

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

DoD BLOGGERS ROUNDTABLE

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE SOCIAL MEDIA OPERATIONS

Washington, D.C.

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PARTICIPANTS:

Moderator:

WILLIAM SELBY
Department of Defense Public Affairs

Guests:

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Senior Program Analyst
Morale, Welfare, and Recreation Policy

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Other Participants:

AMY BUSHATZ
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PROCEEDINGS

MR. SELBY: I'd like to welcome you all to the Department of Defense Bloggers Roundtable for Wednesday, May 22, 2013. My name is William Selby with the Office of the Secretary of Defense, Public Affairs, and I'll be moderating the call. Today we are honored to have as our guest Ms. Carol Potter, Senior Program Analyst for Morale Welfare and Recreation Policy, and Eddie Menser, Policy and Management Analyst in the Office of Family Policy. Both are from the Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Military Community Family Policy.

A note to everybody on the line, please remember to clearly state your name and blog or organization in advance of your question. Keep your questions succinct and to the point. And if you are not asking a question, we ask that you please place your phone on mute.

With that, Ms. Potter has an opening statement. If you want, you can go ahead with that now, ma'am.

MS. POTTER: Thank you very much. Good afternoon, everyone. It is my pleasure to be able to join you this afternoon. As we all know, the challenges of deployment and frequent relocation can sometimes make it difficult for service members and their families to feel settled and enjoy themselves. Additionally, like civilian families, most military families are on a budget and that may limit what they can spend on recreation and summer trips.

To help members and their families enjoy those summer months despite financial constraints, the Department of Defense and its federal partners provide a number of free and discounted recreational opportunities for our military families. These programs enable families to spend time together, to get outdoors, to be active, and to keep children busy while they're out of school.

So whether you're looking for a place to vacation, a hike in the mountains, or maybe a trip to the bowling center, MWR, Morale Welfare and Recreation, is a place to start. We look forward to discussing those recreational opportunities today and answering your questions.

MR. SELBY: Thank you very much, ma'am. And, Dale, you were first in line. You can go ahead with your question.

MR. KISSINGER: Good afternoon. This is Dale Kissinger from Militaryavenue.com. My question concerns the programs that have, you know, received some great things. Like Blue Star Museums is just fantastic. What about the on base programs? Are they seeing any impacts from the reduction in fees or payments or reduced civilian personnel furloughs, et cetera? Are military families seeing any impact on their installations?

MS. POTTER: That's a great question and I'm really glad that you brought that up. Of course, sequestration is going to affect the MWR program. But what we're seeing is going to be happening on the installations is perhaps a reduction in hours or a shift in hours. Maybe a program won't open as early in the morning. Maybe it'll stay open a little later at night. There might be a day where the program might not be offered rather than offering it seven days a week. But please rest assure that although it will vary by installation, MRW programs will be available for our military members and their families continuously throughout the summer.

MR. KISSINGER: Okay, super. We really need that for our military families and I appreciate that. Can you give us a certain amount of dollars or anything that has been reduced by? Can you tell us what that is?

MS. POTTER: Actually we have not had a reduction in dollars because we've already got a set budget for this year. So we're operating with the same equipment, with some new equipment, as a matter of fact, and under the same parameters as before. It's just that the personnel, and you know how important that can be for an MWR program, the personnel that are operating it, some of those will be furloughed, especially if they are general service GS employees. NAS employees, it's my understanding, may not be as affected by the furlough. So we don't expect any reduction in dollars whatsoever.

MR. KISSINGER: Thank you very much.

MR. SELBY: Thank you. And, Sally, did you have a question or are you just listening in?

MS. GIFFORD: No, I'm fine. Thank you.

MR. SELBY: And on to Amy.

MS. BUSHATZ: Hi. Thank you so much for being on the call today. So my question is, you just mentioned for the current year that you're not expecting any reduction in dollars. But tell me about for next year. What is the difference between this year and next year in terms of what you're expecting for operating dollars, you know, whether because of sequestration or just other budgetary issues?

