

RAYMOND M. JEFFERSON, ASSISTANT SECRETARY FOR VETERANS?
EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR

TESTIMONY OF
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ASSISTANT SECRETARY FOR
VETERANS' EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR
BEFORE THE
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AFFAIRS
UNITED STATES SENATE
FIELD HEARING OAHU, HAWAII
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Chairman Akaka, Ranking Member Burr and distinguished members of the Committee:

Aloha! Thank you for inviting us to appear before you today to discuss the employment assistance and outreach services provided to the National Guard and Reserve in Hawaii.

The mission of the Veterans' Employment and Training Service (VETS) is to provide Veterans and transitioning Service Members with the resources and services to succeed in the workforce by maximizing their employment opportunities, protecting their employment rights, and meeting labor market demands with qualified veterans.

We accomplish our mission through three distinct functions: (1) conducting employment and training programs; (2) enforcing relevant federal laws and regulations; and (3) providing transition assistance services.

VETS administers two programs through formula grants to States that directly meet the goals of its mission: (1) the Disabled Veteran Outreach Program (DVOP) and (2) the Local Veterans Employment Representatives (LVER) program. DVOP specialists provide outreach services, and intensive employment assistance to meet the employment needs of eligible veterans. LVER staff conduct outreach to employers and engage in advocacy efforts with hiring executives to increase employment opportunities for veterans, encourage the hiring of disabled veterans, and generally assist veterans to gain and retain employment. To meet the needs of homeless veterans and help reintegrate them into the workforce, VETS administers the Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Program. Veterans with significant barriers to employment or service-connected disabilities are also served through the Veterans' Workforce Investment Program, a focused and innovative training program that coordinates services available through other VETS administered programs. Both the homeless and workforce investment veterans programs are funded through a competitive grant process. .

Our enforcement programs investigate complaints filed by Veterans and other protected individuals under the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act (USERRA), assess complaints alleging violation of statutes requiring Veterans' Preference in federal hiring, and implement and collect information regarding Veteran employment by federal contractors.

VETS' transition assistance services are offered through the Transition Assistance Program (TAP), which provides employment workshops and direct services for separating military members, including those who are seriously wounded and injured.

Transition Assistance Program

TAP is a Department of Defense (DoD) program that partners with the Department of Labor (DOL), the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). TAP has four components:

1. Pre-separation counseling – this is mandatory for all transitioning Service Members and is provided by the military services;
2. TAP employment workshops – these are voluntary on the part of the transitioning Service Member and are administered through DOL and its state partners;
3. VA benefits briefing – these briefings are also voluntary and administered by the VA; and
4. Disabled Transition Assistance Program – also voluntary and administered by the VA.

DOL Employment Workshops

Since 1991, when DOL began providing employment workshops pursuant to section 502 of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 1991 (P.L. 101-510), over one million separating and retiring military members and their spouses have been provided employment and job training assistance and other transitional services. DOL was further directed to provide these services at overseas locations by section 309 of the Veterans Benefits Act of 2003 (P.L. 108-183).

VETS began facilitating TAP workshops at overseas military installations where, by previous interagency agreement, the DoD had provided TAP workshops since the program's inception. We are currently conducting TAP employment workshops at 55 sites overseas including Germany, Japan, Italy, Korea, Guam and the United Kingdom. Our mission is to provide TAP at every location requested by the Armed Services or National Guard and Reserve Component.

VETS provides employment search workshops based on projections made by each of the Armed Services and the DHS (for the U.S. Coast Guard). DVOPs and LVERs are the primary source for TAP Employment Workshop facilitation stateside. However, because of the distance between many state employment offices and the military installations, as well as the rapid increase in Workshop participants, contract facilitators were added in early FY 1992 and supplemented by Federal staff in FY 1996. Hawaii currently uses contract facilitators.

The Department of Defense recently set a goal for TAP Employment Workshop participation of 85 percent of separating service members. Eighty-one percent of active-duty transitioning Service Members currently attend the DOL TAP employment workshops, a 30% increase in participation since 2001. TAP employment workshop participation is expected to increase over the next year, and we plan to target workshop delivery to spouses and family members of separating service members, including those with limited English proficiency. .

In an effort to provide the same high level of instruction to all service members and spouses attending TAP Employment Workshops, VETS requires that all TAP facilitators receive training conducted by the National Veterans Training Institute (NVTI) at the University of Colorado in

Denver. NVTI provides competency based training to further develop and enhance the professional skills of veterans' employment and training service providers throughout the United States.

