

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

TESTIMONY OF
RAYMOND M. JEFFERSON
ASSISTANT SECRETARY FOR
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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR
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BEFORE THE
SENATE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS

Chairman Murray, Ranking Member Burr, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to appear as a witness before the Committee and speak to you about Veterans' employment and what the Department of Labor's Veterans' Employment and Training Services (VETS) is doing to facilitate a smooth, efficient and effective transition of our Service Members and their spouses from the military into the civilian workforce.

VETS' mission is to proudly serve 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. We do that through the following four major programs that are an integral part of Secretary Solis's vision of "Good Jobs for Everyone:"

- The Jobs for Veterans State Grants (JVSG);
- The Transition Assistance Program Employment Workshops (TAP);
- The Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Program (HVRP); and
- The Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act (USERRA).

VETS also continues to partner with the Employment and Training Administration (ETA) which shares goals for providing services to Veterans, including transitioning Service Members and eligible spouses through a variety of employment and training programs, which allows the opportunity to leverage resources for these populations.

Since being confirmed, I've incorporated stakeholder feedback into the development of five aspirations that VETS will pursue during my tenure as Assistant Secretary in order to achieve our desired outcomes:

1. Serving as the National focal point for Veterans' employment and training.
2. Increased engagement with employers, with a particular emphasis on the private sector.
3. Helping Service Members transition seamlessly into meaningful employment and careers, with a particular emphasis on emerging industries such as green jobs.
4. Boosting USERRA's impact by increasing awareness of and commitment to it.
5. Investing in VETS' team members to further develop their potential and better serve our clients.

Over the past year and a half, VETS has prioritized our efforts to transform TAP, implement a new approach to employer outreach, and better serve rural Veterans.

For the purposes of this hearing today, I would like to elaborate more on these efforts and other initiatives we have to assist our Service Members in transitioning from the military into the civilian workforce.

Transforming and Redesigning the Transition Assistance Program

Our primary program for assisting individuals with their transition is the Transition Assistance Program (TAP). TAP is an interagency program delivered via a partnership involving the Department of Defense (DoD), DOL VETS, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). TAP has four components:

1. Pre-separation counseling – this is mandatory for all transitioning Service Members and is provided by the military services;
2. TAP employment workshop – this is voluntary on the part of the transitioning Service Member and is administered through DOL VETS and its state partners;
3. VA benefits briefing – this briefing is also voluntary and administered by the VA; and
4. Disabled Transition Assistance Program (DTAP) – also voluntary and administered by the VA.

Since 1991, when VETS began providing employment workshops pursuant to section 502 of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 1991 (P.L. 101-510), we've provided employment and job training assistance and other transitional services to over two and a half million separating and retiring Service Members and their spouses. Our goal is to provide TAP at every location requested by the Armed Services or National Guard and Reserve Components.

VETS' employment workshop is a comprehensive two and a half day program during which participants are supposed to learn relevant skills and information, such as job search techniques, career decision-making processes, and current labor market conditions. Practical exercises are conducted in resume writing and interviewing techniques. Participants are also provided an evaluation of their employability relative to the job market and receive information on the most current Veterans' benefits available. Components of the employment workshop include: career self-assessment, resume development, job search and interview techniques, U.S. labor market information, civilian workforce requirements and documentation of military skills.

The current workshop also includes discussion about additional services available at the over 3,000 One-Stop Career Centers. By connecting over 1.8 million Veterans to the workforce investment system this past program year, One-Stop Career Centers are helping to provide the support Veterans need to be successful and competitive in today's workforce. Building on this success, VETS partners with the ETA to increase Veterans' awareness of, access to, and use of the One-Stop service delivery system including ETA's suite of on-line electronic tools.

To maintain quality in service delivery and ensure uniformity among locations, all workshops use a common workbook and standard program of instruction. In addition, all facilitators are trained and certified by the National Veterans' Training Institute.

In the FY 2012 Budget proposal, VETS requests that the Transition Assistance Program be funded at \$9,000,000, renewing our FY 2011 request to fund this as a separate activity. This is \$2,000,000 above the level for FY 2010. VETS anticipates increased demand for TAP Employment Workshops in connection with the Department of Defense's Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program, and in providing workshops to retiring Reserve and National Guard members.

In the current TAP workshop, we have identified six primary opportunities for improvement. Therefore, VETS is taking the unprecedented step of completely 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 is based on established best practices in career transition. Many of its components have never been a part of the employment workshop and are being introduced for the first time.

