

## Army Looks to Improve Guard Life

Starting next fall, the time a reservist spends at home between mobilizations will increase to four years, the Army Chief of Staff said yesterday during a meeting with members of the Army National Guard in Arlington, Va. Gen. George Casey said the longer time at home is necessary for the welfare of troops.

"We had to get there," he said. "Studies show that it takes a minimum of 24 to 36 months to recover from a combat deployment. The reality of it all is that we cannot go to war without the Guard and Reserve."

Casey previously announced that the Army's active-duty force would return so-called "dwell time" to two years home after a deployment. In recent years, some Soldiers have re-deployed barely a year after coming home. Guard and Army Reservists might be home two or three years after a deployment.

Casey has said the demands placed on the Guard and Reserve essentially transformed it from a strategic reserve to an operational force. "It's a fundamentally different Guard, and because of that, it is a fundamentally different Army today, and we can't go back," he said March 7.

Meanwhile, as the Army readies to stretch the dwell time for its reserve forces, the Pentagon is communicating with thousands of civilian employers to figure out ways the military can help ease the strain on both employer and employee as they deal with the ongoing operational demands.

The Employer Support for the Guard and Reserve, a Defense Department agency responsible for handling reserve forces and employer relations, has sent a survey to 80,000 employers.

The survey is an acknowledgment that the past decade of war has also put strains on the reservists' employers that are required by law to provide differential pay to mobilized employees and also to have the troops' jobs ready for them when they return.

"Our goal for this survey is to identify best practices in supporting employers of Guard and Reserve members and evaluate the effectiveness of Department of Defense programs," Assistant Secretary of Defense for Reserve Affairs Dennis McCarthy said in announcing the project.

In 2010, according to ESGR figures, the number of employers that signed Statement of Support forms agreeing to honor the re-employment rights of reservists and make sure supervisors have what they need to support the deployed workers rose to nearly 59,000. That's up by about 4,000 from 2009 and well over the roughly 11,400 that signed the forms in 2006, according to the Pentagon.

Attorney Mathew Tully, who specializes in USERRA cases on behalf of reservists, said it's a good idea to survey the employers. But what employers have said they want most is

something Congress has so far refused to give them: tax credits associated with employees who are serving.

"A survey without the resources to help the employers won't be very beneficial," he said.