

JOHN SAVAGE, STATE DIRECTOR, VETERANS' EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING
SERVICE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR

TESTIMONY OF JOHN SAVAGE STATE DIRECTOR
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BEFORE THE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS U.S. SENATE

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Senator Brown, thank you for the opportunity to testify before the Committee about the state of Veterans' employment in Ohio and the important work we are doing at the Department of Labor (DOL or Department) to decrease the unemployment rate for Veterans, National Guard members, and Reservists. With nearly 900,000 Veterans living in the state, it is critical that we provide those who need assistance with the services and support they need to find and obtain good jobs.

My name is John Savage, and as a State Director for the Department of Labor's Veterans' Employment and Training Service (VETS), I am dedicated to helping our Veterans and returning Service Members achieve that goal.

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.

President Obama is committed to ensuring that America fulfills its obligations to our returning Service Members and their families. As a result, the Administration has launched a series of initiatives to lower Veterans' unemployment and provide a seamless transition from active duty to civilian life. I would like to begin by briefly discussing some of our nationwide programs along with other initiatives that assist America's Veterans in

getting a job or returning to work, and then focus specifically on what is happening in Ohio to meet the employment related needs of our transitioning Service Members and Veterans.

Recent Initiatives:

On November 7, 2011, a few days before Veterans' Day, the President and DOL, working with other Federal partners, introduced new online resources created to help Veterans take the skills they developed while serving in the military to land civilian jobs. These tools are designed to aid their search for jobs and make it easier for them to connect with companies that are hiring.

The first of these resources is the “Gold Card Initiative”, which offers a set of intensive services to post-9/11 Veterans through DOL’s nationwide network of One-Stop Career Centers. The goal of this initiative is to jump-start the job search process through enhanced in-person services that help them reconnect to the civilian labor force.

The Administration that same day launched a new Veterans Jobs Bank, an easy-to-use tool to help Veterans find job postings from companies that are looking to hire them. It already searches nearly one million job postings and is still growing. In a few easy steps, companies can make sure the job postings on their own Web sites are part of this Veterans Jobs Bank, which can be found at www.nrd.gov.

Finally, the Department of Labor launched My Next Move for Veterans, (<http://www.mynextmove.org/vets/>), a new online resource that allows Veterans to enter their military occupation code and discover civilian occupations for which they are well qualified. The site includes information about salaries, apprenticeships, education and training programs, and links to area job openings that are also available through a Veterans reemployment portal within the Department’s CareerOneStop online tool (<http://www.careeronestop.org/ReEmployment/Veterans/>).

Jobs for Veterans State Grants Program

Beyond these recent initiatives, DOL administers several other programs to assist

Veterans, including the Jobs for Veterans State Grants (JVSG) program. Under this grant

program, the Department offers employment and training services to eligible Veterans by allocating funds to State Workforce Agencies in direct proportion to the number of Veterans seeking employment within their state.

The JVSG program funds Disabled Veterans’ Outreach Program (DVOP) specialists and 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. Last year, the JVSG provided services to nearly 589,000 Veterans, and 201,000 Veterans found jobs nationwide.

As you know, Ohio operates, through the One-Stop Career Centers, a Public Labor Exchange that is part of the national Employment Service, primarily funded by DOL’s Employment and Training Administration (ETA), to assist job seekers with their employment needs. Over the past year, 77,468 Veterans and transitioning Service Members received a wide array of employment services funded by the JVSG and the Employment Service. Of these Veterans and transitioning Service Members, 15 percent,

or 11,618, received services from a DVOP or LVER. Of those, 26 percent, or about 3,000, received intensive, case-management type services from a DVOP.¹

Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Program

To meet the needs of homeless Veterans and help reintegrate them into the workforce, VETS administers the Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Program (HVRP). Through the HVRP, the Department provides competitive grants to state and local workforce investment boards, state agencies, local public agencies, and private non-profit

1 Source:

U. S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration Form ETA 9002 A: "Services to Participants" July 1, 2010 through September 30, 2011.

