

**STATEMENT OF
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VETERANS' EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR**

BEFORE THE

**SUBCOMMITTEE ON LABOR,
HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES, EDUCATION,
AND RELATED AGENCIES**

COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Tiahrt, and Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for your service to the Nation, for your service to the Veterans community, and for the opportunity to testify before you today about the actions we're taking at the Department of Labor's (DOL) Veterans' Employment and Training Service (VETS) to meet our Veterans' and transitioning Service Members' employment needs. This is a critical part of the agenda you have set for the hearing today – getting adults back to work.

I remain deeply humbled by having the privilege to serve our Nation as the Assistant Secretary for Veterans' Employment and Training. Secretary Solis has been an incredible source of guidance and support, and has made Veterans and VETS one of her top priorities.

As we're all aware, since the onset of military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, over 1 million members of the active duty military have served in these two theaters. Additionally, since September 11, 2001, the Department of Defense (DoD) reports that over 700,000 National Guard and Reserve mobilizations have occurred – the largest deployment of the National Guard in the past half century.

Every day, we are reminded of the tremendous sacrifices made by our servicemen and women, and by their families. One way that we can honor those sacrifices is by providing them with the best possible services and programs our Nation has to offer. Accomplishing this will require seamless collaboration, enhanced communication, and sustained, purposeful action. It's going to take all of us working together, sharing best practices and developing innovative solutions to challenging problems while constrained by limited resources.

I am here today to provide an overview of our programs and initiatives, and to answer your questions.

The issue of today's hearing is "Putting Adults Back to Work." VETS' programs support Secretary Solis's vision of "*Good Jobs for Everyone*" –

- The Jobs for Veterans State Grants (JVSG) help Veterans get to and stay in the middle class.
- The Transition Assistance Program Employment Workshops (TAP) helps transitioning Service Members move to the middle class.
- The Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Program (HVRP) helps the homeless Veteran get into the middle class.
- The Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act (USERRA) enforcement helps keep Veterans and Service Members in the middle class by protecting their employment and reemployment rights.

Veterans have earned a secure place in the middle class. VETS works closely with the DoD and the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to help them get there through seamless employment transition.

My testimony today will cover current programs and initiatives in VETS that support putting adults back to work.

Fiscal Year 2011 Budget Request

The mission of the Veterans' Employment and Training Service is to provide Veterans and transitioning Service Members the resources and services to succeed in the workforce by maximizing their employment opportunities, protecting their employment rights, and meeting labor market demands with qualified Veterans. For FY 2011, the Department is requesting \$262,494,000 for VETS, an increase of \$6,367,000 or approximately 2.4% above FY 2010. In addition, the FY 2011 budget request marks a significant change in the delivery model for the services provided to Veterans under the Jobs for Veterans State grants.

Aspirations

Since being confirmed, I have met with Service Members and Veterans, leaders in the Federal and private sector, Veterans' Service Organizations and providers of employment and training services to solicit their views on the issues and challenges regarding Veterans' employment. I have incorporated the combination of feedback and observations from these discussions into five aspirations that VETS will pursue during my tenure as Assistant Secretary in order to achieve our desired outcomes:

1. Providing Veterans and transitioning Service Members a voice in the workplace by serving as *the* National focal point for Veterans' employment and training. This will involve the following actions:

- a. Increasing awareness, access and participation in VETS' programs, and employment outcomes for those participants.
 - b. Communicating, convening and collaborating with partners and stakeholders.
 - c. Ensuring we effectively serve populations with unique needs, especially Veterans and transitioning Service Members who are women, homeless, live in rural areas, or are wounded, ill or injured.
2. Creating a path to good jobs for Veterans through increased engagement with employers, with a particular emphasis on the private sector.
 3. Helping Service Members transition seamlessly into meaningful employment and careers while emphasizing success in emerging industries such as green jobs.
 4. Facilitating a return to work for Service Members and protecting vulnerable populations through boosting USERRA's impact by increasing awareness of and commitment to it.
 5. Investing in VETS' team members and emphasizing continuous improvement to further develop their potential and better serve our clients.

Improvements in Current Programs

Jobs for Veterans State Grants

VETS helps Veterans obtain positive employment outcomes through services provided at One-Stop Career Centers and other locations. Grants are provided to State Workforce Agencies to support staff dedicated to serving Veterans. This is our "front line" for the reemployment of our Nation's Veterans.

We closely partner with DOL's Employment and Training Administration (ETA) to ensure Priority of Service for Veterans in all DOL-funded employment and training programs. Furthermore, VETS is collaborating with VA's Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (VR&E) service to provide enhanced services to VR&E participants by out-stationing Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program (DVOP) specialists at all 57 VA Regional Offices.

