

THE HONORABLE CHARLES S. CICCOLELLA ASSISTANT SECRETARY VETERANS'  
EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING SERVICE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR

STATEMENT OF

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ASSISTANT SECRETARY  
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BEFORE THE

SENATE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS  
UNITED STATES SENATE

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Chairman Akaka, Ranking Member Craig and distinguished members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss transition and employment issues of returning veterans, service members, reservists, and members of the National Guard.

The state of employment for our returning veterans is strong. Our economy continues to grow and it continues to produce new job opportunities. Employers are looking for quality workers, and the service members who are leaving the military today bring the technical and leadership skills employers need.

The Department of Labor (DOL) is working in close partnership with the Department of Defense (DoD) and the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to enhance employment opportunities for our separating military members by better preparing them for the civilian workforce as they transition, by protecting their employment rights while they serve, and by providing employment assistance to our veterans whenever it is requested or needed.

I am pleased to be a member of today's panel because the efforts of DoD, the VA, and DOL in the area of employment are complementary and supportive. We participate on many joint committees, including the recent Presidential Task Force on Returning Global War on Terror Heroes (Task Force), in an effort to constantly review and improve services for veterans and help make their transition to employment as seamless as possible.

My testimony today discusses three major areas.

First, you asked that I address the cooperation and collaboration on employment issues by DOL, DoD and VA, particularly in the context of the important employment-related recommendations of the Task Force. Since the Task Force focused to a large degree on improving transition services, I will elaborate on how DOL is implementing the recommendations by expanding or

enhancing initiatives that directly assist the smooth transition of service members, including members of the National Guard and Reserve and wounded and injured military members.

Second, I will discuss the ongoing collaborative efforts underway for the past several years to help service members who need help the most -- those who are wounded and injured, including those who are disabled as a result of military service -- and our continuing efforts to reduce unemployment among young veterans.

Finally, I will discuss the Department's extensive efforts to reach out to employers to help them find and hire veterans.

#### Collaboration between DOL, DoD and the VA; and DOL's Role in Task Force Recommendations

First, I would like to discuss the extensive cooperation and collaboration between our departments. As the Committee has recognized, the most recent example of our collaboration with VA and DoD is on the Task Force. Chaired by Secretary Nicholson, both Secretary Gates and Secretary Chao were members of the Task Force. The Task Force report contains important recommendations that are already in progress and it illustrates the high level of coordination and collaboration that goes on among DOL, VA, and DoD, as well as with other federal departments and agencies.

DOL was tasked with the lead on four of the report's recommendations. Those are to integrate our HireVetsFirst Campaign into career fairs; train active duty, Guard and Reserve members regarding their rights under the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act (USERRA); develop a financial aid education module; and develop a wounded veterans intern program. I would like to describe our efforts in each of these areas.

- Integrate the HireVetsFirst campaign into career fairs: DOL's Veterans' Employment and Training Service (VETS) works through the nationwide system of One-Stop Career Centers to ensure that veterans receive priority employment services, including the specialized services of dedicated veteran employment specialists. We are working with One-Stop Career Centers in every state to integrate the HireVetsFirst campaign into over 120 private and public sector veteran job fairs, and to expand the number of employers actively involved in veteran recruitment. We will soon announce simultaneous job fairs that will be held this November in every state to highlight the value veterans bring to the workforce and to offer unprecedented opportunities for employers to find and hire veterans and service members who are transitioning to the civilian workforce.
- Train Active Duty, Guard and Reserve on USERRA rights: To improve service members' understanding of their reemployment rights at entry to, during, and exiting from military service, DOL has stepped up its efforts to ensure that National Guard and Reserve members are briefed on their Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act (USERRA) rights, both during mobilization and during their demobilization once they return. In 2006, we rolled out an aggressive training regimen on the new USERRA regulations and over 400,000 service members and employers have been briefed to date.

We collaborate closely with the DoD National Committee on Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve (ESGR) to develop better understanding and application of the law in order to

improve the USERRA training, technical assistance, and dispute resolution services that are provided to service members. DOL has developed a comprehensive pocket guide and interactive programs on USERRA for use by service members, veterans, employers, ESGR caseworkers and mediators as well as by our own USERRA investigators. We have improved training for our USERRA investigators and VETS has established a corps of senior USERRA investigators as part of its efforts to better advise service members of their USERRA rights, and to insure prompt and accurate handling of USERRA cases.

