

**TESTIMONY OF  
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VETERANS' EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING  
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR  
JUNE 2, 2011  
BEFORE THE  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY  
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AFFAIRS  
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

Chairman Stutzman, Ranking Member Braley, and Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for the opportunity to appear as a witness before the Subcommittee and speak to you on the Transition Assistance Program employment workshop, more commonly referred to as TAP.

VETS proudly serves Veterans and transitioning Service Members by providing resources and expertise to assist and prepare them to obtain meaningful careers, maximize their employment opportunities and protect their employment rights. We do that through four major programs that are an integral part of Secretary Solis's vision of "*Good Jobs for Everyone.*"

- The Jobs for Veterans State Grants (JVSG);
- The Transition Assistance Program Employment Workshops (TAP);
- The Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Program (HVRP); and
- The Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act (USERRA).

**Overview of the TAP Program**

TAP is an interagency program to help returning Service Members transition back into

civilian life. TAP consists of five components and is delivered in partnership by DOL, the Department of Defense (DoD), Department of Veterans' Affairs (VA), and Department of Homeland Security. The five components include:

1. Pre-separation counseling (3 hours) – this is mandatory for all transitioning Service Members and is provided by the military services;
2. TAP employment workshops (2.5 days) – these are voluntary on the part of the transitioning Service Member and are administered through DOL and its State partners;
3. VA benefits briefing (4 hours) – these briefings are also voluntary and administered by the VA; and
4. Disabled Transition Assistance Program (DTAP) (2 hours) – also voluntary and administered by the VA.
5. One-on-One Coaching – this is a follow-up to the four components outlined above.

DOL began providing TAP employment workshops in 1991, pursuant to section 502 of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 1991 (P.L. 101-510), and, to date, we have provided employment and job training assistance and other transitional services to over 2.5 million separating and retiring Service Members and their spouses.

We also started providing employment workshops at overseas military institutions pursuant to section 309 of the Veterans Benefits Act of 2003 (P.L. 108-183). Today, so that we can better serve Guard and Reserve units, we've made the commitment to provide employment workshops whenever requested, to include those returning from mobilization. We are currently conducting TAP employment workshops at 50 sites overseas including Germany, Belgium, the Azores, Japan, Italy, Korea, Guam, the United Kingdom, Turkey, and Bahrain.

Our mission is to provide TAP at every location requested by the Armed Services, including National Guard and Reserve Components. Last year, nearly 130,000

transitioning Service Members and spouses attended a TAP employment workshop given at one of 272 locations world-wide.

### **Employment Workshop Overview**

DOL is authorized by Chapter 58 of title 10, U.S. Code, to assist DoD and VA in providing transition assistance services to separating Service Members and their spouses. The role of VETS in this effort is to conduct employment workshops based on projections made by each of the armed services and the Department of Homeland Security for the U.S. Coast Guard. DOL-funded Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program (DVOP) specialists and Local Veterans' Employment Representatives (LVER) lead many employment workshops that take place in the United States. In some cases, due to the distances from state employment offices to the military installations, and to assist with the rapid growth of the program, contract facilitators were added in early Fiscal Year (FY) 1992 and federal staff in FY 1996. In overseas locations, contract facilitators lead all workshops.

DOL's TAP employment workshop is a comprehensive two and a half day session where participants learn about job search techniques, career decision-making processes and obtain information on current occupational and labor market conditions. Practical exercises are conducted in resume writing and interviewing techniques. Participants are also provided an evaluation of their employability relative to the job market and receive information on the most current Veterans' benefits. Current components of the employment workshop include the following: career self-assessment, resume development, job search and interview techniques, U.S. labor market information, civilian workplace requirements and documentation of military skills.

The current workshop also explains the additional services available at the over 3,000 DOL One-Stop Career Centers and the value of the workforce investment system. One-Stop Career Centers help provide the support Veterans need to be successful and competitive in today's workforce and, this past program year, served over 1.8 million

Veterans. VETS partners with the Employment and Training Administration (ETA) to increase Veterans' awareness of, access to, and use of the One-Stop service delivery system including ETA's suite of on-line electronic tools.