U. S. Department of Labor, Veterans Employment and Training Service Form VETS-200C; "DVOP/LVER Quarterly Report", for the period ending September 30, 2011.

organizations, including faith-based organizations and neighborhood partnerships. HVRP grantees provide an array of services utilizing a holistic case management approach, which directly assists homeless Veterans and provides training services to help them to successfully transition into the labor force.

In 2010, VETS awarded 140 HVRP grants; over 16,000 homeless Veterans received services from HVRP grantees, and 9,447 (59 %) obtained employment. Here in Ohio, the HVRP has touched many lives and helped hundreds of homeless Veterans because of grants to programs such as the Ohio Valley Goodwill Industries and Volunteers of America.

Veterans' Workforce Investment Program

Through the Veterans' Workforce Investment Program (VWIP), the Department awards competitive grants focused on training, re-training, and providing employment opportunities for certain categories of Veterans: those who are recently separated; Veterans with service-connected disabilities; Veterans with significant barriers to employment; and Veterans who served on active duty during expeditions or campaigns for which specific badges were awarded. These grants help workers attain the qualifications they need in high demand industries, particularly in occupations that require a license or certification. In FY 2009, VWIP began providing training and employment services in green energy occupations. There are currently 22 grants serving 4,600 Veterans.

Transition Assistance Program

Our primary program for assisting individuals transition from the military to the civilian workforce is the Transition Assistance Program (TAP). TAP is an interagency partnership

between the Department of Labor, Department of Defense, Department of Veterans Affairs, and Department of Homeland Security. VETS provides an employment workshop that is a comprehensive two and a half day program during which participants are provided with relevant instruction and information, such as job search techniques, career decision-making processes, and current labor market conditions.

Currently, VETS uses a mix of contractors, VETS Federal staff, DVOPs, and LVERs as TAP facilitators. As you know, VETS is in the process of redesigning and transforming the TAP employment workshop. We are creating experiential, effective, and enduring solutions for a successful transition from military to civilian life and employment. The new TAP will be based on established career transition best practices.

Last year, nearly 130,000 transitioning Service Members and spouses attended TAP employment workshops at 272 locations world-wide. Ohio currently has one TAP site, located at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base in Dayton. In FY 2011, 638 transitioning Service Members and spouses attended one of the 28 TAP workshops held at Wright-Patterson.

Employer Partnerships

VETS has been taking a new approach to employer outreach that involves programs and partnerships with the private sector, including the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM). These partnerships are giving us much broader access to employers, which allows VETS to communicate the value of hiring a Veteran and to educate employers about the unique skills Veterans bring with them based on their military experience. They also allow us to help employers better understand how to access this extraordinary source of talent, and to develop a more efficient hiring process that benefits both the business community and our Veterans.

The Chamber is working to hold 100 hiring fairs exclusively for Veterans, transitioning Service Members and their spouses between March 2011 and December 2012. The U.S. Chamber and its affiliates focus primarily on securing the participation of employers, while the VETS team focuses on obtaining participation by Veterans, transitioning Service Members and their spouses.

VETS is also working with SHRM to identify opportunities for VETS state managers to meet with local SHRM chapters to connect Veterans seeking employment with companies

who are hiring. We believe this is an effective and efficient way to connect employers and Veterans.

Ohio Specific Information

The Public Labor Exchange, operated by the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS) through One-Stop Career Centers across the state, is open to everyone, but Veterans are given priority of service across all DOL-funded employment and training programs. The services and assistance offered at the One-Stop Career Centers range from employment preparation and comprehensive employment placement services to intensive services through a case management approach for Veterans with special needs.

In addition, every post-9/11 Veteran can now go to the DOL website and download a Veteran Gold Card (<http://www.dol.gov/vets/goldcard.html>). This card entitles them to six months of intensive services, including job counseling and personalized case management at one of the Labor Department's nearly 3,000 One-Stop Career Center locations across the country. Among other things, these services include career assessments, direct referrals to open jobs, interview coaching, resume assistance and training referrals. We are excited about the Gold Card because our experience shows that Veterans who receive one-on-one employment assistance have much greater success in launching civilian careers.