- Develop a Financial Aid Education Module for the Transition Assistance Program (TAP): DOL, DoD and the Department of Education have formed a work group to develop a training module in the Transition Assistance Program and the Disabled Transition Assistance Programs (DTAP) that will better inform transitioning service members of available financial aid benefits. Since only a limited number of service members take advantage of the education benefits that are available to them, this module will educate them on the wide range of financial aid and other benefits to support enhancing their education and skills, and improving their marketability to employers.
- Develop an Intern Program for Wounded Veterans: Many severely wounded and injured service members have little or no civilian employment experience. The internship program will build on DoD's Operation Warfighter (OWF), in which DoD and DOL have worked very closely since its launch two years ago at the Military Severely Injured Center (MSIC) in Arlington, Virginia. OWF places active duty wounded and injured service members in unpaid federal employment opportunities that meet both the agency's needs and the needs and interests of the OWF participant. Like OWF, the expanded internship program will provide valuable work experience to injured Global War on Terrorism (GWOT) service members while they are in medical hold status and transitioning out of military service.

DOL has a full-time employee based at the MSIC who leads our role in OWF. We work directly with federal agencies to develop intern opportunities for interested service members, and hold regular meetings for potential OWF participants at Walter Reed Army Medical Center where federal agencies discuss their internship opportunities. We then work closely to match wounded or injured service members with appropriate internships. To date, over 200 service members have participated in OWF, and over 50 have gone on to be hired into permanent Federal jobs.

In addition to leading these important initiatives recommended by the Task Force, DOL plays a pivotal role in several other Task Force recommendations.

- Increase participation in TAP. One of our goals has been to increase the participation rate of active duty, National Guard, and Reserve members in Transition Assistance and Disabled Transition Assistance Programs (TAP/DTAP) to 85%, and we have been working with DoD officials to accomplish this goal. Under DoD's lead, DOL and VA are working with the military at all installations to market TAP and encourage greater participation so that every service member that might need to find post-separation employment attends this important transition activity. Active duty service member participation in TAP employment workshops has risen by 50% since 2002 and will continue to increase under these joint efforts.

To smooth the return of activated National Guard and Reserve troops, in FY 2005 DOL began offering TAP Employment Workshops to members of the Reserve and National Guard returning from active duty. Recognizing the special needs of these returning units and their members, we developed a TAP instructional program specifically tailored for them. VETS State Directors coordinate closely with state workforce agencies to ensure veteran employment staff or contract facilitators are available to provide TAP employment workshops for the Guard and Reserve. The State Directors work directly with officials of the State Adjutant General offices and local Reserve Unit Commanders to stress the importance of TAP and to schedule the workshops. Spouses are also encouraged to attend.

Finally, DOL has assisted DoD with the development of "TURBO TAP", which DoD will discuss during this hearing. This innovative, on-line resource will dramatically enhance transition.

In addition to increasing participation in the TAP employment workshop, DOL is working with DoD to improve the quality of the workshop. The improved TAP workshops will include resume development so that service members leave TAP with a draft resume; "mock" interviews so they gain experience in job interviews; and job search sessions so participants have conducted a personal job search on their state workforce system job board. Further, DOL has issued over 300,000 Keys to Career Success cards, which provide transitioning service members with information on how to locate the One Stop Career Center in their hometown, and we will continue to provide the cards in the TAP resource packets.

- Improve opportunities for Licenses and Certifications. DOL is also supporting the DoD in implementing the Task Force recommendation to improve civilian workforce credentialing and certification to better relate a service member's military experience to civilian employment opportunities.

Ongoing Programs for Service Members and Veterans who need help the most.

Now I would like to take this opportunity to share the ongoing collaborative programs that target service members who need help the most, and to smooth the transition of our youngest veterans.

- Providing Employment Assistance for Wounded and Injured Service Members and their Families: DOL initiated the Recovery and Employment Assistance Lifelines (REALifelines) program in November 2004 to provide face-to-face, personalized assistance to seriously wounded and injured service members and their spouses so they are better prepared and trained for rewarding careers in the civilian sector. Dedicated REALifelines professionals work closely with DoD, the military services, and the VA at major military medical treatment facilities. They meet personally with wounded or injured service members who will be transitioning into the civilian workforce.