The first improvement opportunity we've identified is that the current TAP workshop does not include any type of assessment of an individual prior to a person attending the workshop. As a result, there is no customization to an individual's needs or readiness for employment. Presently, Service Members and other TAP participants (e.g. spouses) with different transition needs and degrees of employment readiness are all grouped together. As an example, when a senior non-commissioned officer with a bachelor's degree attends the same workshop as a junior enlisted member with a high school diploma, each has a different readiness level and transition needs. Therefore, to be most effective, the workshop content should be customized for each participant's employment readiness situation. Previously, there was no way to accomplish this goal. One solution could be "pre-work" – multiple employment-readiness assessments completed before attending TAP. The redesign will assess each individual's readiness for employment and their career interests before attending the workshop via online surveys. The pre-work process will then assess and place each TAP participant in one of three categories of employment readiness: 1) high, 2) moderate, and 3) entry-level. When a Service Member attends TAP, they will so do with a cohort of peers at the same readiness level and, additionally, receive materials tailored to their specific level.

The second improvement opportunity we've identified is that the TAP Employment Workshop content is outdated – the material has not been significantly updated in 19 years. Therefore, the transformation and redesign will bring in best practice content in the area of career transition.

As a result of the pre-work assessment, the content will be customized based on employment readiness and will cover topics such as the following:

1. Life and career planning
2. Transitioning from a military to a civilian work environment
3. Stress reduction techniques
4. Mental resiliency training
5. How to create a network
6. Storytelling (articulating one's value proposition)
7. Peer-support techniques
8. Entrepreneurship.

Although TAP will continue to cover the traditional topics like resume writing, interviewing, and dressing for success, an important new emphasis in TAP will be the creation of an Individual Transition Plan that will serve as a roadmap for the “next steps” to be taken in each participant’s transition to civilian employment.

The third improvement opportunity we’ve identified is that TAP is presently being facilitated by a mixed cadre with different skill levels and training (e.g. contractors, VETS Federal staff, State Disabled Veteran Outreach Program specialists, and Local Veterans Employment Representatives). Our solution to this is to shift to only using skilled and experienced contract facilitators who are trained to standards developed as part of the redesign. They will provide experiential learning and interactive facilitation that is customized to a participant’s readiness level. This represents a significant shift away from a reliance on PowerPoint slides. Evidence has shown that skilled contract facilitators produce the best results of the current mix of TAP facilitators. Having the facilitator contracted directly to VETS will enhance their performance accountability.

The fourth improvement opportunity we’ve identified is the limitation in what the current TAP employment workshop can cover and who can attend. The solution to this is an online platform. The TAP transformation and redesign will include an online, e-learning platform that will contain the entire TAP Workshop – including the pre-work assessment tools – in an engaging, dramatized format and serve as a comprehensive toolbox for wounded warriors, spouses, Guard and Reservists. Having an online platform will allow Service members, Veterans, and spouses to access all of the content provided in TAP, including the workshop, at any time. Additionally, it will provide comprehensive content on entrepreneurship and Federal employment. Furthermore, a Veteran who went through TAP many years ago – or who never went through it – can go online and access the best-practice content of the new TAP. Finally, this solution will allow us to receive feedback from online users and track how many there are.

The fifth improvement opportunity we’ve identified with the current program is that there are no follow-up services for its participants. Currently, when a transitioning Service Member or spouse attends TAP, they leave with whatever they received in those two and a half days. Our solution to this is an innovation called “After-TAP Support.” In the redesigned TAP, after attending a workshop, each participant will have 60-day access to individualized phone and online support with “live” person-to-person contact that will focus primarily on assisting participants with implementing their own Individual Transition Plan.

The sixth improvement opportunity we’ve identified is that TAP has no performance metrics to evaluate its effectiveness. During the 19 years since the TAP employment workshop has been in existence, we estimate that more than 2.5 million people have gone through the TAP program. However, there is no accumulated data measuring the program’s effectiveness. Therefore the redesign will include performance metrics. The new program will gather evaluation input from TAP participants at “three moments of truth”:

- 1) When the TAP Employment Workshop concludes – attendees will evaluate the delivery, content, resources, and setting;
- 2) During the job search process – attendees will evaluate the value and relevancy of the workshop’s content; and

3) After becoming employed – attendees will evaluate the program’s effectiveness in helping them to assimilate into a new culture, minimize the time it takes for them to begin contributing, and provide feedback on the overall value of the new TAP and its usefulness in obtaining a job.

Employer Outreach through Jobs for Veterans State Grants Program

The Disabled Veteran Outreach Program (DVOP) and the Local Veterans Employment Representatives (LVER) program are known collectively as the Jobs for Veterans State Grants program (JVSG). Over time, the responsibilities of DVOPs and LVERs have merged. However, VETS realizes that their function and value are very different, and it is critical that these positions maintain their distinct roles.