In FY 2011, we propose to fundamentally change the program's service delivery model. The goals of the redesigned model are to improve the quality and effectiveness of employment services by:

- targeting disabled and recently separated Service Members, including National Guardsmen and reservists,
- linking closely with Transition Assistance Program employment workshops, and
- providing intensive employment services through a customer-focused case management approach.

Transition Assistance Program Employment Workshops

DOL provides TAP Employment Workshops at military installations world-wide to help Service Members and their spouses make the initial transition from military service to the civilian workplace with less difficulty and at less overall cost to the government. These workshops consist of comprehensive two and one-half day employment workshops at military installations nationwide and at select military installations overseas.

We have reviewed external assessments and stakeholder feedback regarding TAP's performance and ways to improve the program. In an effort to increase program effectiveness and improve participant outcomes, we are working to redesign the workshops to make them more relevant and engaging for participants. We are working in close cooperation with our partners at DoD, VA and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) in this endeavor.

Late last year, our four agencies engaged in a weeklong working group to develop a joint, multi-year, strategic plan for Service Members as they transition from the military. This effort goes beyond the TAP Employment Workshop and encompasses the entire transition experience. We're all committed to ensuring the plan is action-oriented and will have a direct, positive impact on our transitioning Service Members. The plan will involve an increased emphasis on the employment needs of the Reserve components and Service Members who have been wounded, ill or injured.

DoD has set a goal for TAP Employment Workshop participation at 85 percent of separating Service Members. Although TAP Employment Workshop participation is expected to increase in FY 2010, VETS expects the number of Service Members receiving TAP Employment Workshops will hold steady around the level of 185,000 in FY 2011, consistent with an anticipated stabilization of separations from active duty. The FY 2011 budget establishes the TAP program as a separate budget activity to highlight the significant role this program plays in returning Service Members to the workforce. The requested increase of \$1,000,000 in FY 2011 will be used to raise awareness that spouses are eligible to attend the program, and to provide the course to spouses in languages other than English.

Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Program (HVRP) and Veterans' Homelessness

Secretaries Solis, Shinseki and Donovan share the vision of eliminating homelessness among Veterans within five years. We have strengthened our interagency collaboration at all levels to mobilize for this important and necessary goal. VETS' contribution to this effort will include the following:

- Continue reaching out to homeless Veterans and assisting them in becoming reintegrated into the workforce through the Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Program. VETS expects to serve 21,000 participants in FY 2010. The requested increase of \$5 million for FY 2011 will boost that number to an estimated 25,000 participants.
- Through the Incarcerated Veterans Transition Program (IVTP), VETS will continue its efforts to help incarcerated Veterans and will coordinate these efforts with the Department of Veterans Affairs. Of the \$36 million for HVRP in FY2010, VETS

plans to use \$4 million for IVTP, which will serve approximately 1,500 Veterans through 12 grants. We plan to continue this program at that level in FY 2011.

- Of the \$10 million increase for the HVRP in FY 2010, we will use up to \$5 million for a major new undertaking – to provide customized employment services for homeless women Veterans and homeless Veterans with families, a population that is on the rise and in need of specialized services. We expect to fund about 25 grantees with this \$5 million increase, and will continue this effort in FY 2011.
- VETS is collaborating with DOL’s Women’s Bureau, which has already conducted 28 moderated listening sessions nationwide with formerly and currently homeless women Veterans to identify the causes and the solutions for homelessness among women Veterans. The findings from these sessions are available on the Women’s Bureau website at: <http://www.dol.gov/wb/programs/listeningsessions.htm>.
- We also conducted a national listening session with service providers, VA, the Department of Housing and Urban Development, and other government agencies to begin identifying the best practices for serving homeless women Veterans and homeless Veterans with families. We will continue to identify the best practices for serving this population, and disseminate them to service providers throughout the Nation.

Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act (USERRA)

VETS is not only an employment and training agency, but also a worker protection agency with a vital role in enforcing the employment and reemployment rights for uniformed Service Members following qualified service.

VETS recently completed a Lean-Six-Sigma quality enhancement and process efficiency assessment of USERRA, with a view toward streamlining, quality improvement and increasing responsiveness to our Veteran clients. The goals of the assessment were to 1) identify ways of ensuring a consistent, high standard of investigations; and 2) determine other steps to improve the program and its outcomes.