MS. POTTER: Each of the services have come in and put in their budget. And to my knowledge, their budget has been accepted and we're not expecting

any variations from that in the future for next year.

MS. BUSHATZ: But you tell me on a practical level what the new budget will mean in terms of what (inaudible) here at Fort Campbell where my husband is stationed. Will I see anything different next year in terms of operating, or hours, or variety that I have not seen – than what I've seen this year?

MS. POTTER: It's hard for me to get down to specifics on an installation level. What I can tell you is that each service has already had their budget for next year determined, and then it works down to the installations, and then it's an installation by installation decision. I'm not anticipating, as I said before, I'm not anticipating much, if any, change from this year.

MS. BUSHATZ: Thank you so much.

MR. SELBY: Thank you. And who else – was there anybody else on the call that did not get a chance to ask a question so far?

MS. HOLD: Sir, this is Leslie Hold I just wanted to let you know –

MR. SELBY: Okay. I heard somebody beep in, ma'am. I wasn't sure. Anybody else? Okay.

MS. POLING: This is Wendy from Mymilitarylife.

MR. SELBY: Oh, Wendy. Wendy, I'm sorry, I was just talking about – seeing if anybody else joined the call.

MS. POLING: Oh, okay.

MR. SELBY: But that's fine. It's your turn so you can go ahead with your question.

MS. POLING: Okay. I just was wondering if you have any advice for military families that want to see a certain event or a singer or (inaudible) variety of things come to their installation, how would they go about requesting that to come to their installation?

MS. POTTER: Requesting that it comes to the installation might be a little difficult. But installation commanders are always open to ideas, as is the MRW director. But let me talk about how they can find out about activities that are scheduled to come to their installation. Of course, there's advertising

throughout an installation and in particular in the newsletter or the newspaper that the installation publishes. But people can also go to any of the MWR office and in particular the Information Ticket and Tours Office.

Sometimes it's called the Leisure Travel Office. Sometimes it's called ITT, Information Ticket and Tours. Sometimes it's called ITR, Information Ticket and Recreation. It just depends upon the installation and the particular service.

But those people will have all of the up-to-date information on local events, local concerts, as well as all of the discounted tickets, for instance, those to Disney World and Disney Land, Sea World, and all of the discounts that we offer. Often they will have baseball tickets, as well as other sports venues. And also, they're able to do vacation planning. So it's really quite a full service center. So that would be my recommendation.

Number one, read the local newspaper. And number two, check in with the MWR Information Ticket and Tour Office. But don't let me forget that when we're talking about children, then you need to check in with the Children and Youth Program on the installation because they have programs that are unique to our children and youth.

MR. MENSER: This is Eddie Menser from the Office of Family Policy. And I'm going to just jump in on a couple of points. I want to jump back to the original question as far as the affects of sequestration on programs on installations. And we are very happy to note that the most recent guidance from the Secretary of Defense has exempted our child care workers from the affects of sequestration. This is especially important for us in the arena of the school age care programs for our 6 to 12 year olds, knowing that things change a great deal when school is out and kids are in programs for 10 to 12 hours a day. We're excited that we will see little to no affect on our child care programs throughout the summer and we're very pleased with that outcome. And, of course, as Carol mentioned, your youth programs, your child development programs are the resource for information on local opportunities for children and youth to participate in a number of activities both on the installation and in local communities.

MR. SELBY: Did you get all that, Wendy?

MS. POLING: Yes. Thank you.

MR. SELBY: You're welcome. And Dale.

MR. KISSINGER: The pass for the military and their dependents from the USGS for national parks, I know that's been worked with DOD. And I went

to their website. And I have a question about it because of personal experience. Is this available to military retirees, as well as active duty and guard and reserve members?

MS. POTTER: It unfortunately is not available to retirees. They only made it available to active duty, National Guard, and reserves, with the understanding that if a retiree is over a certain age, I think it's 65, you get a discounted ticket anyway. But, you know, speaking of that pass, it's really pretty phenomenal. It's not only a pass that can be used at the national parks, but it can also be used at other federal lands.