To maintain quality of service delivery and ensure uniformity between locations, all workshops use a common workbook and standard program of instruction. In addition, all facilitators – whether DVOP/LVER, federal staff, or contractors – are trained and certified by the National Veterans' Training Institute (NVTI). In the future, VETS will transition to having all facilitation done by contract facilitators, allowing DVOPs to focus on their core roles and responsibilities.

### **The Transformation and Redesign of the TAP Employment Workshop**

Since its inception, the TAP employment workshop has been a valuable tool for Service Members transitioning into the civilian workforce. As times change, we believe it is important to ensure that the approach and content stays current with emerging best practices. It is also critical that the program meets any changing needs of our transitioning Service Members, like those returning home from Iraq and Afghanistan during these challenging economic times. Therefore, in order to bring the best possible program and services to our Service Members and their spouses, VETS is undertaking a redesign of the workshop that will incorporate the latest techniques and best practices that have been identified over the past two decades.

We have identified six major opportunities for improving the current employment workshop and are in the process of completely redesigning and transforming it. We are creating experientially-taught, effective, enduring solutions for a successful transition from military to civilian life and employment.

The first improvement opportunity we have identified is that the current employment workshop is neither customized to participants' needs nor segmented according to their readiness for employment. There is no assessment of individuals prior to them attending

the course. Simply put, it's "one size fits all." For example, in today's workshop, Service Members of all skill sets and experiences attend the same workshop- in this situation, we are not effectively engaging varying readiness levels. The solution to this dilemma is "pre-work." The redesign will assess each individual's readiness for employment, and their interests, before they attend the workshop. The pre-work results will then be used to assign individuals to one of three employment readiness levels: 1) high; 2) moderate; or 3) entry-level. When a Service Member attends TAP, he or she will do so with a cohort having the same readiness level, and the material will be tailored to that level. This is a completely new addition to the employment workshop.

The second improvement opportunity we have identified is that the content for the employment workshop is outdated – we have not done a significant content update in 19 years. Therefore, the transformation and redesign will bring in best practice content in the area of career transition. The new content will focus on helping participants develop the vision, strategy, and tactics for their careers. Vision involves determining the life they want, strategy involves creating their roadmap for getting there, and tactics are the actions and steps they'll be using along the journey. There will be three versions of the content – one for each level of employment readiness. The new, best-practice content will cover topics such as the following:

- Life and career planning;
- Stress reduction techniques;
- Mental resiliency training;
- Transitioning from a military to a civilian work environment and culture
- Peer support techniques;
- Networking;
- Storytelling (how to determine and communicate one's value proposition)
- Entrepreneurship; and
- Federal government employment.

TAP will continue to cover the traditional topics like resume writing, interviewing, and dressing for success. A distinctive element of the new employment workshop is that each

participant will create an Individual Transition Plan (ITP) – encompassing his/her vision, strategy and tactics – which will serve as the individual’s roadmap to meaningful and successful career opportunities. This is a completely new addition to the employment workshop.

The third improvement opportunity we have identified is that, presently, TAP is facilitated by a mixed cadre with different skill levels and training (e.g. contractors, VETS Federal staff, State Disabled Veteran Outreach Program specialists, and Local Veterans Employment Representatives). Our solution is to employ experienced, skilled contract facilitators trained to standards developed as part of the redesign. They will provide interactive facilitation that is based on adult learning principles. A major difference in the new employment workshop will be the emphasis on experiential learning – “learning by doing” – as opposed to the current reliance on PowerPoint slides. Also, by using contract facilitators, we can implement changes more quickly and will have better accountability of their performance. This is a new approach to content delivery.

