

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BLOGGERS ROUNDTABLE WITH ALEX BAIRD, CHIEF OF FAMILY PROGRAMS, NATIONAL GUARD BUREAU SUBJECT: NATIONAL GUARD FAMILY ISSUES TIME: 2:00 P.M. EDT DATE: TUESDAY, AUGUST 3, 2010

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MS. MCCLUNEY: Okay. I think we're going to go ahead and get started.

Hello. I'd like to welcome you all to the Department of Defense Bloggers Roundtable for Tuesday, August 3, 2010. My name is Christen McCluney with the Office of the Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs, and I will be moderating our call today. a note to our bloggers on the line, please remember to clearly state your name and blog or organization in advance of your question.

Respect our guest's time, keeping questions succinct and to the point, and also try and limit your questions to one each so that everyone will get a turn to ask their questions.

Today our guest is Mr. Alex Baird, chief of Family Programs, National Guard Bureau. Mr. Baird will discuss issues related to families associated with the military. As families experience multiple deployments, their needs change and new challenges emerge. Only by knowing what those challenges are can we work together to address them.

We are pleased to have our guest today.

Mr. Baird, please start with any opening remarks you may have.

MR. BAIRD: Thank you very much. What I'd like to do is also introduce some of the other people I have in the room with me, my experts. Paula Sumrall is from our child and youth program also with the volunteer program. I've got Major Tim Tomlinson who just joined our staff and is part of our family program, and also Major Collins who is from the Army Guard Readiness Center Family program.

We are currently down in beautiful New Orleans at the national volunteer workshop. We have about 1,300 attendees. Half of those are volunteers. This is our annual event we've been doing for about 20 years now. It gives us a chance to recognize our volunteers and the great things they do for us, but also gives us an opportunity to train them as well as the other state personnel how to better utilize their volunteers.

In National Guard because we're not installation-based, we have about 40,000 volunteers who last year put in over two million hours.

And with that, I'll open it up to questions.

MS. MCCLUNEY: Okay. We have two more callers that joined in. Could you please state your names please?

Q This is Wendy from My Military Life.

MS. MCCLUNEY: Okay. Thank you.

Okay. Then we'll go ahead and start with the questions.

David, you were first on the line.

Q Thank you. Mr. Baird, thanks for being with us. My name is David Small, I am with the Reserve Officer's Association, and my blog is The Reserve Officer. My question for you is in regard to the stress on families and particularly military children I'm curious if you have any trend statistics or maybe vignettes that you might be able to share with the constant use of the National Guard and today's contingency operations and the stress that it's particularly causing with families and children, and perhaps highlight any programs that you might have that is helping with that issue.

MR. BAIRD: Well actually thank you very much, David. That let's me add something that I forgot in my opening remarks, which is the other half of what's going on down here in New Orleans is our annual youth symposium. As you know, the RAND Corporation did a great study on the effect of deployment on youth, and we are seeing an effect. And it is a great concern to us.

Part of the way we're addressing that is through our teen panel, which is our advisory group for our youth within the state territories and District of Colombia. What we find very valuable are the purple camps that are being run, also the state camps. What we find is the more engaged a child is, the more resilient they'll be.

What I think we're going to see throughout DOD is, you know, the Army did just a superb job of building battle mind to prepare their soldiers for deployment. Then they went into spouse battle mind. I think we're going to start seeing -- the wave of the future is going to be what do we have to do to start making our kids more resilient, and help them cope with deployment.

MS. MCCLUNEY: Thank you for your question, Dave.

Dale, you were next on the line.

Q Good afternoon, Mr. Baird. This is Dale Kissenger from MilitaryAvenue.com. Normally our blogger for families would be Leanne but she's giving birth to a baby right now so we're going to be a little bit -- step in here for her.

But she was also a National Guard spouse who had a deployed husband. And one of the questions she had was that she recently received information that a grant program that had helped her family and their civilian community attend soccer camps and do things like that that active duty kids have on base but they have to pay for it at a much higher rate on the civilian community has -- was going to be ending.

Do you know anything about that program and why would it be ending?

MR. BAIRD: I sure do. Thanks, Dale, for your question.

The group they're talking about is Our Military Kids. It's a charitable organization that makes grants to National Guard and Reserve families. I'll tell you what. I met with them and the chief of the National Guard Bureau about a week and a half ago; and there was no talk of them ending, only a talk of them getting stronger and doing more for National Guard and Reserve families.

Our Military Kids has kind of filled a niche were you've got families that want to put a child into karate class, into ballet. They want to attend archery. They may need tutoring on a subject, or they just wanted to learn guitar lessons, things that kind of no one else pays for. They're a niche and they'll grant -- I believe five years old is the age range. But anybody over five they'll grant to the family up to \$500 to participate in some kind of camp or some kind of event. It's a great organization. They work very closely with us. And I will tell you I've not heard anything about them ending. In fact they are here at our conference with us.