DVOP specialists provide intensive employment services and assistance to meet the employment needs of eligible Veterans. DVOPs do this primarily at the nation’s One-Stop Career Centers funded through the Workforce Investment Act and at the VA’s Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (VR&E) offices. They also provide recovery and employment assistance to wounded and injured Service Members receiving care at Department of Defense military treatment facilities and Warrior Transition Units through the Recovery & Employment Assistance Lifelines (REALifelines) program. DVOPs focus their services on disabled Veterans. DVOPs also provide services through the Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Program, Veterans’ Workforce Investment Program, Transition Assistance Program, and the Incarcerated Veterans’ Transition Program.

The LVER program is a State grant program authorized by Section 4104, Title 38, United States Code. 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. They are often members of One Stop Career Center business development teams. LVERs also conduct seminars for employers and job search workshops for Veterans seeking employment, and facilitate the provision of employment, training, and placement services to Veterans by all staff of the employment service delivery system. In addition, LVER staff seek to maintain cooperative working relationships with community organizations that provide complementary services and referral.

Employer Outreach through Partnerships

VETS created, and is implementing, a new approach to employer outreach that involves a pilot program and partnership with the U.S. Chamber Of Commerce. The official launch of the program was October 1, 2010. This partnership is giving us much broader access to employers so that we can communicate the value of hiring a Veteran and how to access this extraordinary source of talent. It also allows us to educate employers about the unique skills Veterans bring with them based on their military experience.

Phase 1 of the pilot program included the formalized coordination, through a Memorandum of Understanding, between the U.S. Chamber’s affiliated chambers of commerce in 14 states with our State Directors (DVETS) and local staff there. VETS and the U.S. Chamber’s affiliates worked to connect Veterans seeking employment with companies who were hiring. Connecting the talent pool with the many companies looking to hire Veterans allowed for a more efficient

hiring process for many Veterans and employers. We gained valuable information from Phase 1 of the pilot that we'll be applying to Phase 2, a nationwide initiative to help Veterans find jobs in local communities across the country.

In this pilot program, VETS works with Mr. Kevin Schmiegel, the U.S. Chamber's Vice President for Veterans Employment and a Veteran of the U.S. Marine Corps. Mr. Schmiegel has been a steadfast advocate of Veterans' employment and an enthusiastic proponent of both the pilot and VETS.

As part of the Chamber's commitment to VETS, they recently hosted a meeting with their Top 100 Chambers from across the country, with representation from all 50 states. During this meeting, the Chamber enlisted support from a vast majority of these Top 100 Chambers to volunteer to host hiring fairs exclusively for Veterans, transitioning Service Members and their spouses in their respective cities. In the partnership, 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. The DVETS, along with DVOPs and LVERs in hiring fair locales, connect with the local affiliated chambers participating to coordinate outreach to both employers and the Veteran community.

The larger hiring fairs are titled "Mega-Hiring Fairs." An example was Phase 2's kickoff hiring fair in Chicago on March 24, 2011 that connected over 100 employers with over 1,000 Veterans, Service Members and spouses. The Chicago hiring fair began Phase 2 of our pilot program – a nationwide initiative to help Veterans find jobs in local communities across the country. Participating employers must have current vacancies to fill in their organization. We are now working to replicate the Chicago Hiring Fair model with the remaining 99 of the Top 100 Chambers, and are finalizing locations and dates for future Mega-Hiring fairs. This pilot represents a new approach to employer outreach for VETS and is an effective and efficient way to connect employers and Veterans.

Job Corps

VETS and the Employment and Training Administration's (ETA) Job Corps program developed a demonstration project in June 2010 to offer additional educational and career technical training to Veterans and Transitioning Service Members at one of three specific Job Corps centers. These include the Earle C. Clements Job Corps Center in Morganfield, KY, Excelsior Springs Job Corps Center in Excelsior Springs, MO, and Atterbury Job Corps Center in Edinburg, IN. Each of these three centers has 100 dedicated slots for Veterans to live and train together.

While Veterans currently benefit from priority enrollment into Job Corps, this partnership also provides them with priority in entering the academic and career technical training of their choice.

This is 100 percent free for enrolled Veterans. The program includes transportation to and from the Job Corps center, housing, meals, basic medical services, academic and career technical training, bi-weekly living allowance, job placement services and post-enrollment support.

