

HONORABLE JOHN BERRY, DIRECTOR, U.S. OFFICE OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT

UNITED STATES OFFICE OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT

STATEMENT OF

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U.S. OFFICE OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT

before the

COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS

UNITED STATES SENATE

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"VETERANS' EMPLOYMENT: IMPROVING THE TRANSITION FROM THE  
BATTLEFIELD TO THE WORKFORCE"

April 13, 2011

Madam Chair, Senator Burr, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for inviting me to this important hearing on veterans' employment in the Federal Government and for the chance to speak with you about the Office of Personnel Management's (OPM's) leadership of the Administration's Veterans Employment Initiative.

One of the best ways for us to honor the service of the brave men and women in our armed forces is to make sure they have ample opportunities for civilian employment in the Federal Government. They are valued, experienced, and trained. In doing so, we are not only demonstrating appreciation for their service and sacrifice; we are making it possible for the Nation to continue to benefit from their talents, dedication, and training. As I have said many times, hiring veterans makes good business sense.

Veterans Employment Initiative

Recognizing this, President Obama launched the Veterans Employment Initiative in November of 2009, when he issued Executive Order 13518. The order created the Council on Veterans Employment to advise and assist the President on improving employment opportunities for veterans in the Federal Government. The Council is co-chaired by the Secretaries of Labor and Veterans Affairs. As Director of OPM, I serve as Vice Chair. Twenty-four agencies are represented on the Council.

More than a year ago, the Veterans Employment Council published the first ever Strategic Plan for Governmentwide Veterans Recruitment and Employment. The Strategic Plan, which covers the period from FY 2010 through FY 2012, maps a comprehensive assault on barriers to veterans' employment in the areas of leadership commitment, skills development, marketing employment opportunities for veterans, and creation of a single-source information gateway for disseminating veterans' employment information.

One key action required by the executive order was the establishment of a Veterans Employment Program Office (VEPO) within each of the 24 agencies represented on the Council. The mission of each of these offices is to support the Veterans Employment Initiative and provide employment assistance to veterans at the agency level. OPM's VEPO provides a full range of support to transitioning service members, other veterans — including disabled veterans — and

their family members who seek information on employment in the Federal Government. In November 2010, the physical space for OPM's VEPO with assistive technology was officially opened to assist disabled veterans in their Federal job search.

### Progress in Veterans' Employment

The past year has yielded significant progress. Last September, the Council on Veterans Employment adopted a hiring model that established aggressive, but realistic, goals for veterans' hiring by agencies in the current fiscal year. At the most recent meeting of the Council last month, all agencies indicated they are making good progress towards meeting these goals. Executive branch agencies increased their hiring of veterans by a total of nearly 2,000 from FY 2009 to FY 2010, even though their total hiring fell by 11,000 during that same period. Specifically, veterans' hiring grew from 70,170 in FY 2009 to 72,133 in FY 2010, which comprised more than a quarter of new hires in the executive branch. Moreover, agencies hired nearly 2,700 more disabled veterans in FY 2010 than in 2009. While the Governmentwide results are promising, more progress is needed.

OPM, as an agency, has worked hard to provide employment opportunities for veterans. We hired 229 veterans in FY 2010, compared to 171 veterans in FY 2009. In both years, veterans constituted approximately 27 percent of OPM's total new hires. In FY 2010, we hired 113 disabled veterans — 41 more than in the previous year. Disabled veterans made up more than 13 percent of OPM's total new hires last year — more than any other agency's percentage of hires.

### Use of Special Hiring Authorities for Veterans

We continue to encourage agencies to make full use of the various hiring authorities that can facilitate veterans' employment. For example, the Veterans Recruitment Act authorizes non-competitive appointment for eligible veterans to positions up to the GS-11 level, or equivalent. The Veterans Employment Opportunities Act (VEOA) can be used to appoint those entitled to veterans' preference or veterans who have at least 3 years of active military service to permanent positions in the competitive civil service. Hiring of veterans under the VEOA increased from about 20,200 in 2009 to more than 20,750 in 2010. Veterans Recruitment Act appointments grew from 6,659 to nearly 7,000 during the same period, and the special hiring authority for veterans who are 30 percent or more disabled accounted for more than 2,000 hires last year, compared to 1,727 in 2009.

### Veterans Acquisition Intern Program

One element of the Veterans Employment Initiative we are particularly excited about is the new Veterans Acquisition Intern Program, which we will launch later this year as a pilot. This is an inter-agency program designed to recruit student veterans and support their career development once they are hired. It will offer veterans who are students the opportunity to gain valuable on-the-job training and work experience in the acquisition field while continuing their education. Those who are selected for the program will be assigned a mentor, and a robust Individual Development Plan will be used to track their progress. Upon completion of the program, these interns will be eligible for non-competitive conversion to permanent positions in the competitive civil service as contract specialists.

OPM will determine the eligibility criteria for this program and select applicants for agencies to consider. We will provide career counseling for applicants, establish metrics and an assessment process, approve each agency's implementation plan, and evaluate the program. If the Veterans Acquisition Intern Program is as successful as we hope, we will explore the possibility of extending the concept to other occupations. One of the most exciting features of this approach is that it offers veterans opportunities for careers in Government, not just jobs, and builds on the Government's investment in their military training and experience.

### Veterans Nursing Career Track Initiative

During an OPM Veterans Service Organization (VSO) Coalition meeting last fall, several veteran representatives expressed concern over the difficulty they experienced trying to convert their military medical training and experience as Army medics or Navy Corpsmen to assist in their quest for employment as Federal nurses. Although several medical intake positions exist which easily allow a former medic or Corpsman to enter the medical field based on their level of training and experience, these positions were not in the Federal nursing series such as Registered Nurse (RN) (0610) or Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN) (0620).

