

JOHN MCWILLIAM, DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY, VETERANS' EMPLOYMENT
AND TRAINING SERVICE, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR

TESTIMONY OF
JOHN MCWILLIAM
DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY
VETERANS' EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING SERVICE
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR

BEFORE THE

COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AFFAIRS
U.S. SENATE

JUNE 8, 2011

Chairman Murray, Ranking Member Burr, and distinguished Members of the Committee, I am pleased to appear before you today to discuss legislation pending in this Committee aimed at helping our returning Service Members transition back to civilian life.

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.

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 unwavering commitment to help Veterans and their families get into the middle class and maintain stability. We strive to achieve this vision through four main programs:

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

Your letter of invitation seeks input on a significant number of bills at this hearing, and you ask VETS to specifically provide input on S. 951, the "Hiring Heroes Act of 2011". We have done so in subsequent portions of this testimony, in addition to providing comments on the proposed "Honoring All Veterans Act of 2011", which would require the Department of Labor (DOL), through the Assistant Secretary of the Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP), to initiate a program providing technical assistance to employers of Veterans who have a traumatic brain injury or post-traumatic stress disorder.

As the remaining pieces of proposed legislation being addressed at this hearing fall under the purview of other departments, VETS defers to those departments and I will restrict my testimony

to the appropriate sections of S. 951, and the “Honoring All Veterans Act of 2011” that have a direct impact on DOL and the Veterans’ Employment and Training Service.

In addition to the invitation for today’s hearing, VETS has received a follow-up request to comment on Senator Casey’s proposed “Veteran Transition Assistance Program Audit Act of 2011”. Due to time constraints, VETS was unable to conduct a thorough review in time for today’s hearing, but we look forward to providing our comments for the record and continuing to work with Senator Casey and this entire Committee to ensure that our Service Members receive the best assistance possible as they transition back to civilian life.

S.951: “Hiring Heroes Act of 2011”

Section 6: This section would require the mandatory participation of members of the Armed Forces in the Transition Assistance Program (TAP). We assume that this mandatory participation would include participation in all segments of the TAP, to include the Department’s Employment Workshop.

We believe that all transitioning Service Members who plan to enter civilian employment would benefit from attending the Employment Workshop, but defer to the Department of Defense (DoD) as to whether this program should be mandatory for all transitioning Service Members.

Section 7: This section would require DOL to follow-up on the employment status of members of the Armed Forces who recently participated in TAP. In particular, it would require that DOL contact each participating Veteran no later than six months after their completion of the program (TAP), and every three months thereafter for the rest of the year in order to ascertain the Veteran’s employment status.

DOL supports the concept of the TAP follow-up, but believes that the metrics of our redesigned Employment Workshop makes this requirement unnecessary. As you may recall, we recently testified on our current initiative to redesign and transform the Employment Workshop. As part of this initiative, a comprehensive follow-up program will be implemented to track participants’ success entering the civilian workforce. DOL believes that this program may provide the information that the Committee desires, and we would like to work with the Committee to provide additional information on this initiative.

Section 8: This section would: 1) establish a competitive grant program for nonprofit organizations that provide mentoring and training to Veterans; 2) require DOL and nonprofit organizations to collaborate in order to facilitate the placement of Veterans in jobs that lead to economic self-sufficiency; 3) require DOL to conduct an assessment of grant performance no later than 18 months after enactment; and 4) authorize appropriations of \$4.5 million for Fiscal Years 2012 and 2013.

DOL believes that this section is unnecessary. We note that this section seems to closely follow the parameters of the existing Veterans’ Workforce Investment Program (VWIP) established under section 168 of the Workforce Investment Act of 1998, and it is unclear whether the intent of this section differs from the intent of the VWIP. Therefore, we would like to work with the Committee to discuss the potential overlap between this section and the VWIP.

Section 9: Among other things, this section would require DOL, DoD, and the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to conduct a joint study to identify any equivalences between the skills developed by members of the Armed Forces through various military occupational specialties (MOS) and the qualifications required for various positions of civilian employment in the private sector.

Section 9 is unnecessary as it duplicates existing processes that provide the capability to crosswalk Service member skills to equivalent civilian occupations. We note that there are several tools that partially meet the need for skill equivalencies for separating Service Members, such as the Department's Occupational Information Network (O*NET) and DoD's Credentialing Opportunities On-Line (COOL). In addition, the TAP redesign will include practical exercises to assist participants in translating their skills, abilities, experience, and training on to a resume, as well as creating an Individual Transition Plan. We would like to work with the Committee to explore ways to strengthen these resources and improve the transition of Veterans into civilian employment.

Section 11: This section would require the Department to conduct outreach to recently-separated Veterans in receipt of unemployment compensation for longer than 105 days in order to provide employment assistance.

The Department supports this section, but requests that the time period be changed from 105 days to 15 weeks to coincide with the end of a benefit week for the purposes of Unemployment Compensation.

Section 13: This section would reauthorize and modify the demonstration program for the credentialing and licensure of Veterans contained in 38 U.S.C. 4114.

DOL supports the concept of this section and believes that the credentialing and licensing of Veterans will be helpful in transitioning Service Members into the civilian sector, but there continue to be serious implementation issues with this provision. In particular, licensure and credentialing is mostly a function of the individual States, and to facilitate credentialing and licensure for Veterans, the demonstration project would require DoD to align its military training and assessments to more closely match States' civilian licensing requirements. We also note that credentialing and licensure requirements differ from State to State. We would like to work with the Committee to help resolve these issues so that the credentialing and licensure of Veterans can be more successfully implemented.

Draft Bill: "Honoring All Veterans Act of 2011"

The stated purpose of this bill is to: "improve education, employment, independent living services, and health care for veterans, to improve assistance for homeless veterans, and to improve the administration of the Department of Veterans Affairs, and for other purposes." Accordingly, we defer to VA and DoD for most of the sections of the bill.

Section 105: This section would require the Secretary of Labor, through the Assistant Secretary for the Office of Disability Employment Policy, to initiate a program to provide technical assistance to prospective employers, employers of covered Veterans and entities in the workforce

system to assist Veterans who have traumatic brain injury or post-traumatic stress disorder in the area of employment.

DOL believes that this section is unnecessary. ODEP, in cooperation with VETS, created the America's Heroes at Work (AHAW) program in 2008 to fulfill this need. We are currently in the process of transitioning the leadership and funding for this program to our office, and propose to work with the Committee to determine if AHAW needs further enhancements.

Conclusion

We are reminded everyday of the tremendous sacrifices made by our Veterans, Service Members and their families. Secretary Solis and the Veterans' Employment and Training Service believe that America must honor those sacrifices by providing the nation's bravest with the best possible programs and services that we have to offer. We look forward to continuing our work with this Committee to do just that.

I again thank this Committee for your commitment to our nation's Veterans and for the opportunity to testify before you. We would be happy to work with your staffs to provide technical assistance on any of these or future bills, and I would be happy to respond to any questions.