

**SUPPORTING MILITARY FAMILIES: THE GROTON  
MODEL**

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**HEARING**

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON HEALTH, EDUCATION,  
LABOR, AND PENSIONS

UNITED STATES SENATE

ONE HUNDRED EIGHTH CONGRESS

FIRST SESSION

ON

EXAMINING HOW EFFECTIVE THE NAVY HAS BEEN IN MAKING IT  
EASIER FOR MILITARY FAMILIES RAISING CHILDREN AND TO DETER-  
MINE WHAT ADDITIONAL CHANGES CAN BE MADE TO FURTHER AS-  
SIST MILITARY FAMILIES

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JUNE 16, 2003  
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## **SUPPORTING MILITARY FAMILIES: THE GROTON MODEL**

**MONDAY, JUNE 16, 2003**

U.S. SENATE,  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON CHILDREN AND FAMILIES,  
OF THE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH, EDUCATION, LABOR, AND  
PENSIONS,  
*Washington, DC.*

The subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 10 a.m., at the Youth Center, Naval Submarine Base New London, 29 Hickory Drive, Groton, CT, Senator Alexander, chairman of the subcommittee, presiding.

Senators Alexander and Dodd.

### **OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR ALEXANDER**

Senator ALEXANDER. Good morning. I am Lamar Alexander, a United States Senator from Tennessee. And of course you know your own Senator, Chris Dodd.

I call the hearing to order of our Subcommittee on Children and Families. I am a member of the U.S. Senate, and I am the chairman of the subcommittee. Senator Dodd is the ranking member of the subcommittee. The only reason that is decided, it is not by open popularity, just by accident of election. Two more years might go by and he will be the chairman and I will be the ranking member.

We are here today to talk about military parents raising children and what is being done, because a lot is already being done, what we might do better. My thanks to Captain Ratte and his team who have already spent time with us this morning. We have enjoyed our tour and have seen the new facilities, seen the Child Development Center, seen what is happening to the bowling alley.

This hearing is the third of four hearings that we have planned. We may have more before we are through. We are looking at the pocket of military parents raising children. We were engaged by what we called field hearings in Fort Campbell, Tennessee and Kentucky a few weeks ago. On the same day Senator Sachs, Chairman of Georgia, Chairman of the Personnel Committee of the Armed Services Committee, Warner Robbins, Air Force Base, ranking member of that committee. Senator Nelson is holding a field hearing in Nebraska, and later this month Senator Dodd, Senator Nelson, Senator Chambliss and I will convene the two subcommittees and hold a joint committee hearing, reporting what we found and listen to some additional testimony to try to keep our spotlight on the families at home.

It is unusual for four senators, I think, spending this much time on any subject, and this is in different placements. But it is important because we want to keep our focus on the men and women who serve us overseas, but we also want to keep our focus on their families at home. Because we believe that military babies depend on the family, and that is our focus today.

More than half a million women in the United States military are married. About half are parents raising children. That is less, though, but of late, but it is still true of many in the Navy. Military men and women choose their profession and choose to marry, but in order to continue to attract and retain the best, the most talented volunteers, we want to do everything we can reasonably do to make it easier for military parents raising children. All societies benefit when children grow up with nurturing parents. That is why we are holding this hearing, to see how well the Navy is doing in terms of making it easier for military families raising children and what can be done better. We want to look at schooling, at housing, at childcare, at health care, paying taxes, frequent moves, deployment, and reintegration. All of those are issues that impact our service members as well as families.

The hearing that I chaired at Fort Campbell which involved the Army a few weeks ago presented a picture of fewer soldiers, more missions, longer deployments, frequent moves, more marriages, more spouses working away from home and more children. For example, LaSalle Medley, wife of the Commander of Genetic Helicopter Company, told us that she and her husband had two children. The youngest of those is 17 months old. Her husband has been away for 15 to 17 months. The 2 months he was home he was spending most of his time training to take his next assignment. She said, quote, there must be a sense of proportion. Husbands want to serve their country, want to be good soldiers, but also want to be good husbands and fathers. And we want them and their spouses to feel that way as well, because we invest a lot of money, we taxpayers, in attracting and training extremely talented people who are here today and on our military bases in ports around the world. And we want to make sure that we keep them as long as we can.

I thank you for having me here today. I was last here when the USS Tennessee was launched. It was launched in the middle of the winter. Fortunately, all the politicians' speeches were short, because we were freezing to death that day. It was a great source of pride to be at such a story part of America's history, and it is a great privilege for me to be here with Chris Dodd.

Chris Dodd is a champion for families and children and has a senate career. He is one of the senior members of the U.S. Senate and one of the ranking members of the committee on Health and Education. He is the ranking member of this committee. In fact, Senator Dodd is in his home State.

Senator DODD. Thank you very, very much, Mr. Chairman. And let me just begin by saying to all of you here what an honor it is to have Lamar Alexander being in this facility from Tennessee. He has been the chairman of this committee a little over 2 years now, and I have been on the committee—he has been the chairman or ranking member of this committee for the past 23 years, since I

first arrived on the U.S. Senate. I am particularly excited about having him on to chair. Don't misunderstand me. Given the option I would prefer he were the ranking member, but aside from that I couldn't think of a finer individual to chair this committee. And he has demonstrated that already during the brief time he has had an opportunity to work on a number of issues.

You should know that it was his idea to do this, to come up here and to conduct hearings around the country, bringing together the subcommittee of the Armed Services Committee, dealing with individuals and their issues, along with the Subcommittee on Children and Families. It doesn't have particular jurisdiction over military families, but families and children. We don't discriminate when talking about children and families throughout the military; the idea of combining the two committees in a series of field hearings around the country. It has been a wonderful idea to have as much information in the amount of time we have to bring together collectively to see what ideas we can attribute to improving the quality of our armed services.

Senator Alexander has a remarkable history, of course, in public service, having been the governor of the State for a number of years; the president of a major university; the secretary of education, dealing with education issues all across the country.

I know Dr. Mitchell is very familiar with the Morale work, secretary of education, presidential candidate. We have one of those in Connecticut, too. Mara here obviously did a wonderful job in all of those issues and really a wonderful individual to be in charge of this subcommittee and, again, to champion these issues which are so critically important. As he said it so well, obviously strong families make a strong military. It is very simple. If the families are strong and feel as though they are getting the kind of backing and support that they need, then the ability of those members of the family, husband or wife or both, who are serving in uniform, they get to do their job far more efficiently, with a far greater degree of expertise and focus if things on the home front are in good shape. If things on the home front are not in good shape, it is axiomatic that there will be a problem doing your job. It is just that simple. I don't care what profession you are in, but particularly one that involves the security of our Nation that seems critically important to both of us here that we get this right and do as much as we can to improve the quality of people's lives.

As we will discover in today's hearing, others as well the community outside these base walls plays an indispensable role in supporting military families stationed at Naval Submarine Base New London and Groton. This community includes eastern Connecticut's businesses, State and local agencies, the school board, and the local Navy League Chapter. I believe that the partnership that exists here between the Groton community and the base leadership can serve as an important model for military facilities across the country in building a solid support network for our military personnel and their families.

The strains on submariners' family life are particularly unique within the Navy, and, indeed, within the entire Armed Forces. I have had the privilege of representing the Submarine Base for almost 30 years now, going back to 1974. So I have been through

every imaginable configuration you can think of over the years; some of these battles.

My first cousin, Bill Macabee, was chosen submarine commander, so I grew up in a family well aware of the pressures and difficulties that a submariner's family can face. So it's difficult. There are some unique experiences a submariner has to face to make that service different than any other.

First, even during peacetime submariners frequently deploy away from home, oftentimes for up to 6 months. And because of the secrecy of the submarine missions and restrictions on shipboard communications, it could be some time before a sailor can make contact with his child or spouse back at home.

Finally, unlike most other parts of today's military, the submarine fleet is—all this means is the family burden falls exclusively on the shoulders of submariners' wives. Navy Submarine Base New London therefore offers I think an ideal case study to examine what roles the Navy as well as the local community can play in assisting military families adapt to a unique way of life; how we as a community, larger community, try to pay back, if you will, our soldiers, sailors, airmen and marines, as well as their families, for their service they are giving the Nation.

We will explore this morning briefly how the community helps sailors and their families, just arriving for the first time at New London, experience a smooth or as smooth a transition into their new life as possible here in Connecticut, with orientation seminars and social events about the amenities of their newly adopted city, and with special programs for children to help them adapt to the environment, and new schools, and new communities.

We are also going to discuss the most taxing time for our military families, the period when submariners are called to deploy away from home. We will discuss ways the base community works to ease the stress experienced by families when the submariners are underway, and areas where the improvements in this area are still needed.

Under the Navy's stewardship our submariners and their support crews are the best prepared and most sophisticated in the world. In particular, Rear Admiral Walsh, Commander Navy Region Northeast, Captain Ratte, Commanding Officer of this base, and Captain Harrison, Commanding Officer of the Naval Submarine School have all worked, mind you, tirelessly to assemble an invaluable piece of this Nation's nuclear-powered Navy, the attack submarine force.

Other people are also invaluable to our Nation's ability to succeed militarily, people like Jim Mitchell, who you'll meet this morning, who oversees school programs that will provide counseling and adequate nurturing for the submariner's child; the child who's having to cope without one of his parents for months and months on end because his dad is risking his life in the depths of some far-away ocean. People like C. Wayne Olsen and Mark Nickerson of the Eastern Connecticut Navy League Council, who build support for programs and events honoring our Navy families, boosting morale, and educating the public about those sacrifices. And ultimately it falls to moms and wives, like Mrs. Scott and Mrs. Estes, who you will also meet this morning, who serve as the sole man-



agers of the household and pillars of strength during those long deployments undersea. These people deserve our deep, deep sense of gratitude and thanks, and today you will hear their stories.

During his hearing at Fort Campbell, along the Kentucky-Tennessee border, Chairperson Alexander noted the stress placed on our Nation's soldiers and their families in light of the most recent wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. "Family readiness," he said, "is part of military readiness." He said it here again today, and I agree with him. And the military's efforts to relieve the strains on our troops' spouses and children remain a very vital part of this Nation's ability to maintain the best fighting force around the globe. I could not agree more with you, Chairman.

A good support network for our families allows sailors to focus on their military mission when they are at work, without worrying too much about potential problems at home. And a good quality of life will keep our retention numbers up, making the Navy a good career choice for young people starting their professional lives. As they put their lives on the line defending our Nation, it is the obligation of the United States Congress as well as the Department of Defense to work closely with local communities to ensure that our military families are well provided for and as pleased with their military way of life as possible. This is no more so the case than here at the Atlantic Fleet's foremost attack submarine facility in New London and Groton.

Again, Mr. Chairman, I am very grateful to you for hosting this hearing—I am hosting and your being up here.

I want to make reference to Mr. and Mrs. Osbourn. Thank you very much for being here. Mr. Oefinger as well, the town manager. The councilmen from Norwich and Groton/New London are all here. Staff of Congressman Simmons and Councilor Knorr. Where are the two staff members? Why don't you stand up and be recognized. Congressman Simmons's staffer, is he here? Congressman Lauro, I know he is here. Thank you very much. Congressman Simmons I recognize as well. It is nice to have him with us this morning. I thank you.