We have begun work on identifying an electronic case management system to eliminate the paper-centric aspect of investigations and improve efficiency. Access to this system will be shared with our Federal enforcement partners. We are also working closely with the Office of Personnel Management to ensure that the Federal government serves as a role model for honoring USERRA.

New Initiatives

Increased Engagement with Employers

There is tremendous potential and opportunity for increasing engagement with employers to increase the hiring of Veterans and transitioning Service Members. This will involve communicating the value proposition for hiring Veterans more effectively; making the hiring process more convenient and efficient; and developing hiring partnerships.

VETS is developing new relationships with major private sector organizations to enlist their advice and support to increase Veterans' hiring.

- On November 12, 2009, Secretary Solis and VETS participated in a major outreach initiative to promote Veterans' hiring sponsored by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation. In addition to serving as a keynote with Secretary Shinseki, this event was a major first step in developing a partnership with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce in this important area of shared interest. This initiative will involve each of VETS' 52 state directors in leading outreach to regional and local Chambers of Commerce. The goal will be to form a link between the local private sector employer and the Veterans who are looking for employment through the state One-Stop Career Centers. We will be engaging the Chamber in two critical "employer dialogs" over the next two months. Later this month, I will be facilitating a discussion with 50 human resources personnel at Chamber headquarters, and, in May, the Secretary will be facilitating a similar discussion with approximately 30 CEOs.
- VETS is in the process of developing relationships with other important business associations, such as the Executive Leadership Council, Young Presidents' Organization-World Presidents' Organization, Business Executives for National Security, business roundtables, economic development boards and high-tech associations.

VETS will work with ETA, other DOL agencies, the federal government and private sector to leverage efforts already underway that make employment opportunities more available to Veterans. VETS will be working closely with several state workforce agencies that have shown effective innovation in this area and find ways to bring these programs into the talent exchange and apply them nationally.

Targeted Populations

There are several populations of Veterans who have been under-served and require special outreach and services.

1. Native American Veterans, especially those on tribal lands, are one such population. Secretary Solis hosted a Summit of Tribal Leaders at the Department of Labor earlier this month that VETS participated in. We discussed the challenges facing Native American Veterans and potential solutions. This event began the process of better serving this community. VETS will also be participating in a number of major Native American outreach events in 2010. Furthermore, we are conducting a study on the employment needs of Native American Veterans living on tribal lands to identify best practices for serving this population.
2. Veterans who have been wounded, ill or injured are another one of our targeted populations. In response to the employment needs of these brave heroes, VETS has two special initiatives.

- a. Recovery and Employment Assistance Lifelines (REALifelines) provides one-on-one services to our wounded warriors to ease their transition into civilian employment. We have special REALifelines coordinators stationed at military treatment facilities on a full-time basis who provide employment services on those bases and at other nearby facilities. We also have a VETS liaison working full-time at Marine Headquarters in Quantico. This year, we established a liaison at both the Department of the Army's and the Department of the Navy's wounded warrior headquarters. These liaisons will enable seamless transition and serve as a gateway to all DOL employment and training services available to these wounded warriors.
- b. America's Heroes at Work (AHAW) is a joint initiative with DOL's Office of Disability Employment Policy. AHAW is an outreach and anti-stigma campaign that educates America's employers about the simple on-the-job accommodations and steps they can take to help Veterans with post-traumatic stress and/or traumatic brain injury to excel in their careers. This program is in strong collaboration with DoD, VA and other Federal agencies and stakeholders. AHAW has developed a series of timely educational materials to help dispel the myths associated with these conditions and highlight the value these wounded warriors still bring to civilian workplaces. The program receives outstanding feedback from both employers and participants.

Veterans' Green Energy Jobs Initiative

In July 2009, VETS awarded 17 competitive grants totaling \$7.5 million to provide training and employment services in green energy occupations to approximately 3,000 Veterans. These grants awards were made under the Veterans' Workforce Investment Program, with the goal of providing Veterans with training and other services that lead to green energy jobs. Fields of employment include energy efficiency, renewable energy, modern electric-power development and clean vehicles. This program will help Veterans overcome employment barriers and ease their transition into this growing industry. For FY 2010 we received an increase of \$2,000,000, and plan to award up to an additional four grants in July, and will continue this program at the expanded funding level in FY 2011.

Conclusion

The Department of Labor's Veterans' employment and training programs are part of a larger effort to provide a smooth transition process for assisting Veterans and transitioning Service Members as they seek to identify and secure productive civilian opportunities. The Department is proud to assist our heroes who have served our nation well.

Thank you for the opportunity to present our programs and initiatives. I would be pleased to respond to any questions.