

**TESTIMONY OF**

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**UNITED STATES AIR FORCE**

**BEFORE THE**

**COMMITTEE ON VETERAN'S AFFAIRS**

**SUBCOMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY**

**U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

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Good morning, my name is Chief Master Sergeant Clyde Aune, currently serving as the Command Chief for the 28<sup>th</sup> Bomb Wing at Ellsworth Air Force Base. I applied for retirement from the Air Force in January of this year, and then my wife and I attended the Transition Assistance Program (TAP) Seminar at our Family Support Center from 24 – 26 January, 2006. I'm here to testify about the effectiveness and value of the transition assistance my wife and I received.

The entire range of information provided during the TAP Seminar was priceless for individuals like me who have limited civilian employment knowledge and experience outside of my service to the United States Air Force. I joined the Air Force just 5-days

after graduating High School and serving in the Air Force is all I've known for over 28-years. Both my wife and I were ill-prepared and uninformed regarding processes to follow in my transition to a civilian job, working for the first time in my life for a company where profit is a primary goal. The TAP seminar ensured both my wife and I were educated on the wide array of VA benefits, how to effectively write resumes and interview for employment and the correct procedures to follow when applying for disability compensation. There are many timelines one must follow to correctly apply for disability compensation, apply for VA medical care and qualify for VA benefits. The TAP Seminar ensured we were informed on these critical timelines and well prepared to ensure we gain access to the benefits and compensation our 28-years of service have entitled us to.

After a brief overview of the TAP Seminar by employees in our Family Support Center, the seminar began with one presenter after another sharing a wide range of issues to be addressed before and after separating or retiring from the military. We learned extremely valuable information (I took 10 pages of notes) and were given websites and reference documents to teach us even more!

The seminar included various speakers introducing us to important job search information. We were advised to begin assembling a file of all training certificates we had accumulated over our period of service, and also told to start developing a list of contacts, since the majority of new jobs were the result of networking vice being hired solely based on résumés. We were introduced to government job bulletins and given government job search websites to access.

We were counseled repeatedly about the significance of using “key words” in résumés to help us target specific jobs. This also included locating key words in job advertisements, where we reviewed several examples and were asked to make a list of key words. We then discussed at length on how to write résumés targeted for these specific jobs. This was crucial since many companies (including our government) use software that scans résumés for key words to eliminate generic résumés and narrow the list to résumés containing sufficient key words to potentially result in an interview.

We were coached on the fact that a job application includes information the employer wants to know about us, but that a résumé includes the information we want the employer to know. This was extremely valuable information, since in 28 years of service in the United States Air Force I have only “interviewed” for one job, that being the job I currently hold. Like me, many fellow Air Force members have worked very little outside the Air Force. Our average new recruit is 20.2 years of age and has attended some college before joining our service. Although we have some enlisted recruits who are advanced in age (i.e. over 25 years old), this is the exception. As a result, retiring or separating Air Force members are ill equipped to understand the subtleties of creating an effective résumé and succeeding in an interview process.

To further help us in the job market outside of the Air Force, we were also advised to start compiling a list of folks willing to serve as references to be provided to prospective employers. We were instructed on the different types of resumes and the pros and cons of each type. We were then told “functional résumés” were generally best for military members. This important information prevented me from working toward a

“chronological résumé”, which most senior Air Force members are inclined to do based on using a biography format for most formal position selections.

We were taught to first construct a Federal Résumé, and then to use this document as our “base résumé” to extract specific targeted information designed to address key words in job advertisements. We were all given the “TAP Workshop Participant Manual” which is a fantastic product full of great examples of résumés, cover letters, and easy to understand step-by-step procedures in developing our base Federal Résumé.

Though it may seem obvious to members outside the Air Force, details were presented to us on the most basic of issues dealing with interviews, including how to dress (i.e. one level above the day-to-day dress of the place you are applying to work). We were further instructed on how to present ourselves, key words to use during interviews, and traits most interviewers are looking for. We learned the stages of an interview, what to expect from the person(s) interviewing us, and types of questions we should prepare to ask at the interview. We were advised on what to bring to an interview and to purchase