Senator ALEXANDER. Thanks, Senator Dodd. Senator Dodd mentioned for a while I was President of the University of Tennessee. One of the things we agreed not to talk about for the next couple of hours is women's basketball.

Senator DODD. You promised not to talk about it. I want to make the whole hearing about it. We will make them an honorary member.

Senator ALEXANDER. We have great respect for the Universities of Connecticut and Tennessee.

Senator ALEXANDER. Let's hear from our witnesses. Senator Dodd and I have done our homework. We have read your testimony and thank you very much for taking the time to prepare for these sensitive issues. It has been informative and very helpful. We have spent some time before we came here talking and visiting the facility. What I want to do is get a brief introduction to all five of you, not taking the time to give a long introduction, and ask each of you to make a few comments, up to five minutes or so or less if you would like, and then after that Senator Dodd and I will ask questions. And I think that will be the best way for us to add to the

testimony that you have already presented to us. We will try to finish our hearing a little after eleven o'clock. And then if there is anything else that you have to add after that or facts or figures that we ought to consider, we have time to consider them, because we will be having our final, our next hearing on June 24th in Washington DC.

So let me start with Captain Ratte, our host and distinguished officer who's the recipient of numerous awards and on the USS PHOENIX, but now he is the Commanding Officer of the Naval Submarine Bases here with a great amount of responsibility. And we thank you for hosting us today. Dr. Jim Mitchell, who Senator Dodd already mentioned, Superintendent of Schools in Groton with more than 30 years of experience in that school system. And Cynthia Clegg, who we welcome, who is President of the Chamber of Commerce of Eastern Connecticut and deeply involved with the activities here at the base. And we look forward to her remarks. Miss Sarah Scott, the President of the Submarine Officer's Spouse Association. So she spent her entire life in a military family. We look forward to her perspective. And Miss Debbie Estes, who is the spouse of a submariner as well as the ombudsman for one of the submarines here in Groton and also the Submarine Group Two Ombudsman Assembly Chair. Thank you for being here.

Captain Ratte, we look forward to your testimony.

**STATEMENTS OF CAPTAIN JAMES E. RATTE, JR., USN, COMMANDING OFFICER, NAVAL SUBMARINE BASE NEW LONDON; JAMES MITCHELL, SUPERINTENDENT, GROTON SCHOOL DISTRICT; CYNTHIA CLEGG, PRESIDENT, CHAMBER OF COMMERCE OF EASTERN CONNECTICUT; SARAH SCOTT, PRESIDENT, SUBMARINE OFFICER SPOUSE ASSOCIATION; AND DEBBIE ESTES, CHAIRWOMAN, OMBUDSMAN COUNCIL**

Captain RATTE. Mr. Chairman and Senator Dodd, thank you for the introduction. Good morning and welcome to Groton, CT, the submarine capital of the world, and Naval Submarine Base New London, the home of our submarine force. Thank you for visiting and allowing me the opportunity to speak to this subcommittee about the families, sailors, children, and community of the first, and what I believe is one of the finest, attack submarine bases in the Navy.

Senator ALEXANDER. You might move the microphone a little bit closer.

Captain RATTE. There we go.

Today marks my tenth month as commanding officer of this base. I asked for this assignment, I got it, and like my predecessors, I consider the opportunity a great privilege.

Currently we homeport 17 submarines, 14 LOS ANGELES Class attack submarines, two SEAWOLF Class attack submarines and NR-1, the Navy's only nuclear-powered, deep-diving research submarine.

Submarine Base New London's focus, however, extends beyond those national assets stationed on our waterfront and the tenant commands that support them. Our mission remains to support fleet readiness by providing quality service and facilities through our submarine community and their families. They are the true heart

of Subbase New London. We are home to more than 7,500 military personnel and more than 12,000 military family members. We also support more than 1,400 civilian employees, over 1,000 defense contractors, 600 drilling reservists, and over 12,000 military retirees. Of our military population 35 percent are married and 4 percent are single parents. As we have a large, young and single Submarine School student population, 40 percent of our sailors live in the barracks on the submarine base, while 25 percent live in the Navy family housing complex off base, and 35 percent live in the local community of southeastern Connecticut. But no matter the marital status and where sailors live, internal and external support networks ensure that they recognize they are not only part of our one local Navy family, but also partners in the southeastern Connecticut community.

And partners we are. Every day I feel privileged to hear and see more and more examples of our sailors, our Department of Defense civilians, and military families contributing to the vibrancy of the southeastern Connecticut community; contributions from more than 1,500 personnel annually and spanning more than 40,000 volunteer hours. Of course it is more than a good business foundation or a strong local economy that makes a good community. Good neighbors make a good community. And the people of southeastern Connecticut have long been and continue to be wonderful neighbors to the Navy.

The Groton Public School System has long recognized the uniqueness of the military child. The school system and former administrators helped spearhead the Military Child Education Coalition, a national organization committed to bringing military and local communities together in the school districts that best address the needs of the military child. Next month the coalition will be holding its fifth annual national conference here in Groton.

Southeastern Connecticut businesses, large and small, have always welcomed service members and their families, offering a wide variety of discounts and special programs to show their appreciation. On an organized level the Chamber of Commerce of Eastern Connecticut and Groton Commission, Navy League, and other service organizations support our sailors and families through various initiatives at the Subbase through local community.

While such external support networks assure our sailors and families of their partnership in our southeastern Connecticut community, our internal support networks assure them of our commitment as one Navy family.

Tenant commands, activities, sailors and families are the customers, as the base and the regional quality of life storefronts are the service providers in such areas as housing, health care, and sailor and family child support.

Current Navy and southeastern Connecticut support networks for our sailors and their families are a model of care, cooperation, and collaboration. That said we do face challenges. Our Child Development Program is operating under Most Sufficient Organization guidelines that concentrate on fiscal and management efficiencies. Our Fleet and Family Support Center is undergoing a functional assessment that will ultimately result in its operation under those guidelines as well. Anticipated growth on the base in

terms of new tenant and homeported commands, as well as increasing support requirements to other local Department of Defense commands and units, may challenge our ability to continue to provide ample high quality support services. Continued strong support from the Congress, and DoD and Navy leadership, for robust and flexible Child Development Programs, Fleet and Family Support Centers and our many Morale, Welfare, and Recreation Programs would ensure that Naval Submarine Base New London has the resources and programs necessary to fully meet our mission: Service and support to our war fighters and their families.

The sailors of families of Submarine Base New London have an outstanding support network. Our internal Navy programs ensure they feel the embrace of our one Navy family and our southeastern Connecticut partnerships ensure that they feel at home in the community. Retaining an effective and responsive support network will contribute significantly to Naval Submarine Base New London's ability to continue living up to our motto: "The First and Finest" attack submarine base in the Navy.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I would ask my full testimony for inclusion in the record, and I look forward to any questions that you have of me. Thank you very much, sir.

[The prepared statement of Captain Ratte may be found in additional material.]

Senator ALEXANDER. Thank you, Captain Ratte, and we will incorporate your entire testimony.

And Dr. Mitchell, I think we can all hear you better if you move the mike pretty close to you. I think that's maybe—even closer than that. Thank you

Mr. MITCHELL. Thank you. Is that better?

Senator ALEXANDER. Yes, sir.

Mr. MITCHELL. OK. Good morning and thank you, Senator Alexander, Senator Dodd. I am Jim Mitchell, Superintendent of the Groton Public School System, and I take this opportunity to thank you for inviting me to speak to these critical issues. I am completing my second year as superintendent in Groton and my 33rd year as an educator and administrator in the Groton Public School System. I am very pleased to speak to the positive relationship that has developed over the years between the military and school community in Groton.

The Groton Public School System serves 5,800 students in 14 buildings located throughout our community. We have one high school, three middle schools, and ten elementary school buildings. Groton is the home of the New London Submarine Base, and approximately 40 percent of the students we serve are dependents of active duty military personnel. The number of students connected to the military actually exceeds 50 percent when we add families that have retired and/or opted to remain in this community after completing their military tours. The Groton Public School System is a military community, because military children attend every school in our community. And I am proud of the relationship the school system has established in addressing the needs of the military family through direct educational and support services for our school-age children.

Quality of life issues for military personnel and their families have always been a concern for the Groton Public School System. In 1995 a formal bond was established between the then Navy Base Commander Admiral Richard Buchanan and Groton Public School Superintendent George Reilly to address issues affecting the children of military personnel who frequently moved in and out of southeastern Connecticut. The Military/Superintendent's Liaison Committee was formed. The committee consisted of area superintendents, school personnel, and military personally who met regularly to address issues affecting the military dependent child and family. The first task was a standardization of student physical examination requirements for students who move frequently in and around southeastern Connecticut. Area superintendents successfully endorsed this standardization. In 1996 the first New England Conference, *Serving The Military Child...Sharing Creative Approaches*, was held in Waterford, CT. In 1998 the first International Conference focusing on serving the military child was held in Arlington, VA. Senator Dodd and Senator Lieberman were very supportive of us, as Senator Dodd mentioned. As a result of local efforts, both conferences were tremendously successful in identifying, addressing, and bringing national attention to the issues facing the military child and family.

In 1998, as you have heard, the Military Child Education Coalition was formed and chartered in response to our mutual goal of attempting to provide a better quality of life for military children. The Navy Base and the Groton Public School System are members of MCEC. To reaffirm our commitment to serve the military child and family, the Groton Board of Education approved and became a signatory on the Memorandum of Agreement. A copy is provided in the information that I will provide to the senators later. As we continue to focus on the needs of the military child as you heard, I am also pleased to inform you and invite you to the fifth annual MCEC conference on serving the military child which will be held at the Mystic Marriott July 23rd, 2003. Guest speakers will include General Tommy Franks and Cokie Roberts, just to name a couple.

The following are some examples of local efforts which serve the military child and family: Educational programs and classroom settings. The Groton Public School System provides a comprehensive Pre-K through 12 program designed to meet the needs of a constantly learning and growing community. We are equipped with the latest technology and utilize all resources to facilitate learning in our school community.

Class sizes range from approximately 17 to 24 students, and many of our school personnel are or were connected to the military and, therefore, understand the needs of our students and their families. Military families have on several occasions requested and received extensions of duty tours in our community so that special programs, promotions, or graduations would occur for their children. This has validated the program and services the district provides.

The Military/Superintendent's Liaison Committee. This committee includes representatives of the schools and military personnel; namely, the Navy, United States Coast Guard Academy, who meet monthly to discuss and address issues affecting the military child

and family. Topics have included block scheduling, records transfer, local programs, course offerings, transitioning ideas, unique programs, recognition of military volunteers in each community, and networking to maintain open lines of communication and support.

Transitional Counselors. To address the needs of high school students who experience frequent school relocations, counselors at our high school Fitch have participated in the Transitional Counselor Institute sponsored by MCEC and regularly share strategies and information with fellow counselors, students, and parents. Our high school provides student orientations and peer student helpers to assist all new students entering our high school.

A three-day Freshman Academy is also provided during the summer for all students new to our high school. This has proven to be a very positive addition for first-time high school students. During the year academic support is provided to students by students and staff. In addition to the regular comprehensive academic programs, our schools also offer Advanced Placement courses and a challenging IB program. Our recently installed Interactive Counseling Center, ICC, will allow other districts with this equipment to interact visually in real time with our district personnel and should prove to be a great tool which will help our transitioning students.

