

## **Army will review policy that allows graduates to instantly play pro sports**

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The U.S. Army is reviewing its "Alternative Service Option" program that allows West Point graduates to play professional sports immediately after graduation, according to Army spokeswoman Lt. Col. Anne Edgecomb.

Perhaps not coincidentally, a Department of Defense memo obtained by The Gazette seems to encourage the Army to abandon the program and comply with a Department of Defense policy that the Air Force and Naval academies follow.

The Alternative Service Option program, which was implemented in 2005, earned attention and became the subject of controversy when the Detroit Lions selected Army senior Caleb Campbell in the seventh round of the NFL draft on April 27.

The program permits Campbell and other West Point graduates to play professionally while working as part-time recruiters should they earn a spot on a roster. But it is at odds with a Department of Defense policy issued last August that states officers must serve two years of active duty before applying for excess leave or early release from active duty to pursue a professional sports career.

Air Force and Navy - Army's service academy athletic rivals - strictly follow that policy. Officials at both schools argue that the Alternative Service Option program gives Army a leg up in recruiting, as the three service academies generally recruit from the same pool of high school players. They do not believe playing professional sports while serving as a part-time recruiter constitutes "active duty," and they want all three academies to follow the same rules.

It seems the Department of Defense agrees.

David Chu, the undersecretary of defense for personnel and readiness, sent the memo to the secretaries of the Army, Navy and Air Force on April 30 - three days after Campbell was drafted and Army's program became national news. The subject of the two-paragraph memo is "Policy for Academy and ROTC Graduates Seeking to Participate in Professional Sports Before Completion of the Active Duty Service Obligations."

The memo "retransmits" the Department of Defense policy issued in August and states it is "a policy that remains in force and may not be supplemented." It goes on to say that "constructs for 'active duty' service should not include arrangements typically unavailable to others in uniform."

Whether the memo will lead the Army to alter or abandon its program is uncertain. Lt. Col. Jonathan Withington, a press officer for the Department of Defense, wrote in an e-mail that "it is up to the military departments to interpret and apply" the Department of Defense's policy.