

TESTIMONY OF
JOHN M. MCWILLIAM
DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY FOR
VETERANS' EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR
BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AFFAIRS
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

June 29, 2005

Chairman Boozman, Ranking Member Herseth, and distinguished members of the Subcommittee.

It is my honor to appear before this committee today on behalf of Secretary Elaine Chao to update you on the efforts of the Department of Labor (DOL) to provide Transition Assistance Program services to servicemembers.

The mission of the Veterans' Employment and Training Service (VETS) is to provide veterans and transitioning servicemembers with the resources and services to succeed in the 21st century workforce. One of the ways that we meet that mission is by providing employment workshops to separating active, Guard, and Reserve servicemembers as part of their transition to civilian life.

Since 1991, when DOL began providing employment workshops pursuant to Public Law 101-510, over one million separating and retiring military members and their spouses have been given employment and job training assistance and other transitional services. VETS was further directed to provide these services at overseas locations by Public Law 108-183, (December 16, 2003). Before this law took effect, VETS began facilitating TAP workshops at overseas military installations where, by previous interagency agreement, the Department of Defense had provided TAP workshops since the program's inception. VETS continues to expand additional overseas sites in FY 2005 and we are extending efforts to provide workshops whenever requested to those Guard and Reserve units returning from the Global War on Terror. Our goal is to provide TAP at every location requested by the Armed Services.

Employment Workshop Overview

DOL is authorized by Chapter 58 of title 10, U.S. Code, to assist the Departments of Defense (DOD) and Veterans Affairs (VA) in providing transition assistance services to

separating servicemembers and their spouses. The role of VETS in this effort is to conduct employment workshops based on projections made by each of the Armed Services and the Department of Homeland Security for the U.S. Coast Guard. In the United States, Disabled Veteran Outreach Program (DVOP) specialists and Local Veterans Employment Representatives (LVER) lead most employment workshops. In some cases, due to the distances from some State Employment Offices to the military installations, and to assist with the rapid growth of the program, contract facilitators were added in early Fiscal Year 1992 and Federal staff in Fiscal Year 1996. In overseas locations, contract staff leads most workshops.

To maintain a quality of service delivery and ensure uniformity between locations, all workshops use a common workbook and program of instruction. In addition, all facilitators, whether DVOP/LVER, Federal staff, or contract, are trained and certified by the National Veterans Training Institute (NVTI).

In Fiscal Year 2004, over 133,000 separating military personnel were trained in 3,397 employment workshops at military installations across the Nation and worldwide. In Fiscal Year 2005, VETS will complete approximately 4,000 workshops at military installations in the United States and overseas.

The VETS employment workshop is a comprehensive two and one-half day session where participants learn about job searches, career decision-making, current occupational and labor market conditions, resume and cover letter preparation, and interviewing techniques. Participants are also provided an evaluation of their employability relative to the job market and receive information on the most current veterans' benefits. Components of an employment workshop include: career self-assessment; résumé development; job search and interview techniques; U.S. labor market information; civilian workplace requirements; and documentation of military skills.

Overseas Employment Workshops

Beginning in 2003, VETS began facilitating employment workshops at overseas military installations where, by previous interagency agreement, DOD had provided employment workshops since the program's inception. VETS currently offers employment workshops at 49 sites in Germany, the United Kingdom, Guam, Japan, Okinawa, Korea, and Italy. In FY 2004, 5,939 separating service personnel overseas were trained in 286 separate classes. VETS will continue to expand to additional overseas sites in FY 2005 and beyond, reaching Bahrain, Turkey, Spain, Portugal, Belgium and the Netherlands.

