

Employment program to resume for enrolled spouses

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WASHINGTON, March 11, 2010 – The Military Spouse Career Advancement Accounts program, commonly known as MyCAA, will resume March 13 for the more than 136,000 spouses who already have established an account, the defense official who heads up the program announced today.

Officials announced a temporary halt in the program Feb. 18, pending a top-to-bottom review, after a six-fold spike in enrollments in January, a surge that overwhelmed the system and caused the program to nearly reach its budget threshold.

"We made a commitment to our military spouses when they established a career advancement account, and we will be true to our promises," said Tommy T. Thomas, deputy undersecretary of defense for the Pentagon's office of military community and family policy.

The Defense Department will resume the program for the 136,583 military spouses currently in the program at noon EDT March 13, Thomas said.

"We sincerely apologize to our military spouses for the added burden caused by the pause in operation," he added.

While the program will resume for enrolled spouses, new MyCAA accounts or financial assistance applications will not be accepted yet, Thomas said, noting that the comprehensive review of the program still is under way.

"We are working hard to adjust the program to meet the demands of the MyCAA program and to arrive at a long-term solution for military spouses who would like to establish an account," he said.

"Until that time, we encourage spouses to consult with the MyCAA career counselors who can provide career exploration, assessment, employment readiness and career search assistance."

The top-to-bottom review includes procedures, financial assistance documents and the overall program, which is intended to provide military spouses with opportunities to pursue portable careers in high-demand, high-growth occupations.

The program has been growing in popularity since its inception March 2, 2009. Enrollments had been increasing at a rate of about 10,000 a month, and in January, the number spiked to 70,000.

"We had very little time to react to that," Thomas said. "I make no excuses for that. We should have done a better job of notifying our military spouses." Thomas said he will work hard to restore the confidence lost when the program was halted.

"We certainly know we have lost some confidence, and we want to rebuild that confidence," he said. "We will restore that faith hopefully by one, restoring the program, and two, having appropriate resources to ensure everyone that applies for the program receives the appropriate financial assistance.

"We appreciate what [spouses] do, and we hope that through this, that once we get this program back on track, that we don't lose any ... spouses," he continued. "We value and treasure everything you do each and every day, not only for the Department of Defense, but for this nation."

Thomas said he will ensure the lines of communication stay open in the days ahead. An e-mail has been sent to all program participants, informing them of the program's resumption, and spouses will see the announcement letter when they log on to their MyCAA accounts. A "media blitz" of information will precede any announcement that applies to all military spouses, he vowed.

"We don't want to make the mistake we made in the beginning, and that is not notifying you what's going on," Thomas said. "We want to make absolutely sure that you understand that we're working in your best interest."

In the meantime, Thomas urged spouses to be wary of questionable Web sites enticing them with employment opportunities.

"Stay the course with us and allow us to work this to finality by restoring the program," he said. "We will make every effort possible to ensure we educate you and get the necessary funds to continue this program."

Along with MyCAA counselors, spouses also can request free career counseling through Military OneSource at 1-800-342-9647 or at <http://militaryonesource.com>.