Q Okay. Super. Well there was an e-mail that went around, and it was from them. And it said that they were looking at a reduction in support. So that's why I asked the question.

Thank you very much for your explanation.

MR. BAIRD: Yeah, well I'd like to follow up on that. I think what we're seeing and not just us but all the Reserve components and the acting components is when the economy took a turn down, a lot of the organizations have found it a lot more difficult to get donations. And so some of them have had to scale back a little bit the amount of support they are giving to the Guard and Reserve.

Q Okay. Thank you very much.

MS. MCCLUNEY: Thank you.

Next we have Sarah.

Q Hi, good afternoon, Mr. Baird. This is Sarah Blansett. I'm with Cinchouse.com. We're a property site of military.com. We have a lot of our members that are younger, people just getting married and

that sort of thing. And we have an increasing number of members who are spouses and girlfriends of National Guard members.

My question for you today is what is the best resource that we can point them to for support as they transition into a new military life or relationship, particularly those who may not be based near an installation?

MR. BAIRD: Well, for those in the Guard -- and I would like to caveat, the Guard is willing to help any family member. We're all in the same service together, so we're willing to help anybody.

We have a website that is the joint services support portal. It's jointservicessupport.org. And you can go to that site -- the nice thing it does is it picks up on where you're coming in from and it gives you your state resources within that state, so you can find out who the state family program director are, the family assistance centers, and connect anywhere into that network, and then they can get you the help that you need.

It also connects you to psychological health, to veterans help. So it's kind of like our one-stop shop where you can go to and find out what the state resources are. Q Great. Thank you very much.

MR. BAIRD: You're welcome.

MS. MCCLUNEY: Our next caller is Beth Wilson.

Q Mr. Baird, this is Beth Wilson with Homefront in Focus. Thank you so much for taking the time to be with us today.

I wanted to know what your plans perhaps were for the future in using social media or new media to connect families, spouses, even children.

MR. BAIRD: That is a great question, Beth. The folks from Public Affairs here have done a great job of dragging me into social media. I will be honest that -- (laughter) --

Q Keyword dragging?

MR. BAIRD: -- I did not know what a tweet was. I am proficient at texting because I have a 15-year-old daughter.

General McKinley talks about it all the time: we have to change our communication strategy to those of our customers. And you know, back in my day it used to be a letter and you know, you open it up, you read it, and you keep it or you don't.

I found it interesting. One day I went to the mall, I was trying to track down my daughter and I called her three times, left three voicemails. And I was becoming concerned and I pulled out my phone and I just sent her a text, I said where are you, and it instantly came back: well, I'm in such and such store. And I had to realize I had to change

my method of communicating with my daughter because she doesn't answer her phone and she doesn't listen to her voicemail obviously.

So I think we need to reach out to all the social media. We had a long discussion about whether we wanted to have our own Facebook site. But we really want to stay with the National Guard site. That way, our families and our soldiers and airmen learn to go to just one site.

We're using social media throughout this workshop so that those who could not attend are able to stay connected, and they can stay connected through Twitter, through Facebook, and they're writing other stuff down for me that I probably don't even know how to pronounce.

Q If I could ask one quick follow up.

MR. BAIRD: Certainly. Q Are you familiar with what the Oklahoma National Guard Family Programs Office is doing? They launched an Internet talk show called "On Guard in Oklahoma." The numbers are just amazing. And it's become a great way for families to connect with the Family Program Office and with each other.

MR. BAIRD: Yes, I am familiar with that and it's a great resource. What we do in the Guard that works very, very well is a state will come up with an idea, they'll kind of perfect it, and then the rest of them will just start adopting it. So I think you're going to see that in more and more states.

I've been told to tell you that our hash tag -- I got that right? -- is GuardFamily.

Q Awesome. Thank you.

MR. BAIRD: Mm-hmm.

MS. MCCLUNEY: Thank you. Our next person on the line is Christine.

Q Hi. This is Christine Bourque. I am from the Strength Behind the Strong website. And the last two bloggers actually asked the questions I was going to ask, so some smart questions there, I guess.

But I wanted to follow up and just ask, in relationship sort of to social media that you were just talking about, you know, I know that sometimes it's -- you know, someone had mentioned the sisters and the moms and sort of the extended family that really have a hard time knowing where to go for help and support because they're not connected directly to the base or, you know, they're a little bit further removed.

Can they access all of these social-support networks as well? I mean, are they encouraged to do that as well?

MR. BAIRD: Yes, absolutely.

Q Okay.