It was actually a consortium of five different organizations. So this pass can be used in USDA Forest Service Land, Fish and Wildlife Service, the Bureau of Reclamation, the Bureau of Land Management, and, of course, the National Park Service. It's a really phenomenal opportunity for our military families to get out into nature and hike, picnic, really enjoy all of the magnificent opportunities that our country has to offer.

MR. KISSINGER: Oh, it is great. Thank you very much for those that work that pass. It is a good deal. Thank you.

MR. SELBY: Thanks. And back to Amy.

MS. BUSHATZ: I suspect the answer to this is no because I don't recall the person who gave us our pass, you know, making any special note about it. But do we happen to know how many military families have taken advantage of that pass since you guys started, or, you know, the Department of Interior started allowing that last year?

MS. POTTER: I know that they're keeping track of it. But we have not reached out and asked for that number yet. We were really thinking about doing that towards the end of the summer. We thought that that might be a good measure of how the usage is going.

MS. HOLD: Amy, this is Leslie. I would recommend you reach out to the Interior Department and see what they might have on that.

MS. BUSHATZ: I'll do that. Thanks.

MS. POTTER: Now, I would just like to mention one other item while we're talking about the National Park Service. Five times a year the National Park Service offers free admission to national parks for anybody. And the next one that is coming up will be this summer and it will be August 25th, which is the

National Park Service birthday. So I encourage our other population, our retirees and civilians, to take advantage of those opportunities.

MR. SELBY: Thank you. And back to Wendy.

MS. POLING: Okay. Thanks. I have a question about fitness centers on post. I've read that many fitness centers are being cut down to 80 hours a week in some places. And out in town we all know we can go to these 24 hour facilities. We know our sailors and other service members are working shift work and working all kinds of crazy hours. Is there any plans to go to an unmanned fitness center on installations so that way we're not foreseeing service members to go in town for access to fitness centers?

MS. POTTER: The Department is considering looking at unmanned fitness centers. However, I think it's important to understand the reason why we have manned centers. And it's for the safety and security of our service members and families. It's not because we're trying to be bad people and restricting it. It's because we really care about the safety. And if something were to happen to a service member or a family member that was in one of those centers, it would truly be unfortunate. And so it's a safety factor that keeps our hours around 80 a week.

MS. POLING: Okay. Thanks for answering my question.

MR. SELBY: And back around to Dale.

MR. KISSINGER: Well, I think I'm done. Thank you.

MR. SELBY: Roger that. Oh, I'm sorry, Wendy, I skipped you again. Wendy, did you have a question?

MS. POLING: No, I'm good. I mean I just asked the last one so I'll wait for my turn again.

MR. SELBY: Okay. Sorry.

MS. POLING: Okay.

MR. SELBY: Amy, did you have a follow up?

MS. BUSHATZ: Yeah. On the fitness center subject, do you have any data or information about usage in terms of whether it's dropped or risen at the

fitness centers maybe that would signal if people are going off post? Any usage data at all?

MS. POTTER: I do not have any usage data at my fingertips for this telephone call. I can tell you that it is one of the programs that is the most used. And generally speaking, I'm being told by the services that they're not seeing a decrease in the use of fitness centers. It's always been popular and always well attended.

MS. BUSHATZ: So are you then not particularly concerned about people heading or feeling the need to head off post for those services?

MS. POTTER: It's not that we're – we encourage our service members and their families to be fit, and whether they do that, they choose to do that on the installation in our fitness centers or they choose to do that in the community, we think it's extremely valuable and important. So we really encourage fitness and exercise any place.

MS. BUSHATZ: But you want to have people – I mean we have the facilities, we're paying for the facilities on installations, right? We want to have people and make them attractive for users on installations?

MS. POTTER: Yes. And trust me, our fitness installations are extremely busy. And, of course, we have to be mindful of the fact that 70 percent of our service members and families currently live off base. So it's not unlikely that that's where they might choose to recreate.

MR. SELBY: Thank you, ma'am.

MS. BUSHATZ: I'm sorry. Can I have one more follow up question on that?

MR. SELBY: Sure.

