

Thomas Hall, State Director, Veterans' Employment and Training Service, Department of Labor

Senator Begich, Members of the Committee, thank you for your service to our Nation's veterans and for the opportunity to testify before you today about what the Department of Labor (DOL) is doing to help our veterans, transitioning service members, and their families succeed in the civilian workforce. With over 74,000 veterans living in Alaska, it is critical that we provide those veterans who need assistance, with the services and support they need to find and obtain good jobs.

President Obama, Secretary of Labor Tom Perez, and Assistant Secretary for Veterans' Employment and Training Service (VETS) Keith Kelly are committed to ensuring that America fulfills its obligations to the men and women who served in the military both here in Alaska and across the Nation. In support of this goal, DOL has undertaken new initiatives to train, transition, and employ veterans. These initiatives are in addition to the core programs DOL has been administering for decades: providing veterans and transitioning service members with critical resources and expertise to assist and prepare them to obtain meaningful careers, maximize their employment opportunities, and protect their employment rights.

My name is Thomas Hall, and I am the Alaska State Director for the Department of Labor's Veterans' Employment and Training Service. As a disabled veteran, I am proud to testify today on the essential programs DOL provides our veterans and transitioning service members. I am also happy to announce that DOL plans to relocate our Alaska state office from Juneau to Anchorage in the months ahead as part of our continuing efforts to enhance our outreach and engagement with veterans and stakeholders.

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. I will also tell you what is happening in Alaska to meet the employment-related needs of our transitioning Service Members and Veterans.

Core Programs:

The Department of Labor funds various programs that provide employment and training services to job seekers. Many of these programs are operated out of the almost 2,600 American Job Centers (AJCs) across the country that serve as the cornerstone for the Nation's workforce investment system. By law, veterans receive Priority of Service in all DOL-funded programs, including those administered through the AJCs. In Program Year (PY) 2011, more than 1.6 million veterans received employment and training assistance through DOL funded programs subject to Priority of Service.

As you know, much of the Department's work with Veterans and other eligible individuals is concentrated on maximizing the employment and training opportunities developed through the strong relationships among VETS, the Employment and Training Administration's (ETA), and State Workforce Agencies. Based on these relationships, DOL has decades of experience working with the employer community, at both local and national levels, to recruit, train, and find employment for veterans and transitioning service members.

The Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development administers these DOL funded programs. In PY 2011, over 16,000 veterans were served by the DOL-funded workforce system in Alaska. Overall, approximately 45% of veterans entered employment in the first quarter after exiting an employment service program.

In addition, DOL administers multiple programs specifically aimed at promoting the hiring and job readiness of veterans including: The Jobs for Veterans State Grants (JVSG); The Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Program (HVRP); The Transition Assistance Program Employment Workshops (TAP); The Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act (USERRA), and Veterans' Preference in Federal Employment.

Jobs for Veterans State Grants Program (JVSG)

Through the JVSG program, the Department provides grants to the State Workforce agencies in each state, the District of Columbia, Guam, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands to fund support services to veterans through two primary staff positions, Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program (DVOP) specialists and Local Veterans' Employment Representative (LVER) staff members. DVOP specialists provide outreach services and intensive employment assistance to meet the employment needs of veterans with significant barriers to employment. They may be located within the AJCs or co-located with other service providers. LVER staff members are primarily responsible for conducting outreach to employers to assist veterans in gaining employment. In PY 2011, JVSG served nearly 528,000 veterans nationwide. Overall, approximately 48% of veterans entered employment in the first quarter after exiting an employment service program.

In accordance with Title 38 of the United States Code (USC), chapter 41, each state is responsible for establishing the appropriate mix of DVOP and LVER staff based upon local economic conditions and related factors, and allocates a corresponding share of its JVSG funds to support those staff members each year. The Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development (AKDOLWD) currently maintains three DVOPS in Anchorage, one DVOP in Fairbanks and one (half-time) DVOP in Wasilla. The AKDOLWD Employment and Security Division (ESD) provides outreach, technical assistance, and Priority of Service to the entire veteran population regardless of geographical barriers. Each JVSG staff person is assigned as a JVSG services and Priority of Service functional advisor and provides outreach and technical assistance to assigned local AJCs throughout the state. During the past Program Year in Alaska, 1,417 Veterans received a wide array of employment preparation and placement services from a DVOP. Of those, approximately 68%, or about 960, received intensive, case management from a DVOP.