Parental Involvement. Each school in our community has an established School Improvement Team consisting of parents and school staff. This encourages parental involvement in our school and provides military parents with an opportunity to actively participate in school activities and functions affecting their school and community. A myriad of activities, events, and programs are scheduled regularly in each school for and with our parents.

Volunteers. The district has a very active volunteer and mentoring program. Last year over 21,000 volunteer hours were logged, and this year we are projecting an increase over last year. Military personnel from the Sub school and Base serve as volunteers in all of our schools and are constant reminders of the cooperative and collaborative relationship that exist with our school and military community.

When the active duty military member is deployed for an extended period of time, the school staff and the Fleet and Family Service staff are always available to provide support and reassurances that help our children, their families, and school staff. It is important to note that the school staff has also grown over the years as a direct result of training provided by the Fleet and Family staff and Navy personnel in helping civilians understand the effects of deployment and Navy life.

I am very proud of the strong ties that exist between our school and military community. As we continue to look forward, I would still like to see longer tours of duty for military personnel with school-age children; no relocations for personnel with students in grades 11 or 12; and reciprocal agreements between states and the school systems serving military families with school-age children.

Again, thank you for allowing me to address one aspect of what I think makes Groton a great place to live, and that is the concern we share for the future of our country, our children. Thank you.

Senator ALEXANDER. Thank you, Dr. Mitchell.

And Cynthia Clegg, welcome.

Ms. MITCHELL. Good morning, Senator Alexander, Senator Dodd. It is with great pleasure that I talk about this community of eastern Connecticut and how we have embraced the Navy and vice versa.

I would like to make sure that you know the Chamber of Commerce of Eastern Connecticut can't take full credit of the programs that are in place. There are a myriad of organizations and folks in the audience behind me who put in many volunteer hours and made many commitments to the Navy and their families. It's a unique bond here. The 12,000 family members of the Subbase are indeed employees, so we take this very seriously from a business community.

We share a unique value system with the military, and that is built on trust and understanding constructed over the years. And the synergy is demonstrated through the similar mission and vision statements of our respective organizations. And I am proud to say that at the Chamber of Commerce board levels we are represented by Walch, Captain Ratte, and also Olson from the Coast Guard Academy. So we do take that very seriously and want to share their leadership and expertise.

The common visions of the business organizations and the military echo with tones of teamwork, leadership, communication, and a focus on being a vibrant part, as Captain Ratte, however, said, of this vibrant eastern Connecticut community.

You know now that with almost 8,000 military personnel at the Subbase and over 2,000 civilians that work here, the Subbase is one of our largest employers. Suffice it to say, the military has made many contributions that have had a positive impact on the economy and quality of life in eastern Connecticut. In fiscal years between 1999 and 2003, it is estimated that the direct economic impact to our region from the Subbase will be \$35.5 million. At the Chamber of Commerce we take that very, very seriously. It helps us maintain the strong and diverse regional economy.

We are also fortunate that many of the Navy officers and personnel choose to remain in the region once they leave the services, and we are fortunate that they stay here. They start numerous businesses that can contribute, again, to the vitality of our economy, businesses such as Sonalyst. And they continue to add to that quality of life and quality of place that we think is very unique.

Strong partnerships have developed over time between the military and business community. For example, the Military Community Council with representatives from social services, the clergy, the legal and financial communities, town and city officials, and of course the military. This council exists as an available resource for the commands and works with the military to improve fire protection throughout the area as well as improving policing efforts between the military and the towns.

You already heard about military appreciation discounts that many businesses in the area provide to the families, but in addition one area of business, ShopRite New London, has extended that into "Adopt a Sailor" program. And the owner of that encourages employees to "adopt" a sailor, especially around the holidays so they are not left alone.

Our business community has always been very supportive of the families of sailors out to sea. Our Groton Division is currently working with the Ombudsmen to raise money for the creation of a banner that would be used to welcome and bid ships farewell. And the Seahorse on the Thames, a local restaurant, has offered their dock space for families to converge and hang the banner at each coming and going.

The Chamber itself has been impacted by the military. A member of the Chamber staff has had personal experience with the local community's support of military families since her mother was an ombudsman for one of the submarines, and she witnessed firsthand the generosity of the local businesses. When planning events for the families, she went to the community for donations where she was amazed at the ease and pleasure with which gift certificates and services were provided and given.

We at the Chamber try to provide continuity for the young and potential future leaders of our community. And through our Leadership Program we want to make sure that the community and businesses understand the importance of the military. The participants of that program are introduced to the key leaders in each discipline through a series of discussions, lectures, and tours. A daylong session is devoted to understanding the unique relationship and synergies between the community and the military, as well as the benefits derived from such a partnership.

The program that resonates with the entire community, however, is Service Person of the Month. And quite honestly, at the Chamber we argue about who is going to be able to present that award to the recipient. In conjunction with the Navy League, the Chamber of Commerce coordinates this effort to honor an outstanding service representative who has distinguished him or herself not only through their professional achievements, but also through their commitment to the community at large.

Rotary, Kiwanis, and Lions clubs rotate the privilege of hosting the honorees, their families, and the commanding officers. And local businesses, large and small, provide numerous gifts and savings bonds. And as you read the biographies of the recipients, it is indeed humbling to understand what they can accomplish in 24 hours.

Their commitment, professionalism, and dedication to their respective service are astounding, but it is the volunteer roles of these young men and women that provide eastern Connecticut with the quality of place that really makes the area a wonderful place to work, live, and play. Churches, Big Brother/Big Sister programs, volunteer fire departments, our schools, and our businesses all benefit from their numerous contributions.

Since we are a business association, we always calculate these kinds of services and dollars. And our volunteers at the Chamber contribute between \$2.5 and \$5 million of in-kind services to the region. But based on the biographies of the Service Person of the Month and over the years, we calculate that on an annual basis that is giving back to the economy \$20 million in in-kind services with all the things that they do.

I am proud to say that this is "Navy Territory."



And I will conclude with the mention of our "Ship to Shore" program designed to celebrate our region's rich naval and maritime history and heritage that started in 2001 with the port visit of the USS Caron to Fort Trumbull State Park. That is where the State of Connecticut, the Cities of Groton and New London, and the Subbase joined with the business community to host over 300 crew members, 34 officers and the 14,000 visitors who came to our region and to visit the USS Caron. And celebrate we did. We had our interfaith service, we did baseball games, and we did fishing trips, all at little or no cost to those folks wherever possible.

Proud hospitality and appreciation for the military are the legacy of our region and "Ship to Shore." And we anticipate we will be able to do that again, and the good Lord willing, early in July from other ships.

Collaboration and partnerships are the hallmarks of our region and all made possible through the strong relationship between the Navy and the community.

The continued support of Congress and the Navy to the many programs for sailors and their families will ensure that the Subbase will thrive and, therefore, the community of eastern Connecticut will continue to flourish with their rich and numerous contributions. Thank you very much.

Senator ALEXANDER. Thank you.

Mrs. Sarah Scott.

Mrs. SCOTT. Thank you, Senator. I would like to say thank you for raising interest. As you are beginning to tell, these are issues that impact Navy families every day. This is our daily life.

I am a Navy wife of 17 years and 2 days, and we have had three tours of Groton since 1986. So I have seen the community throughout a lot of phases. I am also the newly elected president of the Submarine Officer's Spouse Association for 2003 through next May.

The Officer's Spouse Association is a social and charitable organization. Our main focus and charity up until now has been the Dolphin Scholarship Foundation, a submarine supported scholarship grant program for submarine officers and their dependents. We hope this year to do charitable work, especially in the area of volunteer opportunities in the community.

My focus and my interest as it pertains to this committee is certainly the educational problems and challenges that are met by military children. I met some of them as a military child. Military education is certainly a step in the right direction to address those challenging issues, moving in and out of school districts, statewide testing, things that military children face that are probably those things that may not come up with children that don't move as much as we do.

Thank you for coming and thank you for your interest.

Senator ALEXANDER. Thank you.

Mrs. Debbie Estes.

Mrs. ESTES. I am excited about the opportunity to speak with you today and thank you for inviting me. This is such an important opportunity for Navy families, and I hope to share with you a little bit about our life and our experience here at the Subbase in Groton/New London.

I married my husband almost 7 years ago in Norfolk, VA, knowing absolutely nothing about the military lifestyle. All I knew was the uniforms looked cool and they used a lot of acronyms. Almost immediately after getting married we reported to Subscol here in New London. The opportunity to become an ombudsman for Subscol arose, and my husband mentioned it. Having no clue what I was in for, I interviewed and was selected. Life changed at that very moment for me, and let's just say that my adventure began. I have been an ombudsman since then; first for Subscol and currently for the USS AUGUSTA and also the Assembly. I remember how I felt in Norfolk, how lost and confused I was, and decided then that no new spouse under my command would feel that way.

The ombudsman is the official link between the command and the families. We relay official command information to the families and then represent the families and their issues or emergencies to the command, especially when the command is at sea. It is our job to disseminate information and to empower the spouse to resolve her own problems with our guidance along the way. There is no better feeling than hearing the new confidence in a spouse's voice after she has resolved the current emergency.

As the assembly chairman for this region, I work with others to provide support for the ombudsman. Along with the Fleet and Family Service Center, we provide training for the ombudsman, and bi-annually we have Ombudsman Basic Training for new ombudsmen and Command Support Team spouses. I also relay information from Base Quarterly meetings to the ombudsman for their families and assist the commands in recognition of their ombudsman. I maintain a roster, publish a quarterly newsletter, and instruct at Ombudsman Basic Training.

Being an ombudsman has made me a stronger Navy wife and has made it easier to deal with obstacles thrown my way. Our lifestyle is stressful and is often hard to understand in the civilian world. People often ask "Why put yourself through that?" The smile on my husband's face when he steps on the pier and sees his family waiting for him answers that.

Some of the obstacles we encounter as Navy family's spouses can be overwhelming at times. I can honestly say there is not a lot that we cannot handle. We maintain households, keep our spouses organized, and we raise our children alone while our husband is at sea.

We are very good at holding Christmas in July due to an upcoming deployment schedule. My recent tour as a spouse on my boat has opened my eyes to a new aspect. The day after the boat left my Expedition broke down. And although it was minor the fear of something happening to it as it was being towed away and not having my husband here to make that decision was scary. But that was nothing compared to giving birth to my daughter in an ambulance in front of my house in the middle of the night with my husband at sea and knowing that with his deployment schedule he would be home for 12 weeks her first year. I have been through surgery without my husband, but that was nothing compared to the feeling of who would take care of my children if something happened. We had several wives who have had surgery, have bought houses and have had to move alone, sometimes relocated alone due to innate housing reconstruction. They have purchased vehicles,

taken long road trips with screaming children, and suffered the loss of loved ones without the strength of their best friend and soul mate.

Although it seems crazy at times, I don't think any of us would trade our husbands' careers, and we support them 100 percent. Of course ask me that again when my husband has duty the day they pull in from a deployment. The nice feeling is that no matter what we experience or confront, we have the Navy family and our support system to help us. The frustrating part as an ombudsman is getting the information out to the wives so they know the help is there.

