

Chairman Daniel K. Akaka

OPENING STATEMENT

Senator Daniel K. Akaka

Chairman

Committee on Veterans' Affairs

United States Senate

Oversight Hearing on DoL/DoD/VA Collaboration and Cooperation  
to Meet the Employment Needs of Returning Servicemembers

June 13, 2007

Aloha and welcome to another one of the Committee's seamless transition hearings. This morning we will be focusing on the employment issues facing veterans, members of the guard and reserve, and their families as they seek to move from a military to a civilian workforce.

Making these transitions is never easy, but for younger veterans it can be particularly difficult. For members of the National Guard and Reserves, the return to a job they previously held may be challenging for a variety of reasons. For family members, the uncertainty of multiple and extended deployments poses different obstacles. Finally, the obstacles facing those who are disabled while on duty can sometimes seem overwhelming and, perhaps even, insurmountable. The needs of these individuals deserve our utmost attention and resources.

Despite these problems and challenges, veterans make good employees. They know how to work and they bring with them a wealth of expertise and experience. I believe the employment data supports my belief since rates of unemployment for veterans generally are actually lower than their non-veteran counterparts. However, the rate of unemployment for younger veterans tends to be higher than their non-veteran peers. This deserves our closer examination.

We will be focusing on a variety of issues this morning from a wide range of witnesses. Our starting point will be the recommendations of the Task Force Report to the President on the Returning Global War on Terror Heroes. But, and I want to stress this, it will not STOP there. Indeed, this is something that deeply concerns me -- that the Task Force only looked at what could be done within the constraints of current law and did not make any review or recommendations as to what might be needed in terms of improvements or additions to existing statutes. This is a major shortcoming in my opinion with regard to the entire report -- not just the employment-related portion.

This morning we will start with representatives of the three cabinet agencies most involved in the employment arena -- the Departments of Labor, Veterans Affairs and Defense. Each has a distinctively different role to play, but it is vitally important that they work together in a coordinated effort to address these employment needs. From turning a military MOS into a civilian resume, to making sure that the statutory rights of individuals to return to their civilian jobs is upheld, their efforts must result in a smooth, simple, and effective process.

We will also be hearing from two groups within the private sector seeking somewhat different ways to match veterans with appropriate jobs and to maximize their chances of getting the right job in the shortest amount of time. Finally, we will have the opportunity to hear first hand the experiences of a seriously service-connected disabled veteran, the spouse of an individual deployed in a war zone, and an employer who aggressively recruits individuals with prior service.

So again, welcome and I look forward to hearing from each of you this morning.