Over 2,200 service members, spouses or veterans have received employment assistance since the beginning of the program. We are now exploring ideas for on-site training at medical treatment facilities. For example, at Balboa Naval Medical Center, Cisco Systems has agreed to establish a Technical Training Academy that will certify participants for careers in information technology.

Last September, we hosted the first National Summit on Recovery, Rehabilitation and Employment for Wounded & Injured Service Members in Alabama under the REALifelines

banner. The summit fostered collaboration and highlighted successful efforts to assure the successful return and reintegration of returning wounded and injured service members and their families.

- **Assisting VA's Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (VR&E) Program:** DOL and VA have long maintained a close working relationship in the VR&E Program. To ensure a seamless transition between the VA's VR&E program and civilian employment, DOL-funded veterans employment specialists are outstationed as needed at VR&E offices. These specialists provide labor market information to VR&E participants as they select training programs. The veteran employment specialists assist VA employment counselors and are present as participants complete the program in order to assist in job placement. Currently 72 veteran employment specialists are outstationed at 36 VA Regional Offices and 36 outbased facilities.

DOL and VA strengthened our partnership through a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) in 2005. Under the new MOA, joint working groups meet and report on ways to increase collaboration, to improve data collection and reporting, and, in general, to improve employment opportunities for disabled veterans. VA also uses the DOL-funded National Veterans Training Institute to develop training courses for VR&E staff.

- **Ensuring the Smooth Transition of Young Veterans:** This committee has expressed concern about the unemployment rates of 20-24 year old veterans. There are a number of reasons the unemployment rate of young veterans is usually higher than that of their non-veteran counterparts. First, unlike their civilian counterparts in the Current Population Survey (CPS), which is conducted by the Census Bureau for the Bureau of Labor Statistics, all young veterans have recently undergone a significant labor market transition. Moving from military to civilian employment is a big transition for these young people. They are generally first term enlistees who are getting out of the military and entering the civilian job market for the first time, or are going to school and waiting for a new semester to begin. Some take a well-deserved break after military service. Some use unemployment compensation while trying to land the right job.

Any young veteran who is unemployed is a serious concern to DOL, as we are researching this subject to better understand the path young veterans take as they transition from military to civilian occupations. We are also collaborating with VA and DoD on similar research efforts. We are working to increase service member participation in TAP, to make the TAP employment workshop more meaningful to them, and to encourage these young service members to use the services of their local One Stop Career Centers.

- **Participation on Joint Committees and Task Forces:** In addition to the programs mentioned above, DOL is an active participant on numerous DoD and VA committees, including the following:

DoD Special Working Group on Transition to Civilian Employment  
DoD ESGR Freedom Awards National Selection Board  
DoD/DOL Task Force on Licensing and Certification  
VA Advisory Committee on Homeless Veterans (ex-officio)  
VA Advisory Committee on Rehabilitation (ex-officio)  
VA Advisory Committee on Women Veterans (ex-officio)

VA Advisory Committee on Education (ex-officio)  
VA Advisory Committee on OIF/OEF (observer)

### Support from America's Employers

Finally, I want to take a moment to discuss two important outreach activities we believe are helping veterans find good jobs and employers find veterans.

**HireVetsFirst Campaign:** The HireVetsFirst Campaign was established under the President's National Hire Veterans Committee in 2004 to reach out to employers to help them find and hire veterans. The Campaign centers on helping employers develop veteran hiring strategies, use One Stop Career Centers to find veterans, and participate in activities such as the many veteran job fairs. States and governors also sponsor HireVetsFirst activities focused on hiring veterans in their states. We are particularly proud that 48 of 52 governors have issued proclamations (highlighting or emphasizing) veterans' employment to their respective business communities.

- **Advisory Committee on Veterans' Employment, Training, and Employer Outreach (ACVETEO):** This newly-formed committee is responsible for assisting with outreach, assessing the employment and training needs of veterans and their integration into the workforce and determining the extent to which DOL programs and activities are meeting these needs. The Committee includes representatives of veterans' service organizations, business, employment, labor, state workforce agencies, the National Governors Association, rehabilitation agencies and ex-officio members from federal agencies. VA and DoD serve as Ex Officio members. The Committee is looking at ways to improve transition, outreach to business, and services to special veteran populations. The first meeting of the ACVETEO, held on May 15th, 2007, was attended by Secretary Chao and Secretary Nicholson.

Thank you again for the opportunity to appear today before the Committee. This concludes my remarks, and I would be happy to respond to any questions.