

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

STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE RAYMOND JEFFERSON  
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VETERANS' EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING  
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BEFORE THE

COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AFFAIRS

UNITED STATES SENATE

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Chairman Akaka, Ranking Member Burr, and Distinguished Members of the Committee on Veterans Affairs:

Thank you for your service to the Nation, for your service to the Veterans community, and for the opportunity to testify before you today about the actions we're taking at the Department of Labor's Veterans' Employment and Training Service (VETS) to meet our Veterans' and transitioning Service Members' employment needs.

Today marks my 100th day of serving as your Assistant Secretary of Labor for Veterans' Employment and Training. The past few months have been busy ones spent learning about the agency, determining how to improve our current programs, creating necessary new initiatives and developing partnerships with our stakeholders.

I remain deeply humbled, honored and energized by having the privilege to serve our Nation as President Obama's appointee for this role. Secretary Solis has been an incredible source of guidance, wisdom and support, and has made Veterans and VETS one of her top priorities.

During the past 100 days, you and your professional staff have been a tremendous source of ideas, wisdom and insights. Thank you.

As we're all aware, since the onset of military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, over 1 million members of the active duty military have served in these two theaters. Additionally, since September 11, 2001, the Department of Defense (DoD) reports that over 700,000 National Guard and Reserve mobilizations have occurred – the largest deployment of the National Guard in the past half century.

Every day, we are reminded of the tremendous sacrifices made by our servicemen and women, and by their families. Our Veterans should be remembered, honored and appreciated not just on Veterans' Day, but every day. One way that we do that is by providing them with the best possible services and programs our Nation has to offer. Accomplishing this will require seamless collaboration, enhanced communication, and sustained, purposeful action. It's going to take all

of us working together, sharing best-practices and developing innovative solutions to challenging problems while constrained by limited resources.

I am honored to be here today to provide an update on improvements to current programs and new initiatives, and to answer your questions.

## Background on VETS

The mission of 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 employment and training programs through formula grants to States that directly meet the goals of its mission: (1) the Disabled Veterans' 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.

VETS also administers two competitive grant programs. To meet the needs of homeless Veterans and help reintegrate them into the workforce, VETS administers the Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Program (HVRP). Veterans with significant barriers to employment or service-connected disabilities are also served through the Veterans Workforce Investment Program (VWIP), which offers innovative training and placement services. The program was recently refocused to emphasize training and placement in green industries. .

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 Service Members, including those who are seriously wounded and injured.

## Aspirations

Since being confirmed, I have met with Service Members and Veterans, leaders in the Federal and private sector, Veterans' Service Organizations and providers of employment and training services to solicit their views on the issues and challenges regarding Veterans' employment. I

have incorporated the combination of feedback and observations from these discussions into five aspirations that VETS will pursue during my tenure as Assistant Secretary in order to achieve our desired outcomes:

1. Providing Veterans and transitioning Service Members a voice in the workplace through serving as the National focal point for Veterans' employment and training. This will involve the following actions:
  - a. Increasing awareness, access and participation in VETS programs, and employment outcomes for those participants.
  - b. Communicating, convening and collaborating with partners and stakeholders.
  - c. Ensuring we effectively serve populations with unique needs, especially Veterans and transitioning Service Members who are women, homeless, live in rural areas, or are wounded, ill or injured.
2. Creating a path to good jobs for Veterans through increased engagement with employers, with a particular emphasis on the private sector.
3. Helping Service Members transition seamlessly into meaningful employment and careers while emphasizing success in emerging industries such as green jobs.
4. Facilitating a return to work for Veterans and protecting vulnerable populations through boosting USERRA's impact by increasing awareness of and commitment to it.
5. Investing in VETS' team members and emphasizing continuous improvement to further develop their potential and better serve our clients.

#### Improvements in Current Programs

##### TAP

During the confirmation hearing, I promised to do an external review of the Transition Assistance Program (TAP) employment workshop and determine ways to improve it. In addition to presently reviewing TAP's performance and impact, we are also working to identify and incorporate world class content 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, world-class content experts and service providers to help us determine what would be 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.

Earlier this month, 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, ill or injured.

## USERRA

VETS recently completed a Lean-Six-Sigma quality enhancement and process efficiency assessment of USERRA, with a view toward streamlining, quality improvement 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.

## The Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Program and Veterans' Homelessness

Secretaries Solis, Shinseki and Donovan share the vision of eliminating homelessness among Veterans within five years. We have strengthened our interagency collaboration at all levels to mobilize for this important and necessary goal. VETS' contribution to this effort will include the following:

- Continue reaching out to homeless Veterans and assisting them in becoming reintegrated into the workforce through the Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Program (HVRP). VETS requested a total of \$35,330,000 for the HVRP for FY 2010, an increase of \$9,000,000 (34%) above the FY 2009 funding level. VETS expects to serve 21,000 participants in FY 2010.
- Through the Incarcerated Veterans Transition Program (IVTP), VETS will continue its efforts to help incarcerated veterans and will coordinate these efforts with the Department of Veterans Affairs. Of the \$35 million requested for HVRP in FY2010, VETS plans to use \$4 million for IVTP, which will serve approximately 1,500 Veterans through 12 grants.
- Of the \$9 million increase requested for the HVRP in FY 2010, we would use up to \$5 million for a major new undertaking – to provide customized employment services for homeless women Veterans and homeless Veterans with families.
- VETS is collaborating with DOL's Women's Bureau, which has already conducted over 60 listening sessions nationwide with homeless women Veterans to identify the causes and the solutions for homelessness among women Veterans. Their findings will be made available before the end of this year.
- We recently conducted a national listening session with service providers, VA, the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), and other government agencies to begin identifying the best practices for serving homeless women Veterans and homeless Veterans with families. We will continue to identify the best practices for serving this population, and disseminate them to service providers throughout the Nation.