Upon hearing about this hearing and asking families what affects them the most in this area, the issues that were brought to our attention were housing, TRICARE, relocating, and the educational budget in this area.

I thank you again for this opportunity. I hope I have represented our Navy Subbase lifestyle.

Senator ALEXANDER. Thank you very, very much.

If the five of you have time, we would like to take about 15 minutes or so for questions, and we will ask Senator Dodd to start with the questions.

Senator DODD. First of all, thank all of you very, very much. Captain Ratte, thank you immensely for your leadership here and Dr. Mitchell for a wonderful job.

This is really a model in many ways, what goes on here, Mr. Chairman. You will understand the certain sense of pride in my State and district. I think we have demonstrated tremendous growth over the years and the wonderful job of serving our families and serving, obviously first and foremost, the security and needs of our country, but understanding of course the vital role at having a good support system, of what that is and meeting the security needs of our Nation. So we are very grateful to you, Captain Ratte, and predecessors over the years to constantly work and improve the quality of life. I want to thank our witnesses, and I should point out good friends. Clegg, it is not that common of a name. My wife's maiden name is Clegg, so we may be related through marriage. That is what Jackie says all the time.

Let's get right to it. Obviously having a hearing here we have seen a wonderful facility and a tremendous job being done, but obviously there are areas for improvements to be made. And I have read the e-mails, Debbie, that were sent to you. And I presume those are just some of the reactions you have had. I have read them. They are issues I was going to raise; the housing, TRICARE, moving, the education, transitional questions that go on. So let's start right in. If you will tell me about those issues, get more specific with us if you can so that—I presume these are not unique despite all our efforts being made. I presume, Mr. Chairman, it is the kind of things you have heard about as well. Tell us what the problems are. We saw the Polaris housing complex, what is being done there, but how much more needs to be done in this area. And then the health care issues, women's health, which I have read in the e-mails to some of them is a major, major concern. They may be closing down some of those facilities, and how important that may be. And then quickly run through the other issues.

I want you to feel free to do this expeditiously. When Debbie gets through, Dr. Mitchell, if you would like to comment, or Dr. Ratte, to something that was said, don't wait for my question. Let's get a good conversation going through. Identify yourself here as a speaker for purposes of the record.

Mrs. ESTES. I would like to start with some of the e-mails that I received regarding TRICARE. It is the closing of the Women's Health Clinic. The Women's Health Clinic enables a spouse to see the same doctor that generally cares for them and is able to follow all the progress. Not saying anything bad about the family practitioners, but the family practitioners at the Primary Care Center do not specialize in female medicine. We do have a referral system which enables us to refer out, but then you have to start over with a brand new doctor, go through your history again. And that is after two to 3 months it takes to get in, because the doctors are so busy and booked because our clinic has been closed. We also recently lost our ENT doctor, ear, nose and throat. We have been told it will take approximately 3 months to replace him.

Some other issue—another issue that came up was—sorry. One of my boat wives specifically has a son with a neurological impairment which is unspecified. The doctor has ordered a sensory integration evaluation. There is not a provider in this area for that type of service, so she is having to call around to try and find someone. And the one doctor that she has contacted that can help her is not enrolled in TRICARE and is having certain difficulties becoming certified as a TRICARE provider. A lot of our clinics have been closed, so we do refer out a lot.

Another issue with this crazy, busy—

Senator DODD. Closed or are they closing?

Mrs. ESTES. I believe they have been closed.

Senator DODD. Captain, do you know about this?

Captain RATTE. There is down from the Naval Hospital there's a Naval Care Center. The outpatient type medical treatment is all referred now to partner hospitals, generally L & M or Backus.

Senator DODD. Backus is in Norwich.

Captain RATTE. Yes, sir. We have also increased our partnerships with both those hospitals, with privileges for our doctors to conduct surgery, inpatient surgery and outpatient surgery, at both of those hospitals, our doctors and their facilities on our patients to improve the throughput and minimize some of the TRICARE related out-costing or out-sourcing issues. But there have been a number of clinics closed as the facility has grown down in size with a larger depends on TRICARE private sector to provide services as opposed to Military Medical Center and provider.

Senator DODD. How about the housing question. I read some of those e-mails. Tell us what the concerns are.

Mrs. ESTES. The main issue in housing is the privatization project that is approaching this area very quickly. The major concerns with that are the possibility of civilian mixture into military housing. How they go about determining rates for usual and customary utilities. And a big issue is say, for example, you have a chief and an E-4 living next door to each other in the same house. The chief could pay \$1,300 a month for that house, while the E-4 is paying five, \$600 for that same house. So the ideas that they

have come up with is to maybe address the fees according to a two-bedroom, a three-bedroom, a four-bedroom, designed on the house, not just your BAH.

Senator DODD. One of the problems. Are there problems with that?

Captain RATTE. Actually, in this particular scenario, public/private venture, the cost of housing is BAH. BAH or basic allowance for housing is the payback value for rent, basic utilities, nominal housing insurance. The types of house and where the house is located to a large degree is based on size of the family and not necessarily whether a sailor is a chief petty officer or officer or enlisted. There could conceivably be a situation where a large family—E-5 with a large family living next door to an E-7 or an E-8 with a comparable size family, with different basic allowance for housing values, paying different amounts for the same apartment or the same house. However, there is no impact upon the sailor. The basic allowance for housing is the going rate for rent. The same moneys that the sailor would be providing if they lived in the house absent the public/private venture.

The key issue in the public/private venture is there is no change in the out-of-pocket expense for sailors, but we do achieve quality homes in the hands of sailors quicker through a BAH program. I would say the issues of different cost is based upon pay grade. And BAH are really not particularly material to the issue, because the sailors will essentially not see that money. They will transition that money to the housing contractor. And the overall price of the housing contractor or what the housing contractor will see is based upon average demographic, and that average demographic will then fuel the building construction, construction and renovation programs in the community. So I think we will see a benefit regardless.

Senator DODD. Miss Clegg, I want to raise something with you. There have been some issues raised in the past by private real estate developers in the area about coming in and obtaining key housing. I don't know if this is viable today. It was in the past business community about not allowing the local real estate development market to actually produce housing that would be within the price range being described. Is that still an issue?

Ms. MITCHELL. It is a huge issue in the region. As a matter of fact, there was a study done by the Council funded by United Way about that very thing. And I know I won't get the statistics incorrect, but I think it is 5,100 units each year for the next 5 years. I may have that wrong.

Senator DODD. Sixty-one?

Ms. MITCHELL. Fifty-one. Our region is still growing and prospering. We are the last vestige between New York and Boston, so there is a housing crunch. And affordable housing has been felt by everyone; the community as well as the sailors. There is a blue ribbon panel that has been put together made up of a number of businesses and larger employers who are also faced with that issue, as is the Subbase, because we can only retain and recruit to people based on the order of housing. Jim Cronen from Dime Savings Bank, the President, is the head of that. And really they are pushing forward to look at how they can combine their resources to

bring in developers of affordable housing and make it realistic for our region. So it is a severe issue in our area.

Senator DODD. Any comments you want to make about this, about the last two witnesses?

Mrs. ESTES. No.

Senator ALEXANDER. Thank you, Senator Dodd.

A couple of questions following up on the housing that may be addressed to Mrs. Scott or Captain Ratte. Maybe you can explain this to me. There has been a lot of concern in the country about the fact that low pay for men and women in the military means that some of them are eligible for food stamps or other Federal subsidies. Now, if I have got this correctly, the housing allowance is paid—it is a separate or may be paid as a separate item, counted as part of the income which increases the income level, so that we are proud to say these sailors or soldiers are not eligible for food stamps anymore. But the unintended consequence of that may be to knock them out of eligibility for other Federal benefits that may be helpful. For example, the wake payments and the possibility of the Federal childcare voucher which would help pay for childcare. I am not sure I understand this correctly, and I thought perhaps you could help me understand whether in trying to do a good thing we may have had a couple of unintended consequences and, in fact, knock some of our military men and women out of a couple of benefits that would actually be helpful to them. Does that sound familiar to anyone?

Captain RATTE. It does. As a matter of fact, I engaged with the Community Support Program leadership last week a similar question. The fact that basic allowance for housing will now be seen as a portion of a sailor's income will have the perhaps unintended consequence of raising that income visible to these programs that you talked about, whether it is for women, infant care or food stamps programs; plus it will also have as income—when determining the combined income levels, to determine a child development center based fee structure. The fee structure for child development centers are based on the combined income of the family. This will result in an increase of visible income and may result in an increase in childcare costs to a family, despite the fact that the basic allowance for housing will be paid directly to a contractor and will show up as no more real income in a sailor's pocket.

Senator ALEXANDER. Was this housing allowance counted as part of the income?

Captain RATTE. No, sir, it was not.

Senator ALEXANDER. So this is a change.

Captain RATTE. Yes, sir, it is.

Senator ALEXANDER. Mrs. Estes or Mrs. Scott.

Mrs. ESTES. I have two children in the program, and a constant question that I have is my housing allowance is included in as structure in my fees. And like Captain Ratte said, we don't physically see that money because we live in housing, so it goes where it goes. But I have a thousand dollars a month that is included into our income, which bumps me to the next highest bracket for childcare. So now I have two children, so I am paying, you know, double, \$200 a week, which is incredibly inexpensive compared to

what they have in town, but it concerns me with the BAH, with the privatizations coming, how that is going to affect everybody.

Senator DODD. You are a net loser in that sense of income. So you are actually coming out behind—

Mrs. ESTES. Yes.

Senator DODD. —as a result of the increase in pay due to the housing.

Mrs. SCOTT. I have heard a lot of comments about this problem recently, and it is a very big concern for the families.

Senator ALEXANDER. Dr. Mitchell, you made two or three suggestions here that attracted my attention. I wonder if you want to comment more about them. You said you would like to see longer tours of duty for military personnel with school-age children, no relocations for personnel with students in grades 11 or 12, and reciprocal agreements between states and school systems serving military families with school-age children.

Can you comment on that a little more.

Mr. MITCHELL. Yes, sir, I can. The longer tours of duties—this has actually been an improvement over the last—during my brief career during the last 30 years in the district, sailors assigned to the Subbase with families shorter tours of duty. And over the last few years they have been able to increase those tours and some instances where youngsters were not pulled out of school, because families had to move in September or October or February or March as an example. Now, we are very pleased that tours now are at least beginning to let families move in here so that they can begin in August or sometimes in January. So that is my reference to longer tours of duty.

The issue that is critical to all youngsters is that they are earning credits for graduation, and when they are moving across the country, local and State requirements are not the same. That also refers to reciprocity. For instance, when they were doing a roundtable in Georgia, for instance, as an example, a student moving into Georgia is required to take Georgia history. At any time a student moves in that State as a senior might be required to take that history as a graduation requirement. If that has changed that is great, but for a military family moving into Connecticut as a senior and then Connecticut history, as an example, is required when the youngster has already accumulated 24, maybe 30 credits through moving, that puts a tremendous burden on the family if they do not time that correctly. So the reciprocity issue is one where I am looking at states working closer together so that we can accept Connecticut history, as an example, as a requirement in another state; Rhode Island as an example. That is the reciprocity issue in the simplest terms. Again, 11th and 12th graders.

And I know it is almost impossible, but as I advocate for military families and children, on average a military family moves five or six times during a high school career, and that is a very big transitional issue which the families have to deal with and are dealing with. But as an educator those are the kinds of requests that I see would help military families and youngsters in completing their high school requirements.

