HOLD UNTIL RELEASED
BY THE COMMITTEE

STATEMENT BY

MR. ROBERT L. GORDON III

DEPUTY UNDER SECRETARY OF DEFENSE FOR MILITARY

COMMUNITY AND FAMILY POLICY

REGARDING

THE DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE VOLUNTARY EDUCATION PROGRAM AND THE QUALITY OF COLLEGE EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES AVAILABLE TO SERVICE MEMBERS

BEFORE THE

HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE

SEPTEMBER 22, 2010

Chairman Snyder and distinguished members of the House Armed Services Committee Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear today to discuss the Department of Defense's (DoD) Voluntary Education Programs and the quality of college education available to Service members.

The Department's Voluntary Education Programs provide lifelong learning opportunities for the off-duty military community, contributing to enhanced unit readiness for our Nation. Education helps prepare our Service members to be better Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, and Marines; better thinkers, better analysts, and better leaders

who will continue to make valuable contributions to our nation. Our programs meet the unique needs of the military off-duty student and therefore, continue to attract a large percentage of the military population every year.

Large Population. Each year approximately one-third of our Service members enroll in post-secondary courses leading to associate's, bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees. Colleges and universities, through an extensive network, deliver classroom instruction to hundreds of military installations around the world. Service members are also afforded opportunities to earn college credits for learning that has taken place outside the traditional classroom. This is accomplished through programs such as college-level equivalency testing, assessment of prior learning, assessment of military training, independent study, and distance learning.

Unique Needs. Service members enrolled in Voluntary Education Programs are non-traditional students. They attend school during off-duty hours, usually during the evening. They take courses in a part-time capacity, one or two classes a term. Often the military mission, deployments, transfers or family obligations take precedence over their education so they have breaks of months or even years between taking courses and completion of their degrees normally takes a long time. Opportunities for lifelong learning exist for Service members throughout their career. To improve their basic academic skills, DoD provides high school completion programs and functional/basic skills courses in traditional classroom settings and on-line self paced programs. To

enhance their military occupation and to prepare Service members to return to civilian occupations, there are DoD supported post-secondary education programs.

First Steps. A Service member's participation in DoD-supported voluntary education programs begins with a visit to an installation education center or on-line through their Service Education portal. There are approximately 350 DoD education sites worldwide, to include Contingency areas (Iraq and Afghanistan). At these centers, education officers and education guidance counselors present Service members with an extensive menu of options, provide details about specific programs, help members design courses of study, and accomplish administrative tasks to ensure that Service members receive maximum exposure to and benefits from available programs. They also provide information on the DoD tuition assistance program, Veterans' Education Benefits, Department of Education grants and loans, and other funding options available to Service members.

Benefits. Service members receive a number of voluntary education benefits. These benefits can be broadly classified as tuition support programs or credit conversion programs. Tuition support programs help defray the cost of education. Credit conversion programs enable a Service member to use courses, occupational training, and on-the-job skills as credit toward a college degree or vocational certificate.

The following are brief descriptions of some of the major voluntary education programs and benefits:

The Military Tuition Assistance (TA) Program: The TA program is standardized across the Services, providing tuition assistance for voluntary off-duty college courses

and degree programs. TA is provided only for courses offered by post-secondary institutions accredited by an accrediting body recognized by the U.S. Department of Education. Under the current uniform TA policy which commenced in Fiscal Year 2003 all Service participants may receive up to $4,500 of assistance per fiscal year individual course costs have a $250 per semester hour cap.

The Defense Activity for Non-Traditional Education Support (DANTES) Sponsored Testing Program: The Department operates a testing program through which Service members can earn certificates, licenses, college credits, and high school diplomas. In addition, they can satisfy entrance and employment requirements with successful completion of tests like the Graduate Record Exam (GRE), the Scholastic Achievement Test (SAT/ACT), and the PRAXIS Teacher Exam. Many of these tests are offered to members at no cost. The testing program is offered uniformly across the Services and is managed by DANTES through contracts with both College Board and Prometric.

Certification Programs: For vocational education, Certification Programs enable Service members to earn certifications in specialized technical fields based on their military training. A number of national trade associations, in fields such as information technology, broadcast engineering, medical technology, food preparation, and automotive, have agreements with DANTES to provide these certification exams via our education centers. Service-specific certification programs include the Army's Credentialing Opportunities On-Line (COOL), Navy COOL, and the Navy's United Services Military Apprenticeship Program (USMAP).