On March 29, 2011, OPM hosted a mini-summit of representatives from Federal agencies, military medical organizations, credentialing bodies, and academia to identify and address issues affecting transitioning service members and veterans seeking Federal nursing positions in order to create an effective career track for veterans. During the forum, the VA stated that it hires LPNs who are provided an opportunity to finish their Bachelor of Science in Nursing degree to become an RN. This program may serve as an excellent vehicle to bring young medics and Corpsmen into Federal service while they complete their academic studies. This information is very encouraging as we assist more veterans in securing Federal nursing positions in this mission-critical area.

### Veterans Employment Training Modules

The executive order establishing the Veterans Employment Initiative required OPM to develop mandatory training for human resources personnel and Federal hiring managers on veterans' employment, including veterans' preference and special hiring authorities. We are currently developing an interactive web-based E-Learning application on veterans' employment, which will enable us to track the progress of those who take the courses. The training will cover veterans' preference, special hiring authorities for veterans, non-competitive appointment eligibility for military spouses, and the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act (USERRA).

### Hiring Reform and Veterans

More than two years ago, we embarked on a broad initiative to reform the entire Federal hiring process. Along the way, we have attempted to address broad systemic problems such as reducing long job announcements and allowing resumes and cover letters as applications. However, where appropriate, we have taken on targeted approaches, as with veterans' employment, to improving the recruitment and hiring of talented men and women to represent the diversity of

our Nation and our workforce. This intersection of these various reform initiatives is creating a veterans-friendly employment environment that is unmatched in the private sector.

Hiring Reform, at large, has several major components, all of which, in one way or another, create opportunities to improve veterans' employment. The President issued a memo to make the process easier for talented candidates to apply for Federal employment. Veterans can now navigate the process with greater ease and ensure their veteran's preference is applied fairly and consistently.

Additionally, I am proud of the work OPM and other Federal agencies have done in implementing President Obama's executive order on hiring more people with disabilities. As many members of the military return from combat with serious disabilities, it is our duty as an employer to create opportunities for these men and women to transition into Federal employment.

The Student Pathways framework is another significant part of Hiring Reform. The Student Pathways Initiative, like the Veterans Employment Initiative, was launched by President Obama in an executive order. Executive Order 13562 of December 27, 2010, established three streamlined pathways into Federal service for students and recent graduates, consolidating a confusing patchwork of programs into one Internship Program, a Recent Graduates Program, and the Presidential Management Fellows Program. We expect to issue proposed regulations implementing this initiative in the near future.

The Student Pathways framework was the product of an inter-agency study spearheaded by OPM, which concluded that the Government was at a serious competitive disadvantage compared to the private sector in its ability to recruit and hire students and recent graduates. The inter-agency team recommended the consolidated pathways approach as a way to overcome this disadvantage. The Internship Program will target students enrolled in institutions at all levels, ranging from high school to doctoral programs. The Recent Graduates Program will be designed for recent graduates of trade and vocational schools, community colleges, and universities. The Presidential Management Fellows Program will include modest enhancements to the current leadership development program for advance degree candidates. Veterans' preference will apply to selections made under all three of the pathways.

The Recent Graduates Program, in particular, can be helpful to veterans in gaining access to Federal employment. It will target recent graduates of trade and vocational schools, community colleges, universities, and other qualifying institutions. This program will be open to those who apply within two years after completing their degrees; however, veterans who cannot apply within the two-year window because of their military service obligation will be able to apply as much as six years after finishing their degrees. Applicants who are accepted into the Recent Graduates Program will be placed in a two-year development program with a cohort of peers hired during timeframes aligned with academic calendars. Those who successfully complete the program will be considered for placement into permanent jobs.

Our simultaneous pursuit of four major initiatives demonstrates that many overlapping goals can be pursued in concert.

## Special Appointment Eligibility for Military Spouses

Our concern is not only for returning veterans who are seeking jobs, but also for the spouses of those permanently disabled or killed during military service. Just last month, OPM published a proposed regulation to extend a special hiring authority for spouses of deceased and 100 percent disabled veterans. Currently, these spouses may be appointed, without competition, to a Federal job within two years after their spouse dies or becomes fully disabled. However, we recognize that many spouses are not prepared to enter the workforce during this two-year period because they are still grieving, or are enrolled in educational or training programs, or may be caring for children or for their disabled spouse. The change we recently proposed will remove the two-year time limit on this appointment eligibility so that these spouses will have as much time as they need to consider seeking employment in the Federal Government.

FedHiresVets.gov

Finally, I wanted to tell you about a special website for veterans. In January 2010, Fedshirevets.gov became operational to support the information needs of transitioning service members, veterans, and military spouses seeking employment in the Federal Government. Besides posting updates on important Veterans Employment Initiative activities, the website provides useful information on veterans' preference, special veterans appointing authorities, and agency-specific Veteran Employment Program Manager contact data. A special feature of the Website provides answers to Frequently Asked Questions and offers an opportunity to ask a question not addressed. Additionally, the associated Facebook and Twitter accounts promote real time social contact on employment opportunities and special events. Since its creation, Fedshirevets.gov has registered well over 1 million hits.

## Conclusion

To conclude, I would say that our Veterans Employment Initiative is off to a great start. We are pleased with the initial progress we have made, both within OPM and working with the other agencies on the Veterans Employment Council. We are building a strong program to enhance employment opportunities for veterans, which we believe can serve as a model for private sector employers as well. Although we know we have accomplished a great deal in a short time, we are also very aware of how much work lies ahead, and we are eager to take it on.

Again, I appreciate your inviting me here today. I would be happy to respond to any questions you may have.