Senator ALEXANDER. Mrs. Scott.

Mrs. SCOTT. I have never before heard it suggested that the Navy would provide such a fabulous benefit as to not move me or my children in 11th or 12th grade, but I must say that would be a fabulous incentive to, say, anybody with seniority that have children that old would be very interested in a program like that. Barring that need—they interrupt that, but barring that reciprocity between school systems is a really important issue. Like Dr. Mitchell said, graduation requirements can vary widely. And it can be a nightmare when you need to move your children their junior or senior year and find out that they are not going to have enough credits to graduate because they don't have Connecticut history or Georgia history or other things school boards come up with across the country.

Senator ALEXANDER. Address that.

Mrs. ESTES. I don't have school children that age. Mine are younger. But I can just imagine the stress these young kids are going through. It is stressful enough to move away from friends and trying to establish a new support system and then the added stress of oh, my gosh, I have 6 months in the school year and three courses I don't have so that I can graduate on time.

Senator ALEXANDER. Well, that is very helpful.

Now, we have run over our time, and we surely haven't run out of questions. But I think we will bring this formal part of the hearing to a conclusion, with great thanks to you and to the community, especially, Captain, to you and your team for hosting this today. This isn't the end of our interest in the subject. As I mentioned we have a hearing scheduled for June 24th in Washington which Senator Dodd and I will be involved in, along with ranking member and chairman of the Personnel Committee of the Armed Services Committee, as well as other senators. So any additional thoughts you may have we can accept until then. And I am going to suggest—Senator Dodd and I have been talking about this. We can keep this book open for a while. And I would like to do that, because this needs to be a work in progress process. As we put the spotlight on our men and women who are serving away from home, we need to keep the spotlight on home as well. Homeland security begins at home.

You are going to be coming up with ideas, and let me be specific about one, Dr. Mitchell. I am very impressed about the work all of you have done on the Conference on the Military Child. You are now in your fifth year. As I understand it you are having a conference in July here. The more I listen, the more I hear about reciprocity, Senator Dodd was making suggestions to you about that a moment ago. There are a number of things, whether it is childcare certification for those who might be able to care for five or six children in their homes. It takes a long time to get certified in Connecticut to be able to do that, whether it is graduation requirements as you go from one placement to another. I would invite you in your work together on the military child to identify areas of reciprocity that would make the most difference to military parents raising children and then tell Senator Dodd and tell me, and we can work together with the Congress and maybe we can speed that up. Some of it might be able to be done by changing Federal law, but some of it might be done simply by urging states to create



interstate cutbacks and recognize four, five areas of reciprocity that would make the most difference to military families.

In Tennessee I believe that four families went to the legislature and said would you do this on child care and this on graduation requirements. I think they would be quick to try to do it, and I imagine that is so in many other states. Think of us as an ally as you hold your conferences each year, and particularly on the areas of reciprocity we might encourage. I would invite you to suggest those to Senator Dodd, and he will give those to the full committee, and we will do what we can with that.

I will ask Senator Dodd to make the closing remarks, but thank you very much for your time, and your openness, and your constructive suggestions, and thank you for your service.

Senator DODD. Again, I thank Senator Alexander for being here. It is truly an honor having a colleague in Connecticut, and I am very grateful to him for taking the time away from his own State to come up here to be with all of you.

We may submit some additional written questions to you and then have you submit any additional evidence you think worthwhile for the committee to have. We will keep this open to add to it.

We didn't get into—a little bit into the moving issue, but I know that is a traumatic event, moving families around, Debbie, as you pointed out, Sarah, it is truly traumatic. It is hard enough when you have to do this as many times. It is such a disruptive and such a traumatic event to uproot them in critical moments, to pick up again and plop down. It is terribly traumatic. So I would be very interested in ways in which we can minimize the stress on moving, because education plays a role in it, housing plays a role in it. The child is affected in all of these issues around moving, because we demand so much of you.

We may be demanding more in the years ahead as we shrink the size and the number of bases around the world and having a highly mobile military that can move around quickly where they have to be, I suspect you may see more of this stay longer where you are, but more moving involved over the career.

And I am also very interested in the notion of how many of our military today are the sons and daughters of military and how critically important it is if we are going to retain the future needs of a professional military willing to make this a career not for the 2 years or 4 years or 6 years, but for that 20, 25 years or more. It seems we need to look to the school of your children and your daughters to be the future of our military or at least play a significant part in that constituency.

How are we doing about tracking the sons and daughters of the military?

I regret we didn't have some time, but I would be interested in listening to your children talk about being a teenager here; what they have to say. I think we might get some interesting observations and some good ideas coming from young people about how we can do a better job. Not perfect. Kids are kids. But listen to some of the basic ideas at the table. I find they have some awfully good ideas at high school forums. Young people who know how to see

through everything and come up with ideas. We would be interested in hearing from them as well.

But I am very proud of all of you. I can tell, Captain Ratte, over the years part of our submarine force, it has been a great contribution, obviously, to our southeastern Connecticut, to the State of Connecticut, but most important to the country. And we saw that again in the recent events in the Iraqi freedom conflict, and the role that the submarine force played in that incredibly successful military operation. I know some of those ships are coming back into home port and being received by the families here. But we have determined a deep sense of pride and gratitude to the men who manned those and the tremendous job they have done and to the families who have been so supportive of their husbands, and sons, and fathers during this particular time. So we thank all of them for, once again, serving this country in such a fine way. And again, thank you, all of you, for participating and, Chairman, we thank you.

Senator ALEXANDER. Thank you very much. The hearing is adjourned.

[Additional material follows.]

## ADDITIONAL MATERIAL

PREPARED STATEMENT OF JAMES E. RATTE, JR.

Mr. Chairman and Senator Dodd, welcome to Groton, Connecticut, the submarine capital of the world, and Naval Submarine Base, New London, the home of our submarine force. Thank you for visiting and allowing me the opportunity to speak to this subcommittee about the Sailors, families and community of the first, and what I believe is the finest, attack submarine base in our Navy. Today marks my tenth month as commanding officer of this base. I asked for this assignment, I got it, and like my predecessors, I consider the opportunity a great privilege.

From that original foothold along the flat eastern terrace of the Thames River some 134 years ago, to our designation as the Nation's first permanent continental submarine base in 1916, to today—this base has grown in size and mission. We now occupy more than 687 acres with some 250 buildings and more than 70 tenant commands. Currently, we homeport 17 submarines; 14 LOS ANGELES Class attack submarines, two SEAWOLF Class attack submarines and NR-1, Navy's only nuclear powered deep-diving research submarine. Commander, Navy Region Northeast and Commander, Submarine Group TWO, as well as Naval Submarine School, the center of excellence for the training of our Submarine Force, are all located here. Additionally, the base will host an establishment ceremony for our newest tenant activity this week. Friday, the recently created Submarine Learning Center, in charge of all submarine training commands nationwide, will officially stand up. We expect further new additions in the years to come. We are looking forward to Naval Inshore Boat Unit 22 as well as the New Haven and Plainville, Connecticut Naval Reserve Centers consolidating their activities and moving to the base later this year. We are also readying our waterfront to support new VIRGINIA class submarines—the first of which, USS VIRGINIA, will be christened at Groton's Electric Boat Shipyard this August, and commissioned in 2004.

Submarine Base New London's focus, however, extends beyond those national assets stationed on our waterfront and the tenant commands that support them. Our mission remains supporting fleet readiness by providing quality service and facilities to our submarine community and their families; they are the true heart of our base. We are home to more than 7,500 military personnel and 12,000 military family members. We also support more than 1,400 civilian employees, 1,000 defense contractors, 600 drilling reservists, and 12,000 military retirees. Of our military population, 35 percent are married and four percent are single parents. As we have a large, young and single Submarine School student population, 40 percent of our Sailors live in barracks while 25 percent live in Navy family housing and 35 percent live in the local community. But, no matter their marital status, or where they live, internal and external support networks ensure that they are not only part of our local Navy family, but partners in our southeastern Connecticut community.

Every day, I am privileged to hear and see more and more examples of our Sailors, Department of Defense (DoD) civilians and military families contributing to the vibrancy of the southeastern Connecticut community; contributions from some 1,500 personnel annually and spanning more than 40,000 volunteer hours. Their generosity, warmth, and caring help make the Groton-New London area a wonderful place to live. It is through their generosity that Naval Submarine Base, New London's, annual charitable contributions to last year's Combined Federal Campaign totaled nearly \$320 thousand. Through their warmth, Sailors across the base have been working alongside members of the Navy League in our annual Toys for Children drive. Through their caring, Sailors teamed with scouts in the Navy Caring and Sharing program, which, this past year, collected more than 2,200 items of food for needy families. Sailors, DoD civilians, and military families, offer volunteer service to organizations such as, American Red Cross, the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts of America, Big Brothers and Big Sisters, and a myriad of others. Our volunteers also support local schools and educators in developing our Nation's most precious resource, our young people, by participating in mentoring programs, such as Junior Achievement, as well as partnerships established through the Navy Community Service program. I participate in the Eastern Connecticut and Groton Chambers of Commerce and the Council of Governments to share our respective visions and build closer bonds and understanding between our collective communities. Of course, it is more than a good business foundation or a strong local economy that makes a good community. Good neighbors make a good community; and the people of southeastern Connecticut have long been, and continue to be, wonderful neighbors to the Navy.

The Groton Public School system has long recognized the uniqueness of the military child. The school system and former administrators helped spearhead the Mili-

tary Child Education Coalition—a national organization committed to bringing military and local communities together with school districts to best address the needs of the military child. Next month, the coalition will be holding its fifth annual national conference here in Groton. On a local level, every fall, Groton Public Schools invite us to provide a “Military 101” briefing to new, and otherwise interested, teachers. The briefing is aimed at familiarizing these educators with the military environment, military life, and the benefits and challenges associated with being a child of a military member. The school superintendent also holds monthly meetings of the Military and Superintendent Liaison Committee that allow military representatives from our major local area commands to maintain an ongoing dialogue with senior educators and administrators.

Southeastern Connecticut businesses, large and small, have always welcomed service members and their families, offering a wide variety of discounts and special programs to show their appreciation. On an organized level, the Eastern Connecticut and Groton Chambers of Commerce support our Sailors and families through such initiatives as the Service Person of the Month. The program honors Sailors nominated by their command who have contributed to the success and betterment of their unit and the community. Honorees are celebrated with a special luncheon as well as tokens of appreciation from area businesses and organizations. At the end of the year, the Chambers select a Service Person of the Year from among the 12 honorees. The Navy League sponsors a similar recognition program for the Sea and Shore Officers of the Year. Local area commands nominate candidates who have also contributed to the success and betterment of their unit and the community.

While such external support networks assure our Sailors and families of their partnership in our southeastern Connecticut community, our internal support networks assure them of our commitment as one Navy family. Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Vern Clark, has said, the quality of service our Nation and Navy can expect from our Sailors is directly related to their quality of work and quality of life. Providing Sailors with the highest quality work environment in which to achieve their goals and accomplish their unit’s mission is a priority of each tenant command and activity here. Providing the Sailors and families of those commands and activities with the highest quality of life is a priority of the base and our parent command, Navy Region Northeast.

