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Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-03-549T](#), a testimony before the Subcommittee on Total Force, Committee on Armed Services, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

Since the end of the Cold War, there has been a shift in the way reserve forces have been used. Previously, reservists were viewed primarily as an expansion force that would supplement active forces during a major war. Today, reservists not only supplement but also replace active forces in military operations worldwide.

Citing the increased use of the reserves to support military operations, House Report 107-436 accompanying the Fiscal Year 2003 National Defense Authorization Act directed GAO to review compensation and benefits for reservists. In response, GAO is reviewing (1) income protection for reservists called to active duty, (2) family support programs, and (3) health care access. For this testimony, GAO was asked to discuss its preliminary observations. GAO also was asked to discuss the results of its recently completed review concerning employer support for reservists.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is not making new recommendations at this time, but past reports have contained GAO's views on actions that should be taken to improve reservists' access to military health care benefits and to improve the effectiveness of outreach programs and other aspects of reservist-employer relations. DOD generally concurred with these recommendations and has taken some actions.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-03-549T. To view the full report, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Derek B. Stewart at (202) 512-5140 or stewartd@gao.gov.

MILITARY PERSONNEL

Preliminary Observations Related to Income, Benefits, and Employer Support for Reservists During Mobilization

What GAO Found

The preliminary results of our review indicate that reservists experience widely varying degrees of income loss or gain when they are called up for a contingency operation. While income loss data for current operations Noble Eagle and Enduring Freedom were not available, data for past military operations show that 41 percent of drilling unit members reported income loss, while 30 percent reported no change and 29 percent reported an increase in income. This information is based on self-reported survey data for mobilizations or deployments of varying lengths of time. As would be expected, the data indicate that certain groups, such as medical professionals in private practice, tend to report much greater income loss than the average estimated for all reservists.

Although reservists called up to support a contingency operation are generally eligible for the same family support and health care benefits as active component personnel, reservists and their families face challenges in understanding and accessing their benefits. Among the challenges, reservists typically live farther from military installations than their active duty counterparts, are not part of the day-to-day military culture, and may change benefit eligibility status many times throughout their career. Some of these challenges are unique to reservists; others are also experienced by active component members but may be magnified for reservists. Outreach to reservists and their families is likely to remain a continuing challenge for DOD in the areas of family support and health care, and we expect to look at DOD's outreach efforts in more detail as we continue our study.

Outreach is also a critical component of maintaining and enhancing employers' support for reservists. Although DOD has numerous outreach efforts, we found that a sizeable number of reservists and employers were unsure about their rights and responsibilities. For example, a 1999 DOD survey found that 31 percent of employers were not aware of laws protecting reservists. Several factors have hampered DOD's outreach efforts to both employers and reservists. However, DOD is taking positive actions in this area, such as moving ahead with plans to collect employer data from all reserve personnel.

Families of mobilizing reservists face challenges in understanding and accessing military benefits.



Source: DOD.