On-the-Job Training (OJT):

Working through Ohio's One-Stop Career Centers, ODJFS administers an On-the-Job Training (OJT) Program (funded by a Department of Labor National Emergency Grant awarded in 2010), for eligible job seekers. As part of the OJT Program, employers are reimbursed for a percentage of a trainee's regular wages during the training period, up to \$8,000, to offset their extraordinary training-related costs. Participants benefit from this program by having an opportunity to "learn and earn," which means they can develop occupational skills while earning a paycheck. As is the case with any qualified job-training program funded in whole or in part by the Department of Labor, Veterans and eligible spouses receive priority of service in the OJT program.

Apprenticeships:

Ohio has over 900 Registered Apprenticeship programs that strive to provide participants with the high-level skills they need to succeed in the 21st century workforce. Each program includes, at minimum, 2,000 hours of structured on-the-job training and 144 hours per year of related technical instructions. Only those programs that meet national standards of quality and safety are registered. Graduates of registered programs receive certificates that are recognized across the country.

Rate of Unemployment for Veterans in Ohio:

As a snapshot of the employment situation here in Ohio, the Local Area Unemployment Statistics (LAUS) reports a 10.1 percent rate in 2010 for the general population ages 16

and over. Veterans are not exempt from the problems of unemployment. According to the Current Population Survey (CPS), which is collected by the Census Bureau for the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the 2010 Ohio unemployment rate for Veterans was 11.0 percent and 9.6 percent for non-Veterans (ages 18 and over). (See table below.)

Data Element Ohio

Unemployment Rates:

Calendar Year 2010 (LAUS) General Population 10.1%

Calendar Year 2010 (CPS) - Veterans 11.0%

Calendar Year 2010 (CPS) – Non-Veterans 9.6%

Source: U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics

Ohio's unemployment rate for October 2011 was 8.4 percent (not seasonally adjusted). A breakdown of the October 2011 unemployment rates for the general population in select metropolitan areas (not seasonally adjusted) is included in the table below. Veterans' unemployment rates are not available by metropolitan area, but we know that the local labor markets in which Ohioans compete vary across the state. A person in Cleveland, for example, faces different job search challenges than a person in Mansfield.

Data Element Rate:

Metro:

Cleveland 7.1%

Columbus 7.6%

Akron 8.1%

Cincinnati 8.6%

Youngstown 8.9%

Canton 9.1%

Dayton 9.2%

Toledo 9.3%

Mansfield 10.0%

Source: U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics

Number of Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act (USERRA) Complaints Filed:

VETS is honored to serve our nation's Veterans. One of the agency's top priorities is to protect the employment and reemployment rights of individuals who are called to serve on active duty in the U.S. Armed Forces. The goal of the USERRA is to ensure that no member or prospective member of the U.S. Armed forces suffers any disadvantage or discrimination in employment

because of their affiliation with the military, and to secure the reemployment rights of members of the military after active duty service.

VETS works closely with DOD's Office of the Assistant Secretary for Reserve Affairs' Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve (ESGR) to ensure that service members are informed on their USERRA rights both before and after they are mobilized. We conduct continuous USERRA outreach to educate and inform Service Members and employers of their rights and responsibilities under the law.

The use of the National Guard and Reserves has increased significantly in recent years, with more called to active duty than at any other time since the Korean War. In addition, today's Service Members are subject to lengthier and multiple deployments. This has

increased the challenges faced by Service Members and their families and the complexity of issues arising from their service to the country. Employers also face hardships reintegrating Service Members into the labor force, particularly after lengthy and multiple absences. Below, is the breakdown of USERRA complaints filed in Ohio within the last five years:

Data Element Ohio

USERRA Complaints Filed:

Federal Fiscal Year 2007 56

Federal Fiscal Year 2008 52

Federal Fiscal Year 2009 72

Federal Fiscal Year 2010 61

Federal Fiscal Year 2011 59

Source: USDOL/VETS Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act Information

Management System

Conclusion:

Thank you again for allowing me to testify today and for your tireless support and commitment to our Nations Veterans. DOL and VETS look forward to continuing to work with you and your staff on Veterans' employment initiatives. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have regarding my testimony or VETS' efforts on behalf of our Veterans and transitioning Service Members.