MS. BUSHATZ: Do you have the goal of getting – like myself, I live off base and I go to an off base gym, just this morning, in fact. But do you have the goal of getting someone like me to come on base to use the gym or are you – or do you feel that your clientele levels on post are high enough that you don't really need to worry about wooing someone like me back because you just have – there's just enough people there as it is kind of thing?

MS. POTTER: I think that that's a safe statement to say. Our fitness centers are extremely busy. We have busier times, early in the morning and then

around lunch time and then after work. But they are fully occupied. And so we're not necessarily looking to add additional members to the fitness center.

MR. SELBY: Did you get that, Amy?

MS. BUSHATZ: Yes. Thank you.

MR. SELBY: Sure. And Wendy.

MS. POLING: Okay. Talking about budget cuts, you said, you know, that some of the hours will be cut at some fitness centers or recreation centers. And you know that a lot of spouses and families live off base. One of the things that -- I think our listeners and our readers are very savvy to what ITT is and what it offers. And with places like that, like the craft centers, the auto hobby places, with those also getting their hours cut, how is leadership dealing with even more splintering off of families, to where they might go to these places when they first come to an installation because it is more like community to them? How is leadership handling that?

MS. POTTER: Well, as you know, that's completely up to individual installations and they are handling it differently. One of the things that we're looking at, however, at the Department of Defense level, is using more social media and other types of IT programs to help us get the word out to our service members and families and to connect people that are interested in doing like activities.

We are just right now in the infant stages of looking at that. So that's about all the information I can give you. But my point is to tell you that we are looking to the future and where we might be able to offer other programs through social media.

MR. SELBY: Thank you. And, Wendy, did you get that?

MS. POLING: Yes, I did. Thank you.

MR. SELBY: You're welcome. Dale, did you have any -- I know you said you didn't last time. Anything this time?

MR. KISSINGER: No, I guess not. I think I'm done, William. Thank you.

MR. SELBY: You're welcome. Amy.

MS. BUSHATZ: Yeah. Didn't you know I'd have another question? I'm sorry, but as to the fitness center thing, you said the Department is considering looking at unmanned fitness centers. Is it kind of a, yeah, some day we'll do that sort of a look, or is it a, we have a steady plan, or something that you're actively doing? This is just – talk like that the Military.com leaders will be extremely interested in. Sorry to harp on it.

MS. POTTER: No problem. I think it would be premature to announce that there is a program or a project. But I can tell you that there are a lot of meetings that are taking place and a lot of thought that is being given to how we would implement a change in policy.

MS. BUSHATZ: Thank you so much.

MR. SELBY: And, Wendy, did you have any follow ups?

MS. POLING: Yes, I did. This question is actually for Mr. Menser. And hopefully I've got the right program attached to the right family policy office. I'm located here in the San Antonio area, where we have Fort Sam Houston, and one of the big army programs for families, Army Family Team Building which is being piloted here also as Armed Forces Family Team Building, has just lost its program manager due to sequestration. So I'm wondering from your level, how do you see cuts on this very much needed training for spouses not having someone that's salaried headed up in a large installation like Fort Sam, and I'm guessing other places around the country?

MR. MENSER: That is a great question. And I would say that that is news to me. I had not heard that we have actually seen positions cut due to sequestration. Unfortunately, in that instance, and even under the pilot of the Armed Forces Team Building, it actually doesn't come out of the Office of Family Policy. That is a locally administered program.

MS. POLING: Okay. Interesting. So then the base installation commander is making that decision?

MR. MENSER: It's hard to say. But it is an army program even though it's being piloted there at Fort Sam as the Armed Forces Team Building program. It is a local decision to make that.

MS. POLING: Okay. All right. I'll have to do some further investigation then. But thank you for taking my question.

MR. MENSER: Of course.

MR. SELBY: Okay. Do we have anymore follow ups? All right. Well, thank you for your questions. And thank you for your time, Ms. Potter and Mr. Menser. Did you have any closing statement, Ms. Potter?

