



A Discussion with the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Reserve Affairs

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On 14 January, I had the privilege to meet with the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Reserve Affairs, Hon. Dennis McCarthy. He was at AUSN headquarters for a meeting of The Military Coalition, of which our association is a member.



(L to R) Mr. Bob Norton (MOAA), CAPT G. Mark Hardy (AUSN National President), The Hon. Nancy E. Boyda (Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Reserve Affairs), and The Hon. Dennis M. McCarthy, Assistant Secretary of Defense for Reserve Affairs.

As former Chief of the Marine Corps Reserve and former Executive Director of the Reserve Officers Association, Secretary McCarthy understands well issues faced by our Sailors today. Let me share with you some of his themes that he expressed for 2010.

Since 2001, our reserve forces have adopted an operational rotation cycle vice a strategic Cold War-era mass mobilization and surge approach. For the foreseeable future, we will need some percentage of our reserve units all of the time. His conversations with the young men and women serving today reveal that most prefer being part of an operational force rather than being part of a strategic reserve.

When asked if we have kept the faith with our Guard and Reserve forces, that is, signing them up for a one-weekend-a-month strategic job but now asking them to perform operationally on a regular, prolonged basis, he points out that every member in uniform today has either enlisted, reenlisted, or completed their service obligation under the new system. Today, we are a force of volunteers, and each of us has volunteered to remain on duty to serve within the operational reserve force.

TRICARE Reserve Select (TRS) is a benefit available to most drilling SELRES, and will

soon be available to gray area reserve retirees. It's an 80/20 medical indemnity plan with individual premiums less than \$50 per month, and full family care under \$200. Yet, only 7 to 8% of the reserve force today has elected this benefit. He sees a role for associations such as ours to help get the word out about this valuable program. (I have subscribed to TRS since October 2007.) Most employers pay nearly \$1,000 monthly per employee for health insurance. Having access to TRS provides more options for Sailors who are seeking employment or between jobs.

Our Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve (ESGR) organization has become much more effective over the past eight years. Its nearly 4,500 volunteers helps protect the reemployment rights of service members returning from military duty. However, our current effort is targeted toward sustaining an existing employment relationship. Because of the economy, many who return from duty may find their old job gone. Perhaps we should consider broadening the scope of ESGR to assist in finding a better job for these people.

Lastly, overarching all of these initiatives is support for our military families. The Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program provides Reserve members and their families with information, services, referral, and proactive outreach opportunities throughout the entire deployment cycle. Programs such as Returning Warrior Workshops offer families an opportunity to reconnect after a deployment or mobilization. Expect to see these programs reach larger numbers in the upcoming year.

Our ongoing dialog with Pentagon leadership, Capitol Hill, and members ensures that issues that affect you and your families are addressed. It's a privilege to have a patriot such as Secretary McCarthy serving in a role of great responsibility, and we wish him the best in continued success.

G. Mark Hardy