Tenant commands, activities, Sailors and families are the customers, as the base and regional quality of life storefronts are the service providers in such areas as housing, health care, and Sailor and family support. Base housing includes 12 barracks with more than 1,650 rooms accommodating nearly 3,300 personnel and more than 2,100 Navy family homes. The vast majority of those Navy family homes occupy 430 acres outside the base fence-line in the town of Groton. Currently we have some \$20 million dedicated to Navy housing improvements, as we complete whole-house renovations in our Conning Towers and Nautilus Park Navy Family housing areas. Such improvements will continue through 2006 with the privatization of Navy family housing and the renovation and replacement of more than 1,400 homes.

Our commitment to the finest health care facilities continues as evidenced by our recently begun 4-year, \$17 million, renovation of our Naval Ambulatory Care Center. We will also start construction of a new dental clinic in 2005. While our health and dental facilities are only clinics, our doctors have surgical privileges at local hospitals through a memorandum of agreement. Of course, we are also committed to getting the word out about health care and receiving feedback. To that end, the care center hosts monthly TRICARE orientation classes for active duty personnel and their family members. Classes focus on the TRICARE system in Groton and help familiarize members with the availability and accessibility of services both at the center and in the civilian community. Additionally, the care center hosts periodic Health Care Consumer Council Meetings to keep commands and their representatives informed of policies at the center and to learn of any concerns or issues regarding the services provided through either the center or through TRICARE. Sailor and family member support are met through a broad spectrum of local providers.

While unit chains of command, especially command senior enlisted advisors, like command master chiefs and chiefs of the boat, and the base command religious program and its chaplains, are always accessible and responsive to Sailor and family needs, the bulk of front line support is provided by our Fleet and Family Support Center and child development program. A regional storefront, our Fleet and Family Support Center is committed to empowering military members and their families to thrive amidst change, to find positive opportunity in it, and to solve any problems or crises that may affect their ability to succeed while in the military.

The center serves both active duty and retired personnel and encompasses the Navy “family” of singles, married members and their spouses, children and other

family members. The center's services and programs meet the diverse needs of each customer, such as: acquainting single Sailors with local leisure activities, helping expectant parents prepare for parenthood, assisting transitioning members in conducting successful career searches and educating spouses, and other family members, on job search skills, available Navy services and the deployment cycle. Fleet and Family Support Center staff are intimately aware of the unique pressures and problems experienced by Sailors and are trained and equipped to help them and their families realize the greatest rewards from their military careers and lifestyle through a combination of free services, which include counseling, workshops, programs and briefs, as well as self-help and automated services. The center provides information about child development, parenting, continuing education, career development, basic skills for living (such as budgeting and consumer affairs), and a variety of other topics. Help for special needs families is also offered and includes classes for single parents, families with handicapped family members, and more.

Another regional storefront, our base Morale, Welfare, and Recreation Department, manages our local Navy child development and youth programs. The childcare and development program supports two main needs: day care and before and after school care. Care is available for the families of active duty military personnel, on a priority basis, and to the families of DoD civilians employed on the base. Fees are based on total family income and are set on a sliding scale. Our day care program enjoys the distinction of being accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children. Our three child development centers provide care for children from six weeks through six years of age. Having opened a new center in 2000, and renovated another in 2001, we have the capacity to accommodate 263 children.

We also support a Child Development Home program. Through the program, childcare providers in Navy housing enhance and expand childcare services beyond that available in our local childcare centers. Under the program, providers are certified within state and Navy guidelines, requiring several hours of initial and ongoing training in child development and related topics. Children are cared for in safe, happy and healthy home environments.

Before and after school care is offered under our School Age Care program, which is headquartered in our Nautilus Community Center, in Navy family housing, and currently provides care to 114 children. The program was the second in the Navy to be accredited by the National School Age Care Alliance, receiving this distinction in 2002. Open to children from kindergarten through sixth grade, five to 12 years of age, the program currently serves students enrolled in the four Groton elementary schools adjacent to our Navy family housing areas, as well as three others. We have established a partnership with the Groton Board of Education to provide children in our School Age Program with a dedicated classroom located at adjacent Pleasant Valley Elementary School. Within the partnership, the school provides a classroom; we provide the care and care givers, and the program there is available to children outside our active duty and DoD families.

In addition to child care and development programs, our Morale, Welfare, and Recreation Department directs and supports a wide array of youth programs and activities. Our new 17,000 square-foot Youth Center, centrally located in Navy family housing, opened in 2000. It includes a teen lounge, a supervised Internet-equipped computer room, a music room, a dance room, and a gymnasium. From the center and its surrounding athletic fields, we support military community youth football, soccer, basketball, and Little League baseball. "Kids Karnival," a two-day family festival held at the Youth Center in the spring, and open to the public, has brought our military and local community together for the past 12 years, as more than 6,000 children and adults annually enjoy the rides, games, and entertainment. The center is also the main site for our youth summer camp programs, which offer traditional sports activities to the children of active duty members and DoD employees, as well as such diverse pursuits as, gymnastics, judo, archery, dance and drama. The Youth Center, as well as many of our Morale, Welfare, and Recreation Department's facilities, allows our military and local communities to participate together in fun activities like youth birthday parties or high school post-graduation parties. We support from four to seven organized, chaperoned, alcohol-free, all night graduation parties each year. Additionally, our laser tag gaming facility, Laser Storm, hosts 21 youth parties weekly.

Of course, the greatest celebrations Naval Submarine Base New London hosts are our submarine homecomings. Each one is very special for Sailors returning home and their loved ones awaiting their arrival. Helping families prepare for this emotional day begins well before Sailors deploy. Deployments are unique to the military lifestyle; our approach to assisting families cope throughout the time on patrol is comprehensive. Our Fleet and Family Support Center provides educational workshops and counseling to introduce families to the emotional cycle of deployment and

how to maintain healthy family relationships amidst lengthy separations. Children's programs teach children about deployment and teach parents how to help children adjust to the lengthy separation. We assist schoolteachers, administrators, and counselors as well as community agencies by providing guidance and awareness of our network of services. With the outbreak of war, the center's Child Counselor initiated a "Helping Children Deal with War" outreach program involving eight local schools. The program was extremely well received and helped prepare school professionals to address our children's fears during this time of world uncertainty.

Our team of senior enlisted advisors on the submarines, the chiefs of the boat, volunteer command-appointed Ombudsmen, and our center's deployment specialist, maintain an always-accessible network of support. This triad, along with a unit's spouse support group, ensures that families requesting or requiring assistance in problem solving and crisis management, before, during, and after deployments, are able to receive it.

The southeastern Connecticut community provides outstanding support to our Sailors and their families during deployments. Recently, many local businesses joined with our Navy Exchange and Morale Welfare, and Recreation Department in celebrating our submarine Sailors returning from Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Current Navy and southeastern Connecticut support networks for our Sailors and their families are a model of care, cooperation, and collaboration. Our Child Development Program is operating under Most Efficient Organization guidelines that concentrate on fiscal and management efficiencies. Our Fleet and Family Support Center is undergoing a functional assessment that will ultimately result in its operation under those guidelines as well. Anticipated growth on base, in terms of new tenant and homeported commands, as well as increasing support requirements to other local Department of Defense commands and units, may challenge our ability to continue providing ample high quality support services. Continued strong support from the Congress, and DoD and Navy leadership, for robust and flexible Child Development Programs, Fleet and Family Support Centers and our many Morale, Welfare, and Recreation Programs, will ensure that Naval Submarine Base, New London, has the resources and programs necessary to fully meet our mission: service and support to our war fighters and their families.

The Sailors and families of Naval Submarine Base, New London, have an outstanding support network. Our internal Navy programs ensure they feel the embrace of our one Navy family and our southeastern Connecticut partnerships ensure that they feel at home in the community. Retaining an effective and responsive support network will contribute significantly to Naval Submarine Base, New London's ability to continue living up to our motto: "The First and Finest" attack submarine base in the Navy.

E-MAILS TO MRS. DEBBIE ESTES, OMBUDSMAN USS AUGUSTA/SUBMARINE GROUP TWO CHAIRMAN—JUNE 2003

The following is a compilation of e-mails from submariners' wives sent to Mrs. Debbie Estes, Ombudsman, USS AUGUSTA/SUBMARINE GROUP TWO CHAIRMAN in preparation for the field hearing at Naval Submarine Base New London. The e-mails highlight specific examples of quality-of-life issues raised by Navy families. The senders' identities have been removed.

Dear Ms. Estes

Thank you for your continued representation as the Chairman Ombudsman for Submarine Group Two.

My husband is currently attached to the USS Dallas as the Independent Duty Corpsman. He has been active duty for 15 years. I have been a navy spouse since 1992. I also served for 6 years on active duty as a navy hospital corpsman from 1990-1996. My overall experiences as both a hospital corpsman and a navy spouse have been fulfilling and rewarding.

I have two issues I would like to place before the Senate Subcommittee.

#### 1. *Navy Spouse Employment*

One of the most difficult issues for me, as a navy spouse, is maintaining and advancing my professional career. At my husband's last command, I was employed as a civil servant, GS9, for the Naval Hospital, Naples Italy. Upon my return to the United States, It took me 6 months to find a comparable job. Luckily, I was able to collect unemployment benefits because I was returning off of federal civil service from a foreign country.

My husband is on a 3-year sea/ shore rotation schedule. In fitting with the needs of the Navy, we do not always have the choice where to live. If we receive orders within the United States, I will not be eligible to collect unemployment benefits because I will voluntarily release my job. The loss of my income for 3-9 months invariably creates a fiscal and emotional hardship on the entire family.

I propose that the U.S. Government vote in a federal law allowing active duty military spouses to collect unemployment upon receipt of orders locating to a different state.

## *2. Navy Spouse Retirement*

I have been working since the age of 17. With the exception of social security benefits, I have no other retirement. I lose matching contributions from companies because we do not stay at commands long enough for me to reap the benefits of a company sponsored retirement plan.

I understand that Navy Commands set up financial education classes and assistance to help with investing and budgeting. I feel that navy spouses require more attention given their needs.

I propose the development and implementation of an education program aimed specifically at helping navy spouses get the most out of their retirement investing. This program should address the issues of recognizing the importance of retirement saving, investment, tax sheltering and how to handle moving from job-to job.

I propose the establishment of a military spouse retirement plan. The plan could be managed through the Thrift Savings Administration. The U.S. Government could match up to a certain percent of monies submitted by spouses in payment and gratitude for the countless hours given in the service to our country by assuring the stability of our families and the wellness of our spouses as they perform their duties.

Thank you for hearing my concerns and proposals.

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Dear Debbie,

Congratulations on being asked to speak at the Senate Hearing. We couldn't have a better representative.

I know I'm a day late. I apologize. Getting ready to leave tomorrow for about 10 days, then we'll be moving soon after, so lots of plates spinning in the air.

I wish I had more time to give you a more comprehensive response, but I'll hit some points in the hope that they may prove useful.