The current course curriculum covers two and one-half days of classroom instruction and provides information on a variety of topics including:

- Career exploration;
- Resume preparation;
- Strategies for an effective job search;
- Interview techniques;
- Reviewing job offers;
- Prevention of homelessness;
- Entrepreneurship information; and
- Other available support and assistance.

Reserve Component and National Guard Employment Workshop

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 Service Members now being eligible for Veterans' benefits, including TAP. The employment workshop is available for Guard or Reserve Members, along with all other Service Members, at one of the 215 transition offices located on military installations in the United States as well as overseas locations.

However, Reserve and National 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 Service Members arrive back in the United States from overseas. During demobilization, Service Members may be expected to participate in many separate briefings and activities. This leaves little or no time for a full two and one-half day employment workshop. Nevertheless, we have found that many National Guard and Reserve Service Members would benefit from such transition assistance. Our State Directors have coordinated with each State Adjutant General and they work directly with the individual Reserve and National Guard commanders to make special arrangements following demobilization in order to present a modified TAP employment workshop to Guard and Reserve Service Members. Based on requests from Reserve Component Commanders or Adjutant Generals and through coordination with our VETS' state directors and local VA staff, VETS has offered to tailor the workshops to the identified needs of the transitioning Reserve and National Guard members.

In fact, since 2001 VETS has provided transition services to over 146,000 National Guard and Reservists. These transition services range in size and content from mobilization and demobilization briefings to the full scale TAP employment workshops. They are provided in 43 states and the District of Columbia. In some states, National Guardsmen and Reservists have been allowed to attend the regular TAP for Active Component Service Members. The services provided to the National Guard and Reserve are tailored to the needs and requests by the DoD.

To meet the transition needs of the National Guard and Reserves, in FY 2007, DOL directed the NVTI to develop a modular version of the TAP employment workshop. The traditional TAP

employment workshop was turned into a 15-module menu that Reserve and National Guard commanders may choose from in providing these services to their unit members. This training includes a mandatory module that covers local labor market information, USERRA, the One-Stop Career Center system, small business opportunities, and the risks of homelessness. The other 14 modules consist of the current TAP employment workshop curriculum broken down into logical and connected blocks of instruction. This is not a new or separate curriculum for the Reserves and National Guard; rather it has been packaged to better serve this community.

Programs in Hawaii

I have provided information on what is being done to assist those Service Members transitioning from the military to civilian life. I would now like to focus on what we are doing in the state of Hawaii.

Hawaii averages more than 100 TAP workshops annually with nearly 4,000 transitioning Service Members in attendance. There are five TAP sites, all on the island of Oahu, Honolulu County, encompassing all military service branches including the U.S. Coast Guard.

A DVOP or LVER representative attends each workshop session to discuss their respective roles and responsibilities in providing job search assistance. Since most transitioning Service Members return to the mainland, this information is provided to help the Service Member contact the DVOP and LVER representative in their respective states to assist them directly with their re-integration into the local job market in their areas.

Our VETS Director in Hawaii meets quarterly with all TAP site managers, a VA representative, and a representative from the State of Hawaii National Guard to discuss the TAP program and how it can be improved. Guest speakers have included the garrison commander at Schofield Barracks and the U. S. Attorney for Hawaii.

National Guard and Reserve personnel in Hawaii are informed that they can attend TAP for up to 180 days after completion of their active duty commitment. LVER and DVOP staff assigned to the counties of Honolulu, Maui, Kauai, and Hawaii have all been formally trained and can facilitate TAP employment workshops either individually or on a unit basis.

Periodic USERRA briefings are conducted upon request and through outreach by VETS staff. State of Hawaii Army and Air National Guard units as well as Army Reserve have received briefings and USERRA outreach within the last six months. National Guard units on the neighboring islands of Hawaii (Big Island) and Maui have received briefings within the last 45 days. Briefings will be conducted in conjunction with the Operation Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program for the return of the State of Hawaii Army National Guard's 29th Brigade. These welcome home activities are planned for Oahu on September 20, 2009, followed by September 26, 2009 in the counties of Hawaii and Kona, and October 3 and 4, 2009 for Maui and Kauai counties.

Closing

In closing, I again thank you for allowing me to address you today on this very important issue. I would be pleased to respond to any questions you may have. Mahalo.