

Advisory committee visits

Congressional group conducts focus groups regarding female Soldiers

by Pfc. April Campbell

27th PAD

Two members of the Defense Department Advisory Committee on Women in the Services visited Fort Bragg June 4 and 5. U.S. Sen. J.P. Duniphan, of South Dakota, and Judith P. O'Flaherty, of Norfolk, Va., met with civilian and military leaders to conduct focus groups and address issues regarding female service members and Families in the military.

The committee members presence at Fort Bragg was part of several visits they're making to military posts throughout the United States. The purpose of the visits are to gather information to make recommendations and advise the secretary of defense on matters that affect the recruitment, retention and general wellbeing of female service members as well as those service members whose Families are affected by their jobs.

DACOWITS, which was established in 1951, is comprised of 15 civilian members who are selected by the Secretary of Defense.

"We meet in Washington, D.C., in January, February, March and late August," said Duniphan. "We generally make visits to the military posts March through July of each year.

"We work with the secretary of defense to pick topics to focus on during the focus groups, and then ask the same questions at every base," she added.

This year, DACOWITS is focusing on spousal employment and women's health care while deployed. Those who attend the focus groups volunteer to do so, said Duniphan.

Duniphan has visited the Naval Station Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, Kirkland Air Force Base, N. M. and Marine Corps Base Quantico, Va., as well as Fort Bragg this year. She also visited National Guard troops in Goldsboro, N.C.

Along with the different visits to military posts in the United States, O'Flaherty said she has conducted two teleconferences with deployed health care practitioners.

"While there are some differences between all the services," said O'Flaherty, "the in-theater needs of the women tend to be the same."

" We address hygiene issues such as showering as well as other health care issues that might affect women more than men," said Duniphan.

" We want to make sure that the military is meeting everyone's needs," said O'Flaherty. " If their basic needs aren't met, they will not be able to concentrate on being good service members."

The committee members talk to troops returning

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from recent deployments as well as those who deployed several years ago to gain a better perspective on the progress the military has made in these areas, O'Flaherty added.

"I think the military has come a long way," said Duniphan.

In addition to women's health care in theater, DACOWITS is also addressing spousal employment in their focus groups.

"A lot of retention issues are decided around the kitchen table," said O'Flaherty. "If the spouse's needs aren't met, the service member is less likely to stay in the military."

"We've broadened awareness of some family issues in the top echelons of the military," said Duniphan.

When they finish conducting the focus groups at each base, the committee members have an out briefing with the post commanders to present the positive information they have found and the areas that they want to look at, said Duniphan.

"From the lowest to highest levels, this has been a positive experience in terms of what we have seen and who we have talked to," said O'Flaherty.

"I've seen a tremendously positive attitude in the Soldiers here at Fort Bragg," said Duniphan.

The DACOWITS members will meet in late August to discuss their findings and make recommendations to the secretary of defense based on their visits to the different military posts.

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— Judith P. O'Flaherty

DACOWITS member



photo by Pfc. April Campbell/ 27th PAD

Senator J.P. Duniphan, South Dakota, left, and Judith P. O'Flaherty, of Norfolk, Va., middle, both members of the Defense Department Advisory Committee on Women in the Services, listened to Karen Miller, the Child and Youth Services coordinator at Tolson Youth Center June 4, as she talks about the different features offered at the center.