As we get ready to make yet another move, one issue that comes to mind for me are related to schools. Jacob will be entering 5th grade, and this will be his 5th school. His younger brother Samuel will be entering 3rd grade. This will be his second elementary school. School is a big issue for many, and seems to only get bigger as the children get older. The following are some thoughts on schools and some other issues that come to mind:

Figuring out new curriculums and school routines can be pretty overwhelming, but sometimes the hardest part about being a new kid is simply finding someone to eat lunch with or play with at recess. That can be the most stressful part of a new kids day. Having a buddy system at the school can play a big part in helping a kid feel welcome and cut down on the anxiety that comes with not knowing things like how the lockers work, or what the routine for gym class is, etc . . .

Community outreach to military families can truly help make the military family feel at home in a community. Yes, we have our own community amongst ourselves, but it feels wonderful to feel included in the community at large. We have found that Portsmouth Naval Shipyard and the surrounding towns work hard to do this. They reach out to sailors and their families by "adopting" a boat that's in the shipyard. The town and boat then interact to show each other their worlds, and let each other participate. This can mean parties, parades and other special events. Can't tell you how good it feels to be celebrated like that! That translates into better morale and great publicity for both the town and the military.

Military families are resourceful when it comes to finding out about their communities, but more outreach from the civilian sector can make us feel welcome and help us find opportunities even quicker.

Hire a military spouse. Their ability to adapt and cope with changes can be a real asset to companies and businesses.

Why don't we make it easier by making a standard date for acceptance to kindergarten, rather than every school district/state determining the "cut-off date" for kindergarten. This is particularly disruptive for families moving in the middle of the school year. Johnny may be accepted as a Kindergardener in Hawaii, but not in Kansas.

End of year testing can be problematic, esp. when one of the subjects the students are supposed to know is that particular state's history. Hard to catch up on that, esp. when moving in the midst of the school year.

So, Deb, there's my quick 2 cents worth. I'll be eager to hear how it goes, and what kind of feedback you receive.

Thanks for putting it out to us all.

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My gripes with the government are the following:

*SST Benefits:*

As a Navy spouse, I have followed my husband through his career (and therefore moves). The result of this is that my Social Security Benefits have lapsed and I no longer qualify. My Multiple Sclerosis is progressing and I can no longer work—I am trained to be a math teacher. Due to the nature of my illness, I do not always know if I will be mobile on any given day. This makes it difficult to hold down a job, unless the employer is extremely flexible.

For my situation, I was working at a Navy campus before my husband was transferred to England. I finished up the teaching term and moved over seas. Upon our return to the states, we choose to have me stay home with our children not knowing that I would be giving up my benefits.

Because the Navy transfers military personnel every two to four years, it makes it difficult to keep up a career and therefore benefits. I feel that one possible solution would be to add a year of eligibility on to the spouses eligibility status after each move.

This situation not only exist for military spouses, but also for civilian spouses that choose to stay at home during their children's preschool years. I think stay-at-home parents should have their benefits still intact when they are done raising children. Children do better if there is a parent supporting them at home not only as babies and toddlers, but all through the school years!

I had full benefits prior to starting a family, but because we opted to have a parent at home I no longer qualify for the benefits I earned.

*MV:*

My husband and I have moved nine times in fourteen years to support his military career. Although he is allowed to keep his old drivers license, I have to change my to the new state. This is true of vehicles also. I am not a big fan of the DMV's around the country: it is not unusual to have to go back to a DMV station more than once for reasons beyond the applicants control. With having to find new schools, new doctors, new dentists, a new church and everything else that goes along with moving; why not have a military drivers license and military plates (tags). Why can't the military members and spouses be added into the government system of licenses and plates? And that would eliminate at least one hassle to each military family that has to move.

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Deb,

I can only think of a couple of issues of the top of my head.

I am concerned about them privatizing housing. The rumor is if they do that our BAH will be taxable and that will put us in a higher taxbracket. It will mean that military families who qualify for special services such as daycare because of their low income will no longer qualify.

I am also concerned with the waning quality of care provided at the NACC. Every month they change the services they are willing to provide at the NACC. They need to either farm everyone out or increase the services they provide. It is impossible to get an appointment in the middle of the day or call ahead and schedule an appointment for the next day should you feel the case is not emergent but needs looking into in the near future. They only want to see critical cases within one day or maintenance cases within a week. Life does not work like that. I also think that it is sad that they spend 3 hours actually working on Wednesday, and the rest of their time training. Why can't they train on Saturday? Also why doesn't the pharmacy have normal pharmacy hours instead of limited pharmacy hours? Do they want us to spend the extra money to purchase our medicine off base on the weekend and Wednesday afternoons? Also, why did they get rid of the walk-in care? It was continuously busy every time I needed to use the service which demonstrates it is a valuable service. So, they cut it?!?!?

Thanks,



Deb,

I received an email from Kate Atkinson w/ your email.

I am very concerned w/ the situation at the NACC. Our quality of care is rapidly being reduced. Everyone knows about the waits at the Pharmacy and Lab. Our ENT doctor has been transferred and a relief doesn't arrive until August. That means 3 months w/out an ENT specialist. Our Gyn doctor is leaving and not being replaced. That means many of the dependents who have been treated for serious on-going female health issues are now being farmed out into the community. We have to start the process all over with a new doctor. That is, if we can get a referral from the present doctor, who is so busy I haven't been able to get an appt in 3 months.

Our government has begun to recognize that the Military families make a huge sacrifice and contribution for our country. They have worked hard at improving our pay. Now they must address our health and welfare issues.

Thank you very much for taking the time and effort to represent us.

Dear Debbie,

I have been a NAVY Wife for nearly 13 years and find the hardest part to be the separations, as we all do. During deployments I find it difficult and sometimes what seems to be impossible to acquire good day care. I truly feel like a single Parent. If you don't bring your child full time you are out of luck and they want a fortune . . . This is not just a Navy problem it is a true dilemma in our society . . . With the education system and the child care there are times that it seems in this fast paced world seems to put our children last on the money list. Our school in Plainfield CT are barely up to state standards and the high school is on the verge of loosing accreditation. In one of the most highly taxes states in the union this is a very sad state to be in.

Where is all the money they say is in the military budget going? Certainly not in our wallets . . . don't get me wrong things are much better than when we were newly weds. It is just sad when Chiefs families with more than two kids are eligible for food stamps what give, certainly I don't claim to have the answers but some where along the line I think things definitely got out of control with the federal spending and the priorities. When our children and families are last on the list we all have a problem and as a parent I am truly concerned.

As a Navy wife I have seen a lot of stuff come up on deployment. I can handle most everything that has occurred on my watch. The young wives that have never been alone before this is tuff. When your husband is gone four months and then doesn't get home before 8pm or IOpm 4 out of 5 days and is called into work on the weekend that is really difficult. I know that with advancement comes responsibility but with the Military Divorce rate at 70% this is definitely a contributing factor. Stress, loneliness and many more factors. This last year has been very difficult, 3 transfers and gone 8 months out of the year even the most experienced Navy Spouse would find that a very tuff nut to swallow . . .

I guess what I would like to see is some command thought as to the people left on shore Lord Knows that we think alot of our loved ones out to sea and they think of us but when the sailors are expected to work 14-16 hours a day some compensation should be given.

Good luck in your efforts to get some changes made, I could go on forever but I hope that you get the gist of What I think some things are that need attention . . .

Thank you for the opportunity to speak,

Deb,

This from one of our young wives onboard.

I can give you some feedback based on personal experience.

1) Housing—I give them a grade of a D. 85% of the housing personnel staff are rude. The horrible attitude and treatment we received upon our arrival was unnecessary and unacceptable. We felt they had judged us before they even knew us. I got the feeling they felt all Navy families were low-class and not worthy of being treated kindly. It is their job to make the transition to a new place easier and they left me feeling more stressed and frustrated than I already was being that I had to do the entire move by myself as my husband was out to sea. This is not a good feeling when your entire life is packed up sitting in a moving van while you wait to have somewhere to call home! The housing units themselves are old and ghetto-looking. The first unit I was shown I would have not only been embarrassed to live in but been afraid to live there knowing how much time I spend alone. The units aren't as clean as they should be upon move-in either. I found mouse droppings, and it looked like the extent of the repainting was to brush a few strokes over any holes

that had been sheetrocked leaving obvious markings on the walls. Even now, when I have to call their office my call isn't returned for days. It would be nice to have individuals who have experienced Navy life (i.e. moving 4x's in 2 years) working there because perhaps then things would be different. They might be more understanding and willing to help.

I think that's all being as I could go on and on how hard it is to live a normal life when your husband is never around but I know they will never do anything to change that since it comes with the job.

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I received an e-mail from . . . Regarding your upcoming senate meeting on Monday. The only things I can think of at this time that I am wondering about are the following:

Emergency medical problems can not be taken care of at the NACC because they no longer deal with these things, but when we go to the emergency room at the hospital, Tricare doesn't always cover it. Either have the NACC set up with an 'emergency' area and walk-in clinic like it used to have, or else have Tricare set up to cover the full cost of the ambulance to the closest hospital and the emergency room visit like it would if we went to a military facility.

Second, the Red Cross used to offer free passes for activities to military families. How can we see about getting them to resume this for families with children only? It's great for the moral of the kids and parents, especially during times of deployment when you're trying to fill the hours with things to take your mind off of counting the days. I say 'for families with children only' because when they were doing this a couple of years ago, most passes got grabbed up by single guys, couples, and people bringing a bunch of their children's friends that were non-military.

Third, have PSD honor the Power of Attorney's that we have. Spouses with these documents cannot do anything if something goes wrong with Deers, pay, bonuses, etc. because the military says that even with a P.O.A., they cannot talk to us because it's not our pay, it's our husbands'. I know of many couples who had their pay get messed up while the husband was deployed, and nothing could be done to fix it until the husband returned. Those few months can make a big difference though to the lives and financial status of the spouse and children while they wait.

Offer free classes to spouses that deal with basic car and home maintenance, bills, taxes, first aid, or whatever else might come up while the husband is deployed and that the wife might not know how to take care of.

Lastly, I have a friend who is eligible to go from her 2 bedroom home in housing to a 3 bedroom. There are some new 3 bedrooms already done, but she was told that she was not able to get one of these houses. Housing told her that only families moving here from elsewhere were able to receive these houses at this time. Families going from a 2 to a 3 bedroom in housing were only allowed an older 3 bedroom at this time, and then would be moved again within a year or two to a new 3 bedroom when the time came for the housing area in which she was to move to be re-renovated. Why make people keep moving like this? Just let them have the new houses now if they are done and ready to be moved into. I was also told that families moving to a larger bedroom house have to pay for and move themselves. This is difficult to do when it's just you, and your children underfoot. I know that professional movers here are very expensive, and most of us wives can't move heavy furniture! e all by ourselves. Even when our husbands are here, it's still hard to do. Especially when for a move such as this, they don't get time off to take care of it unless they are able to take leave. I don't think the Navy should have to allow these types of moves to be ditty moves, but they could at least have their movers do it for us like they do when we move to a new base.

I don't know if any of these issues are the types of things which you will be talking about on Monday, but these are the things that concern me at this time. Thank you very much for reading my input. I hope it may be of some help to you.

