

MARIA CANTWELL
WASHINGTON



United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-4705

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The Honorable Pete Geren
Secretary of the Army
101 Army Pentagon
Washington, DC 20310-0101
Tel: (703) 695 5135
Fax: (703) 697 8036

Dear Secretary Geren:

I am writing to draw your attention a program at Fort Lewis, WA, that I believe has the potential to be a model for how the military sends soldiers to war, and looks after the families those soldiers leave behind.

During the Memorial Day recess, I attended a 'deployment fair' at Fort Lewis for soldiers preparing to deploy to Iraq and Afghanistan and for their families. Instituted by Army Col. Cynthia Murphy, the deployment fair functions much like a trade fair. Booths set up under a big tent offer information on child care, credit counseling, emotional counseling, adult education for deployed soldiers and loved ones, legal services, housing, and even car maintenance. This creative program replaces a three-hour PowerPoint presentation that seemed to swamp preoccupied soldiers and relatives with more than they could absorb in one sitting.

Typically, family services for deployed troops have focused on returning soldiers. The program at Lewis is geared toward providing military families with information they need *before* the troops leave home, and doing so in an innovative and user-friendly fashion. I proposed to base officials – and they reacted favorably to the idea – creating a one-stop site online so that families could quickly access the information they need to help them manage these painful separations.

I understand that this unique program may not provide a one-size-fits-all solution for each Army installation, but I believe its basic elements should be incorporated by unit Family Readiness Groups and by the Army's Morale, Welfare and Recreation officials. By adopting this approach, the Army could provide an additional benefit to family members while not casting aside other successful programs that are already in place.

We owe our service members deploying to Iraq, Afghanistan and other dangerous assignments overseas, and their families, all the information and support they need to get through these difficult months of separation.

Sincerely,

Maria Cantwell
United States Senator