MR. BAIRD: In fact, you know, the National Guard is community-based. We have over 3,000 armories. We have 92 locations where our airmen are at. Everything we do is reaching out to people who are not installation-based. In fact, I think the last number I heard was not even a third of our folks are near an installation. So we use social media and every other avenue we can to reach folks.

And what we're finding in the Guard, as the services are finding, is more and more what we're having is single airmen and single soldiers who are deploying, and it is the parents that really provide the support. So we need to stay as connected to them as we do the spouses.
Q Thank you.

MS. MCCLUNEY: And Wendy, you're up next.

Q Okay, great. It's Wendy from MyMilitaryLife.com. Thanks for being on the call today and taking all of our questions.

I read today Admiral Mullen came out with a recommendation the yes/no box be eliminated from deployment checklists when it comes to service members giving their permission for commands to contact families. I'm just wondering what your view is on that, considering, you know, Guard families, Reserve families, like you mentioned, are so far removed from installations.

MR. BAIRD: Thank you, Wendy.

He actually did that here at our conference. We've been fortunate enough not only to have Admiral Mullen here yesterday, but General Casey, chief of staff of the Army, was here this morning and just was -- both of them were absolutely amazing. It was just so enjoyable to listen to them talk.

For those that are not familiar with the yes/no box, it was put on a piece of paper that soldiers and airmen and sailors and Marines would fill out as they went through processing, and you were asked a question, "Do you want information passed on to your family member?" And the thought behind it was we want to protect the privacy of family members and we don't want to force information on them.

Well, military people who are going through lines -- I remember my father, who was a Marine, told me, "Always say no unless you have to say yes." And so what happens is, as people go through the processing line, they just start marking no on these checklists. And what would happen then is a family member would come back two months into a deployment and say, "You know, I haven't heard a thing from my husband or my wife's unit about the deployment, and I don't understand why I'm not being contacted." And then the unit has to tell them, "Well, your spouse said they did not want you contacted."

And so then we put the spouse in a bad position, who says, "I don't even remember filling out that form." So what, you know, Admiral Mullen said is it ought to default to everybody says yes unless somebody

specifically said, "I want written on my form I don't want my mother or my father contacted" because of a health reason or, you know, we can still accommodate those who don't want somebody contacted, but it has created problems. And he did say he would fix that.

MS. MCCLUNEY: All right, thank you for your question.

We have time to go around the horn one more time. So, David, if you have an additional question, you're free to go ahead.

Q No, I'm good. Thank you for your time. MR. BAIRD: Thank you.

MS. MCCLUNEY: Dale?

Q Yes, sir. My question is on success stories. What do you say you're bringing out of your conference here that's going to help the National Guard families in the future?

MR. BAIRD: I think the biggest success is the way we've been able to use our volunteers. Some of the states have been better than others. When we were in with General Casey this morning, one state said they had an issue, and it was interesting that the state right next to them said, "We had that. We fixed it."

And so through this conference we're able to talk about the best practices. What we find is usually it's about communication. It's about changing how we train our commanders so that they are involved and understand the issues are families are facing.

Q Okay, thank you very much.

MR. BAIRD: You're welcome.

MS. MCCLUNEY: Sarah, if you have an additional question.

Q I do, actually.

I have a question that's actually kind of in the joint environment. I know that in the Minnesota National Guard, they have a program called Beyond the Yellow Ribbon where the National Guard actually reaches out to other servicemember IAs who are coming back off of deployment, particularly like in Minnesota, where there's not a huge Navy presence. I know that Navy IAs who come off of deployment, the National Guard actually takes them under their wing and gives them access to programs.

Is that something that you find is common across the United States, or is that something -- if you could just say a few words about that and how well that works, something like that.

MR. BAIRD: In every state and territory and the District of Columbia. One of the things -- Secretary McCarthy, the Reserve Affairs secretary, also spoke. And he had asked for some preliminary

information, and he asked that very question. "Do you help people from other services?" And when he saw the numbers, he was very amazed to see that we had had over 20,000 encounters with Navy Reserve. We had had over 12,000 encounters with Marine Corps Reserve.

And, you know, the great thing about the National Guard is it's community-based. And a lot of times when you look at the Navy Reserve, Air Force Reserve and Army Reserve, you may have a regional headquarters that is many states away from where the families are actually located. And we certainly don't try to replace those Reserve components. What we try to do is augment their services to provide somebody local, because sometimes there's a big difference between somebody who can come face to face with you and somebody who is, you know, halfway across the country.

The other thing we find is when you've got somebody, let's say, in Kentucky that you're trying to get help from, they don't really know what the services are in Minnesota. So having somebody who's local, who knows what the local resources are and support services are, is a great advantage. So we try to partner as much as we can with the Reserve components. We don't ever turn anyone away, and we know our other Reserve counterparts never turn any of our families away.