Reserve and National Guard (RC) Employment Workshop

Our global military commitments have necessitated a mobilization of Guard and Reserve members that is unprecedented in modern times. The longer mobilization periods result in these servicemembers now being for veterans' benefits, including the Transition Assistance Program (TAP). The employment workshop is available for most servicemembers at one of the 215 transition offices located on military installations in the

United States. However, Reserve and Guard members usually transition at fewer locations, referred to as demobilization sites. Typically the demobilization process is rapid, taking a matter of days once the servicemembers arrive back in the United States from overseas. For example, the Army standard is to demobilize units in 5 days, and it is not uncommon for military installations to get two or fewer days advance notice before returning troops arrive. During demobilization, servicemembers may be expected to participate in as many as 18 separate briefings or activities such as physical examinations at various locations. This leaves little or no time for a full 2 ½ day employment workshop. Nevertheless, we have found that many Guard and Reserve servicemembers would benefit from such transition assistance. Our State Directors are working directly with the reserve and guard commanders to make special arrangements following demobilization in order to present a modified TAP employment workshop to Guard and Reserve servicemembers.

Based on requests from Reserve Component Commanders and through coordination with our VETS' state directors, TAP employment workshops in some form have been conducted in six states. Classes ranged in length from one-half day sessions in Maryland to three-day sessions in Arkansas. We began collecting data in 2003 and from that date through May of 2005, 1,101 members of the reserve components have attended 24 employment workshops.

Specifically, our State Directors have undertaken two projects. The first is that they have contacted each state Adjutant General to offer outreach and assistance to returning members of the Guard and Reserves during the demobilization process. Secondly, we are working with the Guard and Reserve on three pilots to provide TAP employment workshops. In Oregon, 650 Army Guard members recently demobilized en masse. In preparation for this demobilization, NVTI provided facilitation training on employment workshops for 10 VETS/ State Workforce Agencies (SWA) employees and 10 Guard facilitators.

In Michigan, we are planning four-day workshops to include after-hours employment assistance information. This will integrate separating active servicemembers, Guard/Reservist and case management clients in an employment workshop-like program.

Minnesota is continuing to develop its program for Guard and reserve members in concert with VA. In the last two weeks, they have participated in two Reintegration briefings for Guard members. Unlike a standard TAP program, which provides a very good overview of the employment picture, this program is modified based on the specific needs of each unit. As an example, a returning combat unit may need additional information on Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and available medical benefits and they will concentrate more in this area (using our partners in the VA as well). Another unit that is mainly transportation may need more emphasis in another area, so they will concentrate on their needs. This program remains fluid in order to provide each unit with what they, and their commanders, feel they need most. This also includes input and participation from the spouses so they are certain to cover their issues/needs. All of these

presentations still include available services of VETS, DVOP/LVER, VR&E, USERRA briefings and job-search workshops.

Transition Assistance Program Steering Committee

TAP is coordinated among the various departments of Federal Government through a Steering Committee. Members of the Steering Committee represent the national leadership for military transition from the Departments of Labor, Defense, Veterans Affairs and Homeland Security. DOL convenes and chairs the meetings.

Meeting quarterly, the committee's purpose is to bring together the program leadership to discuss mutual concerns, accomplishments and future program issues. The results of these meetings are then shared with field program personnel from all agencies to ensure awareness of current issues and coordinated direction to address them.

Changes Directed by Congress

Mr. Chairman, Congress has directed DOL to add two items to its TAP employment workshop:

- a homelessness prevention module; and
- training on how to access the workforce investment system's One-Stop Career Centers.

Homelessness

Recognizing that there are data showing a risk of homelessness among veterans, and in response to a Congressional mandate to address the issue, VETS developed a module on homelessness. This module will be added to the TAP employment workshop facilitators' website at the NVTI when interagency coordination with DOD and VA has been completed.

Accessing the Workforce Investment System's One-Stop Career Centers

To promote better ties between the employment workshop program and One-Stop Career Centers, DOD and DOL are developing a supplemental guide to the employment workshop manual. This guide will provide detailed information about One-Stop Career Center services and how to access them.

In addition, the Departments are working on a compilation of successful partnering strategies now employed by employment workshop staff and One-Stop Career Centers in the field. This guide to best practices will be distributed to employment workshop offices and the workforce investment system nationwide.