MS. POTTER: Yes. I would like to add a couple of things. One of them is, I'd like people to be aware of the MWR Library Summer Reading Program. It's a six week program. The theme this year is Have Book, Will Travel. And everybody that participates, the children that participate must register at the library to be eligible for prizes. And they can read their books either in print or electronically, for instance, if they have a Kindle or a Nook.

So we would suggest that people that are interested in this program for their children contact their local library for specific program information. It may start a little differently. The start time may be a little different for each installation. But like I said, it is six weeks. Children must be registered to be eligible for prizes. And it's a pretty exciting program for the summer and it helps our children stay engaged and keep their minds in a learning mode. Another thing that I want to mention is that we have an online library at Military One Source that is particularly good for the 70 percent of our families that live off base.

MR. SELBY: Thank you very much, ma'am. Sorry.

MS. POTTER: No. I'm so sorry.

MR. SELBY: I apologize.

MS. POTTER: I also want to remind everyone again, Eddie mentioned that there are camps for children and youth and to contact the Child and Youth Program on the installation. And I think that that is extremely important for the summer time. Blue Star Museums, there weren't any questions, but we've got more than 1,800 museums in all 50 states and the District of Columbia that are participating. Some of these are children's' museums, some are fine art, some are history and science and nature centers, a phenomenal learning experience for our children. So in closing, a healthy and fit military force is essential to our national security, and that includes our families, as well as our service members. To support that healthy lifestyle, the Department of Defense MWR program which includes the Children and Youth program, provides unique, high quality recreation opportunities. MWR promotes active living, helps build positive self-esteem, and is free to Corps, and contributes to mission readiness.

I'd like to thank all of you for participating in the summer fund on a budget discussion. Good afternoon.

MR. SELBY: Thank you very much, ma'am. And thank you to everybody online for your participation. I'll have an audio –

MS. HOLD: Mr. Selby, this is Leslie Hold.

MR. SELBY: Yes, ma'am.

MS. HOLD: I'm sorry to interrupt. I just wanted to kind of put this out there. Number one is, quite honestly, the beneficiary of these great programs through MWR and through some of these collaborative efforts. One of the reasons why I wanted us to get together for this discussion is, as we all know, the summer season kicks off pretty much this weekend with Memorial Day and runs through September. So quite honestly, my own personal agenda with bringing everybody together today was so that we can, through each of you, reach out to military families so that they know through the summer what some of the exciting opportunities are available to them, whether they're, you know, in the states, stationed in Washington, D.C., but maybe exploring, you know, out west, what are some of the things that are available to them.

So I know that a lot of the discussion today was about budget stuff and some of the other things that the Department is facing right now, and as you go through your reporting process, if you have any questions with regard to budgets and some of the decisions that the Department is making, if you would, please reach out to me and I'll be glad to help you – marry you up with the subject matter experts on that, or Mr. Selby can help link us together.

As Ms. Potter said, our family programs are extremely important to us. And I say that as a beneficiary, obviously, of those programs. You know, they contribute to the readiness of the force, as she said.

MS. POTTER: Before you close, Eddie would like to make just a couple comments.

MS. HOLD: Okay. Sure. And as we, you know, as the Department looks at or faces, you know, the fiscal reality right now, we are to the greatest extent possible trying to minimize the impact of furloughs and sequestration on the Department as a whole. I will tell you that one of the things that we highlighted here were the great MWR programs that are offered through, as Ms. Potter said, the ITT offices, the great program that the National Park Service provides to us.

And just yesterday, as Ms. Potter mentioned, the Blue Star Museums program launched, and that, as you may know, is a collaborative effort between the National Endowment for the Arts and Blue Star families. And 2,000 museums have opened their doors literally to military families. So that regardless

of where we go this summer to spend our vacations, or regardless of where we're stationed, we're not far from a great educational, inspirational, and extremely economical place to spend our very limited time with our families. So I say all that to say is, I'm glad to take whatever budget related questions you have. But I would encourage you to please partner with us as we try to communicate to our families the wonderful, exciting programs that are in their back doors and the commitment that many partners have who are outside the Department to military families. They recognize the sacrifice and the dedication our families, and the unique situations that our families face. And as a beneficiary, I am grateful for the way that they're honoring our families. And with that, I'll stand by for Mr. Menser's comments.