Service members Opportunity Colleges (SOC): The SOC program was created to minimize residency requirements and facilitate the transfer of course credits. The SOC is a DoD contractor cosponsored by the American Association of State Colleges and Universities and the American Association of Community Colleges. The SOC consortium is a group of approximately 1,900 colleges and universities offering associate's, bachelor's, and graduate-level degrees for Service members. All SOC members must be accredited by an accrediting body recognized by the U.S. Department of Education. A subset of these schools agrees to transfer credits among themselves, so Service members do not have to retake courses when they change duty stations. The SOC coordinates degree programs for the Army (SOCAD), Navy (SOCNAV), Marines (SOCMAR), Army Guard (SOCGUARD) and the Concurrent Admissions Program for Army Enlistees (CONAP). Participants must develop a degree plan and complete at least 25 percent of their degree requirements with their designated "home" college.

Community College of the Air Force (CCAF): The Air Force does not have a specific SOC program, but operates the Community College of the Air Force (CCAF). CCAF is an accredited two-year college open to Air Force enlisted on active duty, or enlisted in Reserve or Guard. CCAF offers associate degree programs in areas such as aircraft and missile maintenance, electronics and telecommunications, allied health, logistics and resources, and public and support services. Similar to the SOC program, credits toward a CCAF degree can be accumulated at Air Force advanced training schools by enrolling in colleges that offer accredited courses, and through credit by examination.

American Council on Education (ACE) Evaluation of Military Training: Military coursework and occupational specialty training relevant to individual degree requirements can also count as credit. The DoD contracts with ACE to evaluate military training courses for credit. Post-secondary institutions have the final say on credit acceptance.

Quality Education. The quality of education received by our Service members is very important to DoD. All post-secondary institutions participating in the TA programs, whether they are physically on our installations or not, must be accredited by an accrediting body recognized by the U.S. Department of Education. The criteria for being allowed to operate on our installations are even more stringent. Prior to operating on a military installation, an education service officer seeks favorable tuition rates, student services, and instructional support from providers. The base education staff conducts an education needs assessment to ensure that the colleges and universities providing post secondary instruction on the installations are offering appropriate education opportunities to the population. Institutions granting undergraduate academic credit must adhere to the SOC Consortium Principles and Criteria regarding the transferability of credit and the awarding of credit for military training and experience. To be selected, institutions must meet all of the following requirements: (1) Be chartered or licensed by a State government or the Federal Government, and have State approval for the use of veterans' educational benefits for the courses to be offered; (2) Be accredited by an agency recognized by the U.S. Department of Education; (3) Conduct on-installation courses that

carry identical credit values, represent the same content and experience, and use the same student evaluation procedures as courses offered through the main administrative and academic campus; (4) Maintain the same admission and graduation standards that exist for the same programs at the main administrative and academic office, and include credits from courses taken off-campus in establishing academic residency to meet degree requirements; (5) Charge tuition and fees that are not more than those charged to nonmilitary students; (6) Have established policies for awarding credit for military training by examinations, experiential learning, and courses completed using modes of delivery other than instructor-delivered, on-site classroom instruction.

The quality of our education programs involves the installation education center, education officers, installation base commanders, the Services, the Office of the Secretary of Defense, and our institutional partners. To support these efforts, DoD has contracted with ACE to develop a process called the Military Installation Voluntary Education Review (MIVER), which provides a third party, independent review of our on-installation programs. The review assesses the quality of voluntary education programs at selected military installations each year and assists in the improvement of voluntary education programs through appropriate recommendations to colleges and universities and installation commanders. DoD is proactively taking this approach to quality one step further to include those programs not on our installations. To that end, in the future, we will use improved quality criteria to review programs of those institutions receiving TA dollars that operate on and off our installations. Our new policy, currently on the Federal

Register for public review, states all institutions participating in the TA program will have a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the DoD, which articulates the commitment and agreements between the educational institutions receiving TA. One of these agreements is to participate in the DoD Military Installation Voluntary Education Review Process. The policy includes traditional classroom and distance learning institutions operating on and off the military installations.

The DoD's interaction with post-secondary institutions is further strengthened through the SOC. The SOC advocates for and communicates the needs of the military community to the higher education community. The SOC ensures institutions are responsive to the special needs of the Service members, assists the higher education community to understand the requirements of the military, and serves as the DoD liaison with institutions to resolve concerns and share program information to strengthen education relationships with DoD.

Conclusion:

DoD is committed to offering high quality, comprehensive, lifelong learning opportunities for Service members and effectively delivering voluntary education programs that meet the changing needs of the military. Our programs assist Service members in gaining the knowledge they need for their chosen education and military career paths; ensuring they acquire the skills necessary to operate in a dynamic national security environment; and in returning to civilian life, that they are prepared to be

successful in their chosen careers, leading contributors to their communities, and productive citizens in the 21st century.