

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-4704

COMMITTEES:
APPROPRIATIONS
BUDGET
HEALTH, EDUCATION, LABOR
AND PENSIONS
RULES AND ADMINISTRATION
VETERANS' AFFAIRS

March 12, 2010

The Honorable Robert Gates
Secretary of Defense
U.S. Department of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301-1000

Dear Secretary Gates:

I am writing with concerns about the Pentagon's decision to temporarily halt operations of the Military Spouse Career Advancement Accounts (MyCAA) program and to close it to new enrollees following an overwhelmingly positive response and an unforeseen number of applications. It is extremely disappointing that the spouses of active-duty military service members and reservists who were enrolled in this successful program were left in the lurch due to a lack of preparedness by the Department of Defense, and that this opportunity will be closed off to additional participants.

Our men and women in uniform serve and sacrifice for our nation on a daily basis. We owe them our complete support while they are on the battlefield, as well as the care and benefits they have earned when they get home. But they are not the only ones who sacrifice for our country. The spouses of our active duty military also bear a significant burden of service as well, and frequent moves often make it hard for them to gain the skills and training they need to advance in their careers. This is especially devastating during these tough economic conditions.

As you know, the MyCAA program provides tuition of up to \$6,000 for military spouses to train for career opportunities in fields that can endure frequent relocations. But I have heard from military spouses around my state who were left scrambling to continue their training and education programs due to the program's sudden halt, and who simply did not know where to turn when they heard the news. Many were never directly notified by the Pentagon and ended up finding out through their schools or a posting on militaryonesource.com.

As you know, unemployment and underemployment adds to the already substantial stress facing our military families, and the MyCAA program allows military spouses to access the education and training they need to develop portable career options that work with the transitory lifestyle of military members. This makes it that much more unacceptable those military families were cut off due to a lack of preparedness on the part of the Pentagon.

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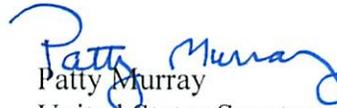
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While I am pleased to see you will be restarting the program for current enrollees, I am concerned about the potential for future spikes in enrollment to disrupt services, as well as about how the Pentagon will pay back enrollees who have already paid tuition while the program was shutdown.

I would like to hear directly from you about what led to the unforeseen shutdown of this popular program, and what needs to be done to ensure it never happens again. I also want to know why you failed to reach out to Congress when the situation emerged and what the status is of your department's review of the program.

It is unacceptable for our government to shortchange military families by promising benefits and then leaving them in limbo. We owe it to our military families to fix this situation and to expand the program to all spouses from here on out. I look forward to hearing from you on this and to working with you on this issue.

Sincerely,


Patty Murray
United States Senator