MR. MENSER: Great. Thank you, Leslie. And there's two areas that I really would like to talk about before we end the call, and the first of those are the different camp opportunities that are available for our young members of the military family, for the 6 to 18 year olds. We have two different initiatives that we have developed through the Office of Family Policy. One of those initiatives is a series of camps being offered across the U.S. in support of children that have been experiencing deployment over the last 18 to 24 months.

So any experience in deployment, whether their parents are deployed right now or they're in the pre-deployment phase or the post-deployment phase, those camps take the range of anything from a day camp, where it might be a partial day camp during the week, to residential camps, where they may be experiencing a full week residing at a camp some place in the U.S.

We have over 120 of those camps being offered. And you can find information on those camps again by visiting Military One Source. Most of those camps are offered at no to very little cost. And when we say little cost, it might be a \$25 registration fee.

In addition, we have a series of camps that we refer to as our Teen Adventure Camp Series. And these are very exciting opportunities for 14 to 18 year olds and opportunities that they normally wouldn't have. Examples of those might be a week long hike through Denali National Forest in Alaska or a week of sea kayaking through the Florida Keys. We tend to focus on more high adventure activities for those older teens that they normally wouldn't have those opportunities. Again, those camps are offered at no to very little cost. And in some cases, because there's fewer of those camps, we've even been able to apply some of the cost or some of the savings to transportation so that individuals can get there at a minimal cost.

The second area that I would really like to stress is our Military Youth on the Move Initiative. And especially in the summer time as young people and families are moving and PCSing around the world, I would highly recommend that we recommend Military Youth on the Move as a resource for young people to

be able to go online and learn more about the installation that they'll be moving to. There's connections there for a youth sponsorship program at each installation that will allow young people to connect with other young people of like interests so that it makes that transition just a little bit easier as they do experience that PCS from installation to installation.

Again, Military One Source is a wealth of information in all of these areas. It can be accessible online or via phone at 1-800-342-9647. And I'll close it there unless there's any other questions about specifically camps or Military Youth on the Move.

MS. BUSHATZ: I'm sorry. This is Amy Bushatz. I do have a question about the camps. You mentioned a couple of very cool sounding camps that, frankly, I would like to transform myself into a military child and go to.

MR. MENSER: Me, too.

MS. BUSHATZ: But, you know, I'm wondering, hey, if I had a kid that age, how would I find out about these camps?

MR. MENSER: If you were to go right now to Military One Source and click on the children and youth area, or to call Military One Source, they would be able to directly line you up with the information there. There are links to both of those camp programs. And you'll be able then to identify which camps might be of interest and then find out from the individual state or camp director the pertinent information you would need.

MS. BUSHATZ: Thank you so much.

MR. MENSER: I also want to mention that this is not the limit of camps that are offered for military kids. These happen to be camps that are funded through DOD from OSD and the Office of Family Policy. But there are a number of other organizations out there that have been supporting our military kids for a number of years. One of those you may be very familiar with would be the Purple Camp Program.

Another that really has come on in the last couple of years that I have heard great reviews about is a program called Camp Corral and that can be accessed through www.campcorral.com. And that is a camp program offered across the U.S. specifically for military kids that's sponsored wholly by the Golden Corral restaurants. And we've, again, seen some great anecdotal evidence that those programs are extremely supportive of military youth and bringing military youth together so that they can share their experiences.

MR. SELBY: Roger that. Were there any other follow up questions? And, sir, that was very well said. I apologize for not coming to you for closing statements the first time around. I would like to thank everybody for your comments today and for your questions again. Today's program will be on DODlive.mil. I'll have an audio file ready for this. It should be up first thing in the morning at the latest. And also a transcript will be ready tomorrow. I will email those links out to everybody on the call. Thank you again for joining us. This concludes today's call.

MR. MENSER: Thank you. It was great to be here.

MR. SELBY: Yes, sir. Thank you again. Thanks everybody.

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