

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
U.S. SENATE

May 19, 2010

Chairman Akaka, Ranking Member Burr, and members of the Committee:

I am pleased to appear before you today to discuss legislation pending in this Committee.

The Veterans' Employment and Training Service (VETS) proudly serves Veterans and transitioning Service Members by providing resources and expertise to assist and prepare them to obtain meaningful careers, maximize their employment opportunities and protect their employment rights.

I am deeply humbled to have the privilege of serving our Nation as the Assistant Secretary for Veterans' Employment and Training. Secretary Solis has been an incredible source of guidance and support, and has made Veterans and VETS one of her top priorities. Our programs are an integral part of Secretary Solis's vision of "Good Jobs for Everyone," and her commitment to help Veterans and their families get into the middle class and maintain stability.

First let me describe what the Veterans' Employment and Training Service at the Department of Labor does. We have four main programs that we are working to improve:

- The Jobs for Veterans State Grants;
- The Transition Assistance Program Employment Workshops;
- The Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Program ; and
- The Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act.

Your letter of invitation indicates you are seeking input on a significant number of bills at this hearing and you want me to specifically provide my views on S. 3234, the proposed "Veteran Employment Assistance Act of 2010. I am also providing comments regarding S. 3314, which would carry out a program of outreach for Veterans' who reside in Appalachia. Because the other bills are under the purview of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), I defer to the VA and will restrict my comments to S. 3234 and S. 3314.

S. 3234

The Veteran Employment Assistance Act of 2010, S. 3234, is intended to "improve employment, training, and placement services furnished to Veterans, especially those serving in Operation

Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom, and for other purposes”. The Department of Labor supports the goals of the Veteran Employment Assistance Act of 2010.

This comprehensive legislation will address the unique needs of our Veterans who have been struggling to find work and to keep their jobs. The legislation fills a critical need. This bill will help our Veterans gain the additional skills they need to participate in today’s modern economy. It will provide them the opportunity to start their own businesses, if they choose to. And, it encourages employers at all levels to recognize that those who’ve given much in the service of their country have much to offer to a prospective employer.

Much in S. 3234 if enacted would significantly help the Veteran community. I would like to highlight some of the key provisions of this bill.

The Veterans Business Center Program established in Section 3 of the bill would provide entrepreneurial training and counseling to Veterans. As we all know, small business is the main driver of job creation in our country. Veterans make ideal entrepreneurs, they have the discipline, maturity and life experiences to take on the tremendous challenges that small business ownership entails. Targeting entrepreneurship programs to this community makes sense. If enacted and fully funded, we would be pleased to work with SBA on this initiative.

Section 5 requires all new state employees, Disabled Veterans Outreach Program specialists (DVOP) and Local Veterans Employment Representatives (LVER) to be trained by the National Veterans’ Training Institute (NVTI) within a one year period from the date of hire. Current law requires it be done in three years. Those employed before enactment of S. 3234 would have to be trained within one year following enactment unless they have already been trained. We believe that this training needs to be provided as soon as practicable. However, these individuals are not always hired at the same time and, depending on the number of new hires, there may not be sufficient new hires to fill a class.

Section 6 adds a new section 4216 to Chapter 42 of title 38 United States Code, that requires the Assistant Secretary for Veterans’ Employment and Training (ASVET) provide a monthly training subsistence allowance to a Veteran who is enrolled in a full time employment and training program. Covered Veterans would include those who do not qualify for VA’s educational and training assistance under Title 38, have been unemployed for four consecutive months, and can complete the training program.

The Department notes this section establishes an entitlement to this assistance, which is a concern in light of the long-term financial challenges the Nation faces. The assistance would be available without regard to the financial need of the Veteran or the need for training to enhance his or her employment prospects.

The Department also notes that Veterans receive priority of service within the wide array of training programs currently available through the DOL-funded One-Stop Career Center system. Moreover, Pell Grants and other financial assistance may also be available for unemployed veterans, including eligibility for unemployment insurance benefits, as well.

In the event this legislation is enacted and appropriations are provided, the Department would need to address several issues prior to its implementation, including:

- Developing a system of certification and payment;
- Determining options to include employment specialists in One-Stop Career Centers certifying Veterans; and
- Develop a payment system, which would include collaborating with the Department of Defense to ascertain payment amounts under section 403 of title 37, United States Code.

The Department believes the training allowance program's highest priority should be those eligible Veterans who, without this benefit, would be unable to obtain the training necessary to find a good job. It should be reserved for those who truly need it or have significant barriers to employment.

Section 9 establishes within the VA a Center of Excellence where the ASVET would have a consultative role to establish a system of affording academic credit for military experience and training under certain circumstances. This recognition of military experience and training should be useful in preparing a resume and establishing capabilities with prospective employers. Additionally, it may also be helpful if the Service Member is applying to a college or vocational institution. These institutions want information on the Service Member's military training and experience, as well as how this might relate to the civilian world.

Current law codified at 38 USC §4212(d) requires certain federal contractors to report data on their workforce and on certain Veterans in their employ. This is accomplished by filing a VETS 100A Report with DOL. Section 10 of this bill would require DOL to publish the VETS 100A Reports on the Internet. DOL supports this provision. However, the Committee should recognize that some contractors might believe that certain reported data, in particular data on the total number of new hires, should not be made available to their competitors.

There are many other components to S. 3234 and we would like to work with the Committee to ensure that this legislation effectively achieves its intended goals.

S. 3314

S. 3314 would require the Secretary of Veterans Affairs and the Appalachian Regional Commission to carry out a program of outreach for Veterans who reside in Appalachia. While the Department of Labor is not tasked with anything in S. 3314, we would like to provide information on our rural initiative.

VETS is developing an innovative national initiative that will allow us to greatly improve outreach to rural Veterans and provide them access to better programs, services and information, as well as connection to a wide variety of services. VETS understands that successful employment is inextricably linked to other quality-of-life issues, so this initiative will also offer access to these other important services. VETS has reached out to the Corporation for National and Community Service and Service Nation to create a partnership that will serve as the basis for this initiative. Our goal is to begin a demonstration pilot in 2010 that will provide lessons on how VETS can create a scalable model for national roll-out.

The core service envisioned is for DOL VETS to work with existing non-government networks and state government organizations to launch a pilot program to reach Veterans. The outreach team may offer in-person, internet, and/or phone based intake for self -registration to schedule a volunteer visit. The volunteer team will contact the Veterans, check on how their careers are going, and if needed, making them aware of additional support available from DOL, and potentially other government organizations.

VETS intends to leverage capacity from Veteran Service Organizations and state and local based volunteer organizations to provide the outreach services. These volunteers will be directed and closely managed by the Federal government through our state Director of Veterans' Employment and Training (DVET) and our federal partners.

We believe this initiative complements the outreach efforts envisioned in S. 3314.

Conclusion

Every day, we are reminded of the tremendous sacrifices made by our servicemen and women, and by their families. One way that we can honor those sacrifices is by providing them with the best possible services and programs our nation has to offer. Secretary Solis and I believe strongly that Veterans deserve the chance to find good jobs.

I again thank this Committee for your commitment to our nation's Veterans and for the opportunity to testify before you. I would be happy to respond to any questions.