I am happy to see the Department of Veterans' Affairs (VA) represented here today as we work closely with them on the employment piece of their Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (VR&E) program. Here in Alaska, DOL supports a DVOP specialist assigned to work with VA's VR&E office and serve as the Intensive Service Coordinator (ISC). The ISC provides employment information to VR&E participants during their rehabilitation program. Following completion of the program, the ISC coordinates and monitors services provided to veterans through the statewide AJCs.

Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Program

At DOL, our primary program aimed at eliminating homelessness among veterans is the Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Program (HVRP). The HVRP provides employment and training services to assist in reintegrating homeless veterans into meaningful employment within the labor force and to stimulate the development of effective service delivery systems that will address the complex problems facing homeless veterans. HVRP is the only nationwide program focusing exclusively on employment of Veterans who are homeless. HVRP funds are awarded to eligible entities including state and local workforce boards, local public agencies, nonprofit organizations, tribal governments, and faith-based and community organizations through a competitive grant process. These grantees provide an array of services utilizing a holistic case management approach that directly assists homeless veterans and provides training services to help them transition into the labor force. Grantees also provide critical linkages for a variety of supportive services available in their local communities, including employers.

In June 2013, the Department awarded almost \$29 million to 121 HVRP grantees nationwide. Over 14,000 homeless veterans will receive services from HVRP grantees. In August 2013, DOL awarded over \$5 million to fund 22 Homeless Female Veterans and Veterans with Families competitive grants. Approximately 1,900 veterans will receive

job training and related services through these programs to help them succeed in civilian careers.

Transition Assistance Program

Our primary program for assisting service members and their spouses with their transition from the military to the civilian workforce is the Transition Assistance Program (TAP). TAP is an interagency effort between the Departments of Labor, Defense, Veterans Affairs, and Homeland Security. Through TAP, the Department of Labor brings to bear its extensive expertise in employment services to oversee a comprehensive three-day employment workshop at U.S. military installations around the world. Workshop participants learn job search techniques, career decision-making processes, and current labor market conditions.

DOL—with Federal agency partners including DoD, VA, Department of Education (ED), and the Small Business Administration (SBA)—are currently participating in the implementation of an enhanced TAP curriculum, known as Transition GPS (Goals, Plans, Success), which was developed under the Administration's Veterans' Employment Initiative Task Force.

Current components of the Transition GPS curriculum include mandatory pre-separation counseling, service-delivered modules, VA benefits briefings, a DOL Employment Workshop, and optional tracks focused on technical training, education, and entrepreneurship opportunities. With the implementation of the capstone event by the end of fiscal year 2013, the Transition GPS curriculum will take approximately 7 to 8 days to complete.

To better serve our separating service members, DOL completely redesigned the TAP employment workshop in 2012 presenting effective and enduring solutions in an experiential way to ensure a successful transition from military to civilian life and employment. The new TAP curriculum uses established best practices for career transitions and

includes tools to help service members translate their military skills and training to meet applicable civilian licensing and credentialing requirements in their chosen career field.

During FY 2012, over 160,000 transitioning service members and spouses attended more than 4,500 TAP employment workshops at 272 locations worldwide and we expect that number to increase in the coming years. Alaska currently has four regular TAP sites located at Eielson AFB, Fort Wainwright and two at Joint Base Elmendorf - Richardson. Additionally, the Coast Guard schedules workshops on an ad hoc basis in various locations throughout the state. During FY 2012, 2,167 transitioning service members and spouses attended one of the 67 TAP workshops offered in Alaska.

Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act (USERRA) & Veterans Preference in Federal Hiring

DOL administers and enforces a host of laws that protect American workers to ensure their workplace safety, protect their hard-earned retirement benefits, and to ensure that they are treated fairly on the job. Among these important worker protection laws is USERRA. Through USERRA, DOL works tirelessly to ensure that our Nation's service members and veterans are protected against adverse discrimination due to their past, present, or future military service obligations, and to ensure service members proper reemployment upon return from service. DOL also works diligently to help ensure that veterans receive their due preference in securing Federal employment pursuant to the Veterans Employment Opportunities Act (VEOA).

DOL VETS's professional staff accepts and investigates complaints filed by individuals who believe that their USERRA employment or reemployment rights have been violated by public or private sector employers. In addition, it investigates complaints brought by eligible veterans who allege their Federal veterans' preference rights have been violated. DOL staff also provides technical assistance and informational briefings on the law to the public. Many employment disputes arise

from misunderstandings of employee and employer rights and obligations under the laws, and, as a result, DOL seeks to resolve issues at the earliest possible opportunity.

