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New Initiative Offers Education, Training Funds for Military Spouses

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WASHINGTON, Nov. 14, 2007 – Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates joined Labor Secretary Elaine L. Chao today in supporting a new initiative to help military spouses get the education and other credentials needed to pursue careers in high-demand, high-growth occupations.  [\(Video\)](#)

Gates praised the new Military Spouse Career Advancement Initiative as a “landmark program that will open the doors to our military spouses for more fulfilling careers,” even as they relocate regularly due to their loved ones’ assignments.

The \$35 million demonstration program, co-sponsored by the Defense and Labor departments, sets up accounts for eligible spouses in eight states to cover expenses directly related to post-secondary education and training, Gates said during today’s signing ceremony at the Pentagon.

These include costs for tuition, fees, books, equipment, and credentialing and licensing fees required for careers in education, health care, information technology, construction trades, financial services, and other “high-growth, portable” fields, Chao said.

The program also covers the cost of renewing existing credentials and licenses due to a military move.

Beginning in January, the new program will launch at 18 military installations in eight states: California, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Maine, North Carolina and Washington.

Spouses of active-duty servicemembers grades E1 through E5 and O1 to O3 will be eligible to participate. They must have a high school or general education diploma.

Gates said the program will provide the much-needed help many spouses need to pursue rewarding careers despite frequent career disruptions. “Thousands are called on to pack up and relocate the family, often at the cost of their own careers,” he said. “This makes it difficult to navigate the career licensure and certification requirements that go with most professions.

“In addition, education is often unaffordable for young families who must also bear the expense of child care,” he said.

Gates called the new initiative another step in fulfilling the Defense Department’s commitment to its servicemembers and their families. “We owe it to our brave men and women in uniform to assist their families as they do their job, often thousands of miles from their homes and families and under extremely hazardous conditions,” he said. “When servicemembers find time to call home or e-mail home, they shouldn’t have to worry. They have the right to hear their loved ones honestly say, ‘We miss you, but we are doing fine.’”

Chao said the program will give the 77 percent of military spouses who report wanting or needing to work an opportunity to forge careers in fields that provide the most opportunity now and in the future.

Workers in these high-demand occupations will be able to pick up and move with their loved ones’ assignments, but still continue building their own careers, she said. She noted that with the trend toward a knowledge-based economy, two-thirds of the new careers will require some post-secondary education or training.

Chao said military families serve as the backbone of the fighting force. “Our military could not do its job without your support,” she told spouses at today’s ceremony. “As they say in the military, you are mission-essential. And that’s what this initiative is all about.”

Twenty-five-year-old Gwen Bates, wife of Navy Petty Officer 2nd Class Alexander Bates, said she hopes to be among the first military spouses to take advantage of the new program. Living in San Diego, where her husband is assigned, with the couple’s three children, Bates said her family hasn’t had extra cash to put toward her education. “This has been my stumbling block. I’ve been at a crossroads,” she said.

Bates said the new initiative will offer exactly what she needs to build on the associate’s degree she already has to get a bachelor’s degree in pre-medicine, then go on to medical school. “This is the reinforcement I need to finally go ahead and get the show on the road,” she said.

With the initiative beginning as a demonstration program, Bates said she’s hopeful it will expand to include more spouses military-wide. “There are so many people like me,” she said.

She called the new initiative an example of the Defense Department making good on its pledge of support to its military families. “It shows they actually care,” she said.