The goal of these efforts is to educate program staff about the benefits and commitments involved in local partnerships and encourage them to leverage each other's resources. Direct business connections to employment workshops are constrained by the mandated

curriculum and limited time. However, we believe promoting ties between the employment workshop offices and One-Stop Career Centers in general will help separating service personnel connect with businesses, and we are working within DOL to make this connection more meaningful.

To further enhance awareness of these resources and initiatives, the Departments will work with “HireVets First,” (www.HireVetsFirst.gov), a Federal campaign to maximize the benefits of business partnerships on behalf of transitioning military personnel.

The impact of these changes to the existing employment workshop program as well as the education and encouragement of local partnerships between employment workshops and the workforce investment system will ensure that transitioning military personnel are aware of and utilize all of the resources available to them as they search for employment and training opportunities. Spouses will also be informed of the services available through the One-Stop Career Centers.

Small Business

Additionally, Executive Order 13360 requires that TAP and the Disability Transition Assistance Program educate separating servicemembers about the potential entrepreneurial opportunities available to service-disabled veteran businesses. Accordingly, a module on small business opportunities is under development. This information will also be provided to TAP facilitators by means of the NVTI facilitator’s website in the very near future.

GAO Review

The Government Accountability Office’s review of employment workshop (*Enhanced Services Could Improve Transition Assistance for Reserves and National Guard* GAO-05-544) contained a recommendation that DOL participate in a DOD-led effort to determine what demobilizing Reserve and National Guard members need for a smooth transition back into the workforce. We fully support that recommendation, and are working through the TAP Steering Committee with DOD to fulfill this recommendation. This recommendation formalizes the work that DOL had initiated with each state Adjutant General.

Additional Programs

Mr. Chairman, I would like to mention two additional programs that supplement our employment workshop in providing assistance to transitioning servicemembers: 1) “REALifelines” and 2) a DOD/DOL partnership created by a Memorandum of Understanding between DOD and DOL to focus on recruitment and retention of military personnel and re-entry of transitioning military personnel into the 21st century workforce.

REALifelines

The Recovery and Employment Assistance Lifelines (REALifelines) is a new program initiated by Secretary of Labor Elaine L. Chao last October at Walter Reed Army

Medical Center. This program complements the employment workshop by playing an important role in the transition of wounded and injured servicemembers, including Guard and Reserve members, who are preparing for civilian life.

The REALifelines initiative provides a seamless, personalized network to ensure that seriously wounded and injured servicemembers are provided opportunities for rewarding careers in the public and private sector.

Currently VETS representatives are stationed at the recently-established DOD Military Severely Injured Joint Operations Support Center, Walter Reed Army Medical Center, and Bethesda National Naval Medical Center, and will soon be placed at additional Military Treatment Facilities.

Partnership with DOD

The second program to complement the employment workshop is an effort with DOD to study and undertake activities of mutual interest that may expand recruitment, retention and re-entry. These activities include: job search services, training, placement, licensing and certification, and other services for military personnel, veterans, and their families. An MOU was signed on July 11, 2003 by the Secretary of Labor and the Secretary of Defense. A DOD/DOL MOU Policy Steering Committee and associated working group have been established to focus on collaborative efforts that can be undertaken to fulfill the goals of the MOU.

One of the major areas being addressed by DOD and DOL is the re-entry of members of the military into the 21st century workforce after their service. A primary focus has been reviewing the registered apprenticeship programs and licensing and certification requirements of the private sector. The accessibility of certification opportunities to servicemembers while in the military may assist those servicemembers with rapid and successful entry into civilian occupations following military service. Section 599 of the Defense Reauthorization Act for FY 2005 required DOD and DOL to study how military training relates to civilian credentialing requirements. The study is in its final draft and is currently under review by senior officials of both Departments.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my testimony. I am pleased to respond to any questions.