Sincerely Yours,

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Good Morning,

My name is Kelly Killingbeck. I am a civilian employee at the NACC, but my husband is active duty down at NSSF. I read over your email regarding information to pass on at the meeting. Though, for the most part I don't have any bad issues with being a Navy wife, currently we are experiencing severe problems with housing. Recently, there have been several rumors around base about the Privatization of Military Housing. Generally, when this does take effect,

It will not affect military families in a big way. It does affect those of us who choose to live in the Navy's Mobile Home Park. We have orders to move in Dec of

this year. We already had someone in the Navy who was interested in buying our mobile home. They went to talk to housing. Housing told them no one would be allowed to move in or sell their existing homes. They said that they were closing the Mobile Home Park. Current residents could stay there through their current orders only. Through many phone calls and visits, not only to housing but also Public Affairs and legal visits, we are still waiting for answers. Many bases throughout the US are doing this exact thing. Unfortunately for us, there is no standard policy on how to handle this issue. Some bases are offering financial assistance to move the house, others are just letting the military member pay the price. When we bought our home back in 2000, we had no intention of moving the mobile home. We have had several neighbors who have no problems selling their homes in the last 3 years. We have approximately 40 other Navy families that live in this park who are all about to get swept under the rug. The worst part of all is that they don't even know. The only reason any of this was brought to our attention was in preparing to sell the home. Nothing has been officially released. Calls to housing have gone unanswered.

They have told us they will be releasing information in the "next week or two". This was back in the end of April. We have been told we can sell the home to someone who is willing to move it. This may sound like no big deal, except even to move it 50 miles could cost up to \$3000. We have also discussed moving it to our next duty station. This will cost anywhere from \$2000-\$6000 out of our own pocket. Then we need to find a lot to put it since all the Navy's Mobile Home Parks are being closed. They are no easy solutions to this problem. Morally, we feel the Navy is supposed to be taking care of its own. They have shown no regard for the families that live in Cherry Circle. They need to show some respect to those serving. The only real solution to this problem is for the Navy to take responsibility for their actions and buy the mobile homes at fair market value. They need to start by at least being truthful to the families who are financially bound to their homes. I thank you for time. Sorry this is so long, but there is still a lot more information out there. I have done a lot of investigated trying to help out the Legal man in my husband's office. They continue to try to get us answers, but it is slow going for those of us who do not have much time in our duty stations. Thank you again for your time and anything you can do to bring this issue to someone's attention. I know that in the big scheme of things, 40 Navy families don't mean much, but the Navy is supposed to take care of all those serving. Thank you.

Sincerely,

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Hi Deb,

I forwarded a message I received from one of the wives. I would also like to comment on how awful housing is here. Not the property managers, but the housing office itself. They make a move to a new family in the area more stressful than it should be. Power trip is what I would call it. The struggle just to get what you are qualified for is unbelievable (I have 3 teenage kids, now ages 17, 15, & 13 and they promised us a 4 bedroom for the next week, and then they'd give it to someone else and promise one for the next week . . . and so on for a month. We finally ended up in a 3 bedroom and had to fight for 2 years to get put in a 4 bedroom) and then some of the rules. I think we need a little updating on some of these. Like I was told . . . they have been here since the dawn of time . . . time to update. One for example, since it is summer time . . . swimming pools. The size they allow, my children's ankles may get wet. If there is supervision, or even if we had to have it in a fenced in yard . . . something . . . I think they should be allowed. I'm not talking full size or inground pools, but bigger than the size allowed now. If you can buy it at Target, Walmart, etc you should be able to put it up. There are many other incidents that need to be looked into with housing. Maybe read into some of the files.

Thanks,

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please say something about the housing its so awful here. I live in old polaris park the ghetto!! off of jackson. secondly please let them know how difficult the seperations are for families with special needs kids I have two of them and its so very difficult sometimes. maybe suggest a support group for families with special needs kids. thank you!

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Hey Debbie,

I am sure I am not alone but as I am dealing with it as we speak, I am very passionate about it: Housing, I am being relocated because of the remodeling, I understand that they need this and the benefits it will have even on my life. However I would have an issue with the communication between everyone with the construction company, housing, and residents. This is a very long story with way too much to type here, I am sure I am not the first one with this issue but I feel very strong about the way that our children are being treated when this happens, here where we live they blocked off the path to the school 10 min before the school was to dismiss and did not inform anyone! Leaving the children with potentially no way to get home. Again the issue is not new I am sure but do feel it is a very important one. I would be happy to elaborate more on the entire situation if you would like please feel free to give me a call, you may email me however I will be in the process of moving the computer over to the new house and will be slower as I will be checking it in the evening only, until say Friday. I hope you have a great day and are able to receive the info you need.

Sincerely,

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Debbie,

My biggest concern/gripe at this point is the closing of the Women's Health Clinic at the NACC. For the past 23 years I've been normal on all my "Women's Stuff!" In recent years my "stuff" has changed. I've had abnormal pap's with mid grade cancer, and have also had problems with my mamograms. Have had two different "scares." I love the Womens Health Clinic because I see the same Doctor and she genuinely cares and follows my progress. Not saying anything bad about the Family Practice Doc's, just my preference. Now that they will be closing I will be referred to the outside and have to deal with the Hell we call TRICARE! ! Everytime I've been sent out for different test I end up having to take more time off of work to take my paper work to the Tricare Advisory people to have it straightened out and paid. I like it as simple as possible.

I guess the Powers that be don't feel there is a need for Women's Health Clinic at a Submarine Base, but we all know that there are plenty of Active Duty Female in need here just like the Family Memebers.

Well that's about it for my big concern! Thanks for letting us know, and I for one appreciate all that you do for the Ombudsman and our Community!

Sincerely,

NACC : Over the years I have seen some positive changes in the way things are done at the NACC. Most recently though I see them cutting staff and services in an already overloaded system. Most Physicians out in town do not want to deal with Tricare Prime because of the very low amount of reimbursement they get. Medicare patients have an easier time getting into an outside Pediatrician. I feel that the areas that are most utilized and desperately needed (Women's Health, Pediatrics and Pharmacy Services) should be adequately staffed and not downsized.

HOUSING: The rules for living in housing need to be enforced better and in a less random fashion. The changes being made to units look very impressive but they're taking quite some time to complete. Rather than starting one or two or even three projects in different areas why cant they be coordinated to disrupt a minimum of traffic flow and complete one section at a time?

I understand the importance of training and being prepared for war. I think a greater effort could be made to minimize the time that the boats need to be deployed during peace times.

I would like to tell the "powers that be" that I am most grateful to hear the military spouses being thanked for their dedication and for the sacrifices they make. AND thanks for asking

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Hey Deb, hope this helps. Good luck!!!!!! LP

BAD:

MY biggest complaint is on Health Care Im receiving here in Ct. Everytime I talk to someone at Tricare I get a different answer. The Tricare office in Groton keeps messing up or losing my papers so that when I see my PCM I get charged/billed as a walk in (no referral) patient. Maybe its the plan Im under but I cant be certain ANY information I get from Tricare to be accurate, so why change and potentially make the situation worse. Weve been here 6 months and Im still trying to get answers so I can get the Health care I need without having to pay hundreds of dollars out of pocket for each office visit.

GOOD: I feel they did good with BAH increases. Keep increases like that coming!!! Its so helpful to those of us who don't live in base housing (whether by choice or having to wait for base housing availability).

HUBBYS COMPLAINT: he'd like to see more parking on base, especially since they have closed lower base to vehicles. I know parking is a daily headache for our guys. I also know the state wont allow some of the old buildings on base to be torn down to make parking garages because they are "historic" or something of that nature. Nevertheless, more parking would sure make things a little easier.

Breakdown: Need better healthcare, need MORE parking, Keep BAH increases coming.

#### RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS OF SENATOR DODD FROM DEBBIE ESTES

*Question 1.* Mrs. Estes. In your opinion, what are the three biggest quality of life concerns facing our military families?

Answer 1. The three biggest quality of life concerns facing our military families:

##### *Housing*

There is a huge concern regarding the Public-Private Venture implementation here at New London: First, the idea that we will be charged our BAH rate to "rent" houses. Everyone is aware of the response that "it will not be any different but the concern missed at the hearing was that of families paying different amounts to live in the same house. For example a chief living in Trident Park (2 bedrooms) will be paying considerably more than an E4 living next door in the same exact house.

Second, is the concern of mixing civilians into housing. Although, none of the bases so far have had this occur, this makes a lot of families nervous. At least with military families next door we are all in the "same boat" and can be held accountable by the Navy and our commands.

Third, who will set the rate for usual and customary utilities? Are they going to properly insulate our houses before doing this?

Why not set the price of a unit depending on the number on bedrooms, just as if you were renting out in town. A four bedroom would be more expensive than a two bedroom, no matter what your rank is. If you want more bedrooms, your rent would be higher.

##### *Tricare*

The NACC here at Subbase has changed dramatically. The emergency room as been removed and the Women's Health clinic is getting ready to be closed. This is clogging the civilian ER's and making referrals an even longer process. It will take three months to replace our ENT doctor here on base and a lot of the specialty clinics have closed completely.

One also wonders why the NACC closed on Wednesday afternoons for training.

It is hard to get an appointment to start with, why can't they train in the evening or on the weekends. This would allow for another whole afternoons for appointments.

*Question 2.* Mrs. Estes. How are the services provided on-base for families just moving to the base?

Answer 2. Moving to Groton

The Fleet and Family Service Center has a Relocation Specialist that can assist families in the relocation process. This service is invaluable. The housing office has a great computer data base of rentals and houses for sale that can be viewed at anytime by families.

*Question 3.* Mrs. Estes, can you describe your experience before, during and after your husbands' deployments? Can you cite any specific examples where the Navy and community network has either provided necessary help, or come up short in supporting you during these times?

Answer 3. Deployment stress

Not enough paper for the experience our family members go through, we should be proud of them all. A good example of when the community and the Navy came together to help out was in my own experience. When I had my baby my husband was away and a NACC representative came to the hospital and gave the package with all the NACC information that I would need to enroll my daughter in DEERS. He even scheduled my two week check up for her right there on his computer. This program was not in-place when my son was born four years ago and it made a huge difference.

Also in the same instance, The Navy Marine Corps Relief Society visiting nurses were contacted by the hospital and they came to the house. They performed a check

up for my baby and were a huge source of support for me being alone with a new baby and a preschooler. They performed her PKU so I did not have to go the base to do it. This is a wonderful service, the only comment I could make would be that they need more funding for more nurses!

*Question 4.* Mrs. Estes, In your opinion, which programs/services provided by the community do you think would be best replicated at other military facilities in the country?

Answer 4. National models that I feel should be shared.

*Fleet and Family Service Center*

This program offers our families so much support and resources. They have programs ranging from Budgeting, Deployment, Counseling, Information and Referral, Spouse Transition, Resume building and all kinds of programs for children.

*Child development center*

This program is truly wonderful. They have full time in the center care along with hourly drop-in. They also provide Home daycare with certified providers in Navy Housing.

The Only draw back to this program is the lack of air conditioning going into the summer months. Every year they have a broken air conditioner and this year as of June 20, it is still not working. This is unsafe for the children as well as the providers. The Center has to reach 95 degrees in the rooms before it can be closed. Some find it amazing that a 3 million dollar renovated center does not have a reliable working air conditioning system. It is sad when you have to dress your baby when you pick them up because it was too hot in the rooms and they had to be stripped to their diapers.

The other idea with the CDC is to remove the BAH from the calculation of fees. As family members, we do not see this money directly if we live in housing.

[Whereupon, at 11:36 a.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]