The fourth improvement opportunity we have identified is that, with the current model, there are constraints on access to the program, who can attend, and refresher training. The solution to this is an online, e-learning platform – a “virtual” TAP. The redesign will include an online, e-learning platform that will contain the entire TAP workshop in an engaging, dramatized format that serves as a comprehensive resource for all Service Members, Veterans, Wounded Warriors, spouses, Guard and Reservists. Having an online platform will allow these communities continual and unlimited access to all of the content provided, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The online platform will be a primary portal to access entrepreneurship training, resources and support from the Small Business Administration (SBA), and other sources. Furthermore, this solution will allow us to receive feedback from online users and track how many there are. The online, e-learning content for the employment workshop will also be available in Spanish. This is a completely new addition to the employment workshop.

The fifth improvement opportunity we have identified is that there are no follow-up services for participants to reinforce and embed what they've learned. When a transitioning Service Member or spouse attends the employment workshop today, they leave with whatever they've absorbed in those two and a half days. Reinforcement of learning is a well-understood principle of adult learning. Our solution to this is what we call "After-TAP Support." In the redesigned workshop, participants will receive customized coaching by phone or online for 60 days after they attend the workshop. This will be "live" person-to-person contact and will focus primarily on assisting the participants with implementing, "pressure-testing" (i.e., comparing the written plan with the participants' actual desires) and revising their Individual Transition Plans. It will also incorporate peer support techniques. This is a completely new addition to the employment workshop.

Finally, the sixth improvement opportunity we have identified is that the employment workshop has no performance metrics to evaluate its effectiveness. Over the past 19 years, about 2.5 million people have gone through the workshop. However, there is no repository of data measuring the program's effectiveness. Therefore, the redesign will include performance metrics and gather evaluation input from TAP participants at the following three "moments of truth":

1. At the conclusion of the TAP Employment Workshop - attendees will evaluate the delivery, content, approach, resources, and setting;
2. During the job search (when attendees are actually applying what they've learned) – they'll evaluate the relevancy and effectiveness of the workshop's content and approach; and
3. After becoming employed – attendees will be asked how useful the workshop was in helping them to obtain a job or career opportunity, how rapidly did it help them assimilate into the work culture of their new organization, and did the program help them to quickly become positive contributors to their organization.

VETS is excited about the future of this program. The request for proposals for this redesign has been released and proposals were due on May 27<sup>th</sup>. Our goal is to have the new workshop in place by Veterans' Day 2011.

### **FY 2012 Budget Request**

In FY 2012, VETS requests that TAP be funded at \$9,000,000, renewing our FY 2011 request to fund this as a separate activity. This is \$2,000,000 above the level for FY 2010. VETS anticipates increased demand for TAP employment workshops because of our participation in DoD's Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program and our commitment to provide workshops for retiring Reserve and National Guard members, which represent two populations not fully supported in previous years.

This funding level helps Service Members and their spouses make the initial transition from military service to the civilian workplace more seamlessly, effectively, efficiently and with less difficulty.

Mr. Chairman, you asked in your invitation letter for the status of the contract for the National Veterans' Training Institute. The request for proposals closed on April 21, 2011, and we are currently evaluating the submitted proposals. We plan to make an award by mid-June 2011.

You also asked about class sizes of the employment workshop at Camp LeJeune, NC. We have established a goal of 24 participants per employment workshop. Upon occasion, due to mission requirements and facility availability, this goal is exceeded. We will continue working with DoD to prevent the issue of excessive class size from arising and address it when it does.

### **Conclusion**

Chairman Stutzman, Ranking Member Braley, and Distinguished Members of the

subcommittee, I reaffirm my commitment to work closely with you, the outstanding team at VETS, and our partners and stakeholders to provide Veterans and transitioning Service Members the best possible services and programs. Our success will be measured by the impact our programs have on helping our Veterans find and keep good jobs in today's modern economy.

Thank you again for your unwavering commitment to Veterans and for the support that you've been providing to us. I appreciate the opportunity to testify before you today and look forward to answering your questions.