

The Honorable Anthony J. Principi Former Secretary of Veterans Affairs And Former Chairman of the Congressional Commission on Servicemembers and Veterans Transition Assistance

Statement  
of  
The Honorable Anthony J. Principi  
Former  
Secretary of Veterans Affairs  
And Former  
Chairman  
of the  
Congressional Commission on Servicemembers and Veterans Transition Assistance  
U.S. Senate  
Committee on Veterans' Affairs  
Hearing  
on  
Veterans' Employment Programs  
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Good Morning Chairman Craig, Senator Akaka, members of the Committee. Our nation depends upon the willingness of the men and women who embody our Armed Forces to assume the risks and endure the hardships necessary to secure our freedoms and independence. Those risks and hardships are difficult realities at all times and in all places, but they are magnified now for the servicemembers, active and reserve, who have responded, and are now responding, to the demands of the global war on terror, particularly in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Just over a year ago, while serving as Secretary of Veterans Affairs, I was privileged to share the holiday seasons with our uniformed defenders in Afghanistan and in the Persian Gulf and I can assure you that those men and women are America's best; and they make me proud to be an American.

Just as those men and women assumed an obligation to our country when they took their oaths of enlistment, so did our country assume a reciprocal obligation to them when they complete their service. When they set their uniforms aside and assume the honored title of "veteran" we owe them the assistance they need to make a successful transition to civilian life. Suitable employment is the key to a successful civilian life. A veteran with a good job is a veteran with a head start in overcoming the "slings and arrows of outrageous fortune" and in laying a firm foundation upon which he or she can build a life and family. Conversely, a veteran searching for a job is a veteran burdened with an unnecessary handicap in dealing with the challenges of life and a veteran attempting to build for the future on a foundation of sand.

That is why the Congressional Commission on Servicemembers and Veterans Transition Assistance placed a heavy emphasis on reform of Federal programs assisting veterans in obtaining their first jobs and why I commend the Committee for holding this hearing.

The Transition Commission's research led us to believe that the organizational structure for veterans' employment programs was not conducive to success. While we found some states provided effective services to veterans, other states were ineffective. Most importantly, we found that there was little that the Federal Department of Labor Veterans Employment and Training Service could do to effectively influence outcomes at the local level. I am pleased that the Congress enacted reform legislation in response to the Commission's findings and I commend the Government Accountability Office and the Congress for following up on the effectiveness of that legislation.

While I am not in a position to opine on the effect of reform legislation or the effectiveness of veterans' employment assistance programs as they exist today;

I will take the liberty of suggesting some questions the answers to which may illuminate paths the Committee may desire to follow.

Do employment program managers and workers, for both veteran specific programs and for programs serving the general population, have clearly defined goals and standards for placing veterans in suitable jobs? This question is applicable to employment service processes and especially for their outcomes.

Have program leadership, at both the state and the Federal level, established management information systems that measure actual verified performance against those standards?

And, perhaps most importantly, do the states hold their local offices accountable for their outcomes and does the Federal Department of Labor hold the states accountable for their outcomes?

Are there sanctions for poor performance? Are there rewards for good performance? Are those sanctions and rewards effective? If there are states or offices that have not met standards, what corrective actions have been taken and what is the effect of those actions?

While there are virtually limitless nuances to oversight of a program this diverse and this important, I believe that the answers to these questions will give the Committee a great deal of insight into whether the Congress satisfied its obligation to America's veterans when it enacted PL 107-288.

Thank you Mr. Chairman, I would be pleased to respond to your questions.