DOL 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 of their USERRA rights both before and after they are mobilized. Last year, ESGR volunteers in Alaska provided 33 briefings to deploying Reserve and Guard units, both pre and post-deployment. In FY 2012, DOL investigated eight USERRA and five veterans' preference complaints brought under the VEOA originating in Alaska. Six of the USERRA cases were resolved, one reassigned to another state, and one referred to the Department of Justice as requested by the claimant. All five Veterans' preference complaint cases were closed. Four cases were found not to be in violation of the VEOA and one was closed due to non-response of claimant.

Interagency and Public-Private Initiatives, Projects, Programs and Services

I would like to touch now briefly on just some of the initiatives, both public and private partnerships, the Department leads or supports to improve services to veterans and transitioning service members in the area of employment. On all of these initiatives, DOL provides valuable insight and assistance to DOL agencies about the unique employment-related needs of our Nation's veterans and service members, and helps coordinate with our Federal partners.

For instance, the Department worked with the VA to implement the Veterans' Retraining Assistance Program (VRAP) created in the VOW to Hire Heroes Act of 2011. VRAP provides eligible veterans ages 35-60 with up to 12 months of VA-funded retraining assistance to pursue an associate degree or certification in a high-demand occupation. The VOW Act specifies that the VA and DOL jointly administer the process for determining an applicant's VRAP eligibility. DOL's specific

responsibility is to determine an applicant's initial eligibility based on their age, employment status, and previous participation in other job training programs. As of July 2013, close to 130,000 veterans applied for VRAP since the program began accepting applications in May 15, 2012. As of July 2013, over 260 veterans living in Alaska have had their applications approved with close to 80 already enrolled in training.

Another example is our work with the Women's Bureau at DOL. Their research and informational meetings with women veterans experiencing homelessness, and the service providers of that population, resulted in the publication of the Trauma-Informed Care for Women Veterans Experiencing Homelessness – A Guide for Service providers. This is a first-of-its-kind for service providers to understand the unique experiences and needs of women veterans. It provides organizational self-assessment tools to improve service delivery methods for women veterans. This guide, with approval from the VA, has been available for use by veteran serving organizations and is an example of our work across departmental programs at DOL.

VETS is also collaborating with the Women's Bureau to develop a new VETS program focused on women veteran employment. The objectives of the program are to identify distinct challenges that exist for women veteran employment; identify DOL services required to close the gap in employment; and elevate the women veteran issue among diverse stakeholders to maximize impact.

In addition, the Department, working with our Federal partners, has introduced numerous initiatives and new resources designed to aid veterans in their search for jobs and make it easier for them to connect with companies that are hiring. For instance, the "Gold Card Initiative," provides unemployed post-9/11 era veterans with the services they need to succeed in today's job market. VETS, in conjunction with the Employment and Training Administration, has developed a suite of enhanced intensive services, designed to address the barriers to employment faced by post-9/11 era veterans. In addition, the

Administration launched a nationwide Veterans' Job Bank to help veterans find job postings from companies that are looking to hire them.

The Department of Labor has also launched My Next Move for Veterans, (<http://www.mynextmove.org/vets/>), an 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 Career One-Stop online tool (<http://www.careeronestop.org/ReEmployment/Veterans/>).

[www.America's Heroes at Work.org](http://www.America'sHeroesatWork.org) is a DOL online resource that focuses on the employment and challenges of service members living with Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) and/or Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). It equips employers with the tools they need to help the men and women affected by TBI and/or PTSD succeed in the workplace.

These are just some of the many tools and resources available to assist veterans, transitioning service members, and their families in finding and securing civilian employment.

Employer Partnerships

DOL has been engaged in employer outreach involving 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, allowing DOL 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 pool of talent, and to develop a more efficient hiring process that benefits both the business community and our veterans.

The U.S. Chamber has been sponsoring hiring fairs exclusively for veterans, transitioning service members, and their spouses. They co-sponsor, along with DOL and other sponsors, the annual Hire Our Heroes Fair here in Anchorage each November in conjunction with Veterans Day. The Chamber and its local affiliates focus primarily on securing the participation of employers, while DOL and associated partners focus on obtaining participation by veterans, transitioning service members, and their spouses.

Conclusion

Every day, we are reminded of the tremendous sacrifices made by our service men and women and by their families. The Department of Labor looks forward to working with the Committee to ensure that veterans have the best possible training and reemployment services our Nation has to offer when they return home. I again thank the Committee for your commitment to our nation's veterans and for the opportunity to testify today. I would be pleased to answer any questions you may have.