We have worked with Job Corps to streamline the program so that it recognizes the maturity and life experience that our Veterans have gained from their military experience. Job Corps employs

a comprehensive career development training approach that teaches academic, career technical, employability skills, and social competencies in an integrated manner through a combination of classroom, practical and work-based learning experiences to prepare participants for stable, long-term employment in high-demand jobs. Job Corps graduates have the opportunity to earn an industry-recognized certification or credential that supports the skills and knowledge gained through career training.

One of the Job Corps program's key benefits is its post-enrollment support. When Veterans are ready to begin transitioning into their career, Job Corps staff will assist them in job searching, resume drafting, and job interviewing skills.

Job Corps provides graduates with transition services for up to 21 months after graduation, including assistance with housing, transportation, and other support services. Upon completion of training, Veterans will be assigned to a career transition counselor to assist them with job placement or enrollment in higher education.

We have incorporated information about this demonstration project and have created outreach materials to be distributed in our TAP Employment Workshops all over the world. TAP facilitators discuss this initiative in class and Job Corps personnel visit selected sites to answer questions and initiate applications from interested Veterans. This is a great opportunity for Veterans 20 to 24 years old - the cohort with the highest unemployment- and we are utilizing various methods, including discussing it before this committee today, in order to get the word out.

Rural Veterans Outreach Pilot Program

Finally, VETS is developing an innovative national initiative that will allow us and states to greatly improve outreach to rural Veterans; provide them access to better programs, services and information; and connect them to a wide variety of services. Rural service is a challenge government-wide because of the cost of serving Americans that live a great distance away from government programs and infrastructure. During this economically difficult time, it is even more complicated to increase services in these areas. VETS' initiative aims to overcome this barrier by leveraging low cost volunteer capacity that exists in communities. VETS, working with state and local government, will provide the initial outreach to rural Veterans and proactively connect them to the workforce system.

VETS chose Washington State to be the first pilot state for this initiative for the following reasons:

- 1) A proven history of innovation in employment and Veteran programming;
- 2) A track record of providing strong employment services to the Veteran population and a commitment from the leadership in the state government to continue providing a high level of service to the state's large community of Veterans;
- 3) A strong network of Veteran service organizations committed to volunteering their time and energy to support their fellow Veteran;
- 4) A geographically diverse state with significant rural Veteran population and a well managed statewide network for launching a new initiative; and

5) Senior Congressional leadership in Washington, DC, and leadership in the Governor's Office have both expressed their support for this initiative.

The core service involves a team of volunteers who will initiate contact with Veterans, check on how their careers are going and, if needed, make them aware of additional support available from government and non-government organizations. The initiative is created to connect Veterans to Veteran specialists in the state workforce agency.

The pilot is working in 22 rural counties in Washington State, with approximately 40,000 Veterans identified in this area. Of this population, 15,000 have not been in contact with employment services in the last five years. This is the baseline for the outreach effort. Based on these numbers, VETS has identified approximately 5-20 community driven Veteran volunteers, and government funded volunteer organizations, to perform the outreach activities. Some volunteer organizations currently work in multiple counties and will be covering more than one county as a volunteer organization.

VETS has signed a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with the Washington State Employment Security Department (ESD), the Washington Department of Veterans Affairs (WDVA), and the Washington State National Guard (J-9). VETS formally launched the program in Seattle on October 26, 2010.

From December 2010 through March 2011, the Labor Market and Economic Analysis Division (LMEA), a division of the ESD, conducted outreach to Veterans and contacted all Veterans who positively responded to the LMEA outreach requesting additional information on employment services. For those Veterans who requested additional information, LMEA will make up to three attempts to contact each of these Veterans to provide more information. Simultaneously, the WDVA, in conjunction with the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) organized volunteers, are mailing postcards to Veterans where there is no phone information available. This will allow the Veteran to contact LMEA to arrange personal contact.

As part of the model, the National Veterans Training Institute (NVTI) trains ESD employees and leaders from the volunteer organizations on how to provide outreach service to Veterans. Volunteer organizations are taught to understand government programs and provide employment program related information when asked. Also, they are trained in working from scripts created by LMEA on how to structure their conversations with Veterans.

LMEA will record which Veterans request additional support during the personal interview. They will provide this information to the State workforce agency who will coordinate a volunteer to provide this additional support in person.

The goal is to facilitate a meeting within three weeks of the outreach activity between the Veteran and the volunteer. The volunteer will provide information on programs that exist at the Federal, state and local level and contact information of the nearest DVOP or LVER in their area to continue the support until employment is found for the Veteran.

We have seen extremely positive results thus far in the program. Our metric for success was having 10 percent of the Veterans participate – their actual participation rate is in excess of 90 percent.

Conclusion

Chairman Murray, 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.