Military Advocate Weekly Update

March 15, 2020

The last week has obviously been one of the most tumultuous in the history of our state and nation. For the first time since 9/11, whole parts of our economy—including many businesses, schools and governments—began the process of shutting down in the face of a COVID-19 virus emergency that seems to be getting worse. National and state efforts to combat the virus will likely be with us for some time, affecting most all of us.

The effects on the Office of the Military Advocate and other parts of Missouri government are just unfolding, with more actions to follow soon. I have curtailed my travel and had to cancel the planned Missouri Military Appreciation Day 2020, which we were to hold in the Capitol on March 31. All of the DoD leaders we had invited to the Appreciation Day cancelled their travel to Jefferson City, and we were advised by the legislature and administration here we should call off our plans. It is unknown as to when or whether we will be able to reschedule.

COVID-19 and impacts on our military

Our military installations and defense agencies are on heightened alert because of the potential impact the virus could have on their missions. Fort Leonard Wood has implemented additional screening across its training programs—especially basic training—to identify those who are at risk to have the virus. Anyone who has traveled to any “hot spot” regions or who have flu-like symptoms are being placed under a 14 day quarantine. As of Friday afternoon, there had been no confirmed positive cases, but the leadership there is taking no chances.

Starting on Monday, March 16, all family-day activities will be cancelled and basic training graduations will no longer be open to families or the public until further notice. Instead, units will provide live feeds of the graduations that family members can view online.

Changes have also occurred when it comes to installation operations. Starting immediately, gate guards will scan IDs differently and they will be wearing personal protective gear to protect themselves. The installation is also temporarily restricting access to visitors who are “not on official business” who have
just traveled from Italy, South Korea and China. The General Leonard Wood Army Community Hospital (GLWACH) has made preparations to quarantine and treat personnel who were exposed to the virus or who may contract it in the near future.

At Whiteman AFB, the alert level has been advanced because of a coronavirus case in a nearby community. While there are no cases at Whiteman, there is a confirmed case in Clinton, MO, which is 35 miles away, and the home of several who work on the base. The new “Health Protection Condition Bravo” means that strict hand hygiene will be practiced—there will be no shaking of hands and the use of hand sanitizers is required—and the practice social distancing will be implemented.

Early next week WAFB leaders will hold a “virtual town hall” to address questions and concerns that base personnel and families may have.

Passage of Professional License Reciprocity for Military Spouses

HB 1511, the Military Spouse License Reciprocity legislation sponsored by Representative Steve Lynch of Waynesville, passed the Senate and was sent to the Governor last week. It was the first bill passed by the legislature during this 2020 session. The legislation was a priority of Governor Mike Parson and, if signed, will have Missouri join 15 other states allowing military spouses who transfer from one state to another to be able to become licensed in the new state much more easily. The new law would allow those who hold professional licenses—like nursing and other healthcare professions, social workers, cosmetologists, etc.—to become licensed immediately in Missouri if their licenses are in good standing in the state where they are transferred from.

This legislation has been a priority for the Secretaries of the Army, Air Force and Navy in an effort to increase military spousal employment and military family quality of life.

Boeing Community Leaders Update

One of the few meetings I was able to attend last week was a briefing for community and state leaders at the Boeing Defense headquarters building in St. Louis. The briefing was well attended but all practiced social distancing and there was no handshaking!

The group received briefings from the managers for the F/A-18, F-15EX, MQ-25, and T-7A Redhawk programs, all of which are going well. Boeing-St. Louis has grown its employment by several thousand over the past two years to accommodate the growth in these programs, particularly the new contracts to produce the T-7A, which is the new trainer aircraft for the Air Force. The new trainer will replace the current T-38 Talon trainers, which are in some cases more than 40 years old. Boeing won the contract to produce a total of 351 aircraft and 46 simulators, maintenance training and support for a total cost of $9.2
billion. Two prototypes are being flown by Boeing, and there are another 2 under construction, in advance of a full rate production order from the Air Force.

**Week ahead**

The best description of the week ahead is that we will be in uncharted territory. The Missouri Senate started its spring break a week early and the House will be working quickly to pass the state's budget before they leave on Thursday. In fact, I am now listening to the Budget Committee working on its markup of the appropriations bills.

I do plan to meet with representatives of the [Department of Higher Education and Workforce Development](https://www.highered.egov.mo.gov/) to discuss how our state can do a better job of awarding [professional and educational credentials and credits](https://www.highered.egov.mo.gov/) for professional military education and experience.

Until next time, I welcome your feedback on the work I am doing on behalf of our military and defense sector.