and search for "Education Updates" or call the 24-hour Air Force Contact Center at 800-616-3775.