Q Okay, great. Thank you very much.

MS. MCCLUNEY: Sarah?

Q Yes?

MS. MCCLUNEY: Do you have any additional questions?

Q I don't. That is all. Thank you very much, Mr. Baird.

MS. MCCLUNEY: Beth Wilson.

Q Thank you.

Sir, I wanted to just ask a little bit more specific about the needs of military Air National Guard children. Are there efforts to get into the school system where your active duty has -- (inaudible) -- or a school liaison officer? Is there a counterpart to that on behalf of National Guard children so that schools are aware of the unique challenges and stressors of National Guard children?

MR. BAIRD: That's a great question. In fact, that has been brought up in every session we've had with senior leaders. As you know, AMSEC goes out there and does quite a bit to try to get to the school districts. But our folks are so remote that sometimes it's challenging to get to every school district that might have a Guard member. General McKinley likes to say we have a Guard member and family in every zip code in the United States. And so it is quite a challenge.

One of the things we were able to do, about a year ago, was Paula Sumrall, who works with me, was added to the DOD-Department of Education working group. So we're actually represented on that work

group. They developed a toolkit for school administrators. And General McKinley did one of the lead-in videos for that, so it was posted on their website so he could thank them for their service. We're getting -- through the Department of Education, we're getting to their training and getting to the awareness. It's a tough challenge, as you can imagine, because, you know, I grew up in Idaho. And in Burley, Idaho, they don't even think about military because there's no installation anywhere around there. But through the Department of Education, I think we're going to be able to get to them.

We're also encouraging the leadership.

We had several of the adjutant generals stand up and say that they had met with the school superintendents and that they've then pushed that down.

Q Great. Thank you.

One other just little add-on. I'm actually an active-duty spouse. But on my show, I have about 30 percent National Guard spouses. And I was wondering, is there thought toward developing a program where active-duty and Guard could actually be hooked up a little bit better so that we can mutually support each other and share resources information?

MR. BAIRD: That's a great question. And I -- you know, we go to conferences and we talk about hooking up, and then we get back to work and we're so busy trying to take care of our own constituents that we don't always do a good job of connecting.

I will tell you, Admiral Mullen has a monthly meeting where he brings in all the service chiefs, and he's doing exactly that. He's getting them to the table and talking. And, you know, as I stated earlier, General Casey was here this morning and he just said very firmly, "We've got to be joint. Families' needs are the same across the board, and we can't afford to work within just our own service."

So when you hear, you know, the chief of staff of the largest service out there talking about the need to be joint, they're moving in that direction. Sometimes it's just getting over rice bowls, and I'm used to only working in my environment. We do find we work very well between Army, Army Guard, Army Reserve. We work well between Air Guard and Air Force.

The key now is going to be how do we go across services? How do we go between, say, the Air National Guard and Army Reserve to make sure they're connected?

Q Thank you. I would love to help with bottom up rather than top down, if that opportunity presents itself.

MR. BAIRD: I appreciate that.

MS. MCCLUNEY: Christine, do you have an additional question? Q I'm all set. Thank you very much.

MS. MCCLUNEY: Wendy?

Q As you wrap up your conference, I'm just wondering, where can we go to get links to some of the stories that will come out of the conference and some of the resources that you've highlighted today?

MR. BAIRD: They're going to write it down for me so I don't -- oh, just NG.mil.

MS. MCCLUNEY: And also, on our Facebook page, which is The National Guard on Facebook, we also have our Twitter page, which is TheNatlGuard. We've got links basically across the board. But our NG.mil site is definitely the home base for news stories.

MR. BAIRD: And search through the hash tag. We've included links back to DVTS, which has the videos from Admiral Mullen, Secretary McCarthy, General McKinley and some other National Guard leaders; the directors of the Army and Air National Guard and the director of the joint staff.

Q Great. Thank you.

MS. MCCLUNEY: Thank you all. We've had some great questions and comments today. As we wrap up today's call, I'd like to ask Mr. Baird if he has any final comments.

MR. BAIRD: My final comment would just be thank you for your support of military families. As this war has gone on, these multiple wars and conflicts have gone on over the years, your continued support is very important to our families that they're not forgotten. We appreciate it.

MS. MCCLUNEY: Thank you, sir.

Today's program will be available online at the Bloggers Roundtable link on DODLive.mil, where you will be able to access a story based on today's call along with source documents such as bios, this audio file, and print transcripts. A transcript from this roundtable will also be e-mailed to each individual on the call.

Again, thank you, sir, and our bloggers and journalists who participated today. This concludes today's event, and you're free to hang up at any time.

MS. BAIRD: Thank you, Christen.

END.