## Jobs for Veterans State Grants

The FY 2010 request for State Grants is \$172,394,000. This level of funding is expected to support 2,036 DVOP and LVER positions. We anticipate that this program will serve nearly 653,000 participants. We are also partnering with DOL's Employment and Training Administration to ensure Priority of Service for Veterans in all DOL-funded employment and

training programs. Furthermore, VETS is collaborating with VA's Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (VR&E) service to provide enhanced services to VR&E participants by out-stationing DVOPs at all 57 VR&E Regional Offices.

## New Initiatives

### Increased Engagement with Employers in the Public and Private Sector.

There is tremendous potential and opportunity for increasing engagement with employers to increase the hiring of Veterans and Transitioning Service Members. This will involve communicating the value proposition for hiring Veterans more effectively; making the hiring process more convenient and efficient; and developing hiring partnerships.

Tremendous strides have been made in the Federal sector. For example:

1. The Executive Order (EO) titled Employment of Veterans in the Federal Government was issued by President Barack Obama on November 9. It established the Veterans Employment Initiative for the Executive Branch to emphasize the importance of recruiting and training Veterans, increasing the employment of Veterans within the Executive Branch, and helping recently hired Veterans adjust to service in a civilian capacity. The EO also established the Veterans' Employment Council, which is chaired by Secretaries Solis and Shinseki, and Vice-Chaired by OPM Director Berry.

2. VETS is also convening a roundtable with senior representatives from the Departments of Commerce, Veterans Affairs, Small Business Administration and the Minority Business Development Agency to streamline agency services; improve communications between the agencies on key Veteran hiring issues; better promote the hiring of Veterans, and overall get aligned on the issue of Veterans' employment and determine how we can work together more synergistically and strategically.

VETS is also developing new relationships with major private sector organizations to enlist their advice and support to increase Veterans hiring.

1. On November 12, Secretary Solis and VETS participated in a major outreach initiative to promote Veterans hiring sponsored by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation. In addition to serving as a keynote with Secretary Shinseki, this event was a major first step in developing a partnership with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce in this important area of shared interest.

2. VETS is also in the process of developing relationships with other important business associations, such as the Executive Leadership Council, Young Presidents' Organization-World Presidents' Organization, Business Executives for National Security (BENS), business roundtables, economic development boards and high-tech associations.

## Pilot Programs

Within the Department of Labor, we are identifying opportunities to collaborate with other DOL agencies to pilot new approaches to accelerate transitioning Service Members into employment and training. For example, we're developing accelerated hiring initiatives with two of our sister agencies – the Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs and Job Corps – to meet their

human talent needs with transitioning Service Members and Veterans. Such pilot programs will allow us to refine and validate an operational model and identify best practices that can then be applied more broadly to other Veteran hiring initiatives.

#### Targeted Populations

There are several populations of Veterans who have been under-served and require special outreach and services.

1. Native American Veterans, especially those on tribal lands, are one such population. Secretary Solis hosted a Summit of Tribal Leaders at the Department of Labor earlier this month that VETS participated in. We discussed the challenges facing Native American Veterans and potential solutions. This event began the process of better serving this community. VETS will also be participating 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.

2. Veterans who have been wounded, ill or injured are another one of our targeted populations. In response to the employment needs of these brave heroes, VETS has two special initiatives.

a. Recovery and Employment Assistance Lifelines (REALifelines) provides one-on-one services to our wounded warriors to ease their transition into civilian employment. We have special REALifelines coordinators stationed at seven military treatment facilities on a full-time basis who provide employment services on those bases and at other nearby facilities. We also have a VETS liaison working full-time at Marine Headquarters in Quantico. This year, we established a liaison at both the Department of the Army's and the Department of the Navy's wounded warrior headquarters. These liaisons will enable seamless transition and serve as a gateway to all DOL employment and training services available to these wounded warriors.

b. America's Heroes at Work (AHAW) is a joint initiative with DOL's Office of Disability Employment Policy. AHAW is an outreach and anti-stigma campaign that educates America's employers about the simple on-the-job accommodations and steps they can take to help Veterans with post-traumatic stress and/or traumatic brain injury to excel in their careers. This program is a strong collaboration with DoD, VA and other Federal agencies and stakeholders. AHAW has developed a series of timely educational materials to help dispel the myths associated with these conditions and highlight the value these wounded warriors still bring to civilian workplaces. The program receives outstanding feedback from both employers and participants.

#### Veterans' Green Energy Jobs Initiative

In July 2009, VETS awarded 17 competitive grants totaling \$7.5 million to provide training and employment services in green energy occupations to approximately 3,000 Veterans. These grants awards were made under the recently refocused VWIP program, with the goal of providing Veterans with training and other services that lead to green energy jobs. Fields of employment include energy efficiency, renewable energy, modern electric-power development and clean vehicles. This program will help Veterans overcome employment barriers and ease their transition into this growing industry.

#### Conclusion

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Burr, and Distinguished Members of the Committee on Veterans Affairs, I reaffirm my commitment to work closely with you, the outstanding team at VETS, and our partners and stakeholders to provide Veterans and transitioning Service Members the best possible services and programs. Our success will be measured by the impact our programs have on helping our Veterans find and keep good jobs in today's modern economy.

We will continue to work tirelessly and innovatively to help our Veterans and transitioning Service Members create meaningful lives, develop rewarding careers and become productive citizens and leaders in their communities.

Thank you again for your unwavering commitment to Veterans and for the support that you've been providing to us.

I appreciate the opportunity to testify before you today and look forward to answering your questions.