

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

TESTIMONY OF  
RAYMOND M. JEFFERSON  
ASSISTANT SECRETARY FOR  
VETERANS' EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING  
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR  
BEFORE THE  
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AFFAIRS  
UNITED STATES SENATE  
FIELD HEARING ANCHORAGE AND FAIRBANKS, ALASKA

February 16-17, 2010

Senator Begich and distinguished members, thank you for inviting me to appear before you today to discuss the employment assistance and outreach services provided to the Veterans in Alaska.

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' PROGRAMS

VETS administers a formula grant program to States that directly meets the goals of its mission. The Jobs for Veterans State Grants (JVSG) program funds two occupations, the Disabled Veterans Outreach Program specialist (DVOP) and the Local Veterans Employment Representatives (LVER). DVOP specialists provide outreach services, and intensive employment assistance to meet the employment needs of eligible Veterans. LVER staff conducts outreach to employers and engages in advocacy efforts with hiring executives to increase employment opportunities for Veterans, encourages the hiring of disabled Veterans, and generally assists Veterans to gain and retain employment. In Alaska, VETS funds six LVERs and seven DVOPs. Of these 13 individuals, eight are accessible in Anchorage and Fairbanks.

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Both the homeless and workforce investment Veterans programs are funded through a competitive grant process. This year, for the first time ever, VETS will issue a Solicitation for Grant Applications (SGA) for homeless women Veterans. We also will soon issue an SGA to reinstitute the Incarcerated Veterans Transition Program (IVTP) to assist Veterans who will be transitioning back to society from incarceration. Additionally, we are in the process of developing an SGA for both HVRP and VWIP. Service providers for these deserving populations in Alaska are encouraged to apply for these competitive grants.

## NATIVE AMERICAN VETERANS

To meet the needs of Native American Veterans, especially those on tribal lands, Secretary Solis hosted – and VETS participated in – a Summit of Tribal Leaders at the Department of Labor late last year. We discussed the challenges facing Native American Veterans and potential solutions. This event began the process of better serving this community. VETS will also participate in a number of major Native American outreach events in 2010. Furthermore, we are conducting a study on the employment needs of Native American Veterans living on tribal lands to identify best practices for serving this population.

## USERRA

Our compliance programs investigate an average of five or six complaints per year filed by Veterans and other protected individuals in Alaska under the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act (USERRA). We also assess complaints alleging violations of statutes requiring Veterans' Preference in federal hiring, and implement and collect information regarding Veteran employment by federal contractors.

One of our commitments to Veterans is to increase awareness of USERRA, thereby increasing our ability to protect vulnerable populations. To improve USERRA's impact, VETS recently completed a Lean-Six-Sigma quality enhancement and process efficiency assessment of USERRA, with a view toward streamlining, improving quality, and increasing responsiveness to our Veteran clients. The goals of the assessment were to: 1) identify ways of ensuring a consistent, high standard of investigations; and 2) determine other steps to improve the program and its outcomes. We have begun work on identifying an electronic case management system to eliminate the paper-centric aspect of investigations and improve efficiency. Access to this system will be shared with our Federal enforcement partners. We are also working closely with the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) to ensure that the Federal government serves as a role model for honoring USERRA.

## TRANSITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

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.

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.

## TAP 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), we have provided employment and job training assistance and other transitional services to more than one million separating and retiring military members and their spouses. 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 Components.

VETS provides employment search workshops based on projections made by each of the Armed Services and 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. Alaska currently does not use contract facilitators.

DoD 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 percent 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.

VETS is committed to ensuring a consistently high level of instruction, service and quality for all Service Members and spouses attending TAP Employment Workshops. Therefore, 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.

An Alaska DVOP or LVER representative attends each TAP workshop session here to discuss their respective roles and responsibilities in providing job search assistance. Since most transitioning Service Members return to some other state, 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.

Alaska averages more than 60 TAP employment workshops annually with approximately 1,500 transitioning Service Members in attendance. This includes about one work shop per quarter with the Coast Guard. There are four major TAP sites, encompassing all military service branches plus the U.S. Coast Guard with an additional four sites that vary in size and frequency according to need.

National Guard and Reserve personnel in Alaska are informed that they can attend TAP for up to 180 days after they complete their active duty commitment. An individual DVOP or LVER can facilitate a TAP employment workshop, or they may do so as a unit.

The Alaska DVET (Director of Veterans' Employment and Training) meets annually with the DVOPs and LVERs who facilitate the TAP employment workshops to discuss transitioning Service Member's feedback and curriculum updates based on the input provided by these TAP recipients.

In addition to presently reviewing TAP's performance and impact, we are also working to modernize the workshop, increase its effectiveness and improve participants' employment outcomes. Specifically, we want the content to be more economically relevant, immediately applicable, and engaging for participants. Thus far, we've solicited input from external content experts and service providers to help us determine what should be included in a best-practice employment transition program. We are working in close cooperation with our partners at DoD, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) in this endeavor.

Late last year, our three agencies engaged in a weeklong working group to develop a joint, multi-year, strategic plan for TAP. We're all committed to ensuring the plan is action-oriented and will have a direct, positive impact on our transitioning Service Members. The plan will involve an increased emphasis on the employment needs of the Reserve components and Service Members who have been wounded or injured, or who are ill.

## 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 Guard and Reserve members 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 made by 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 from which Reserve and National Guard commanders may select relevant services for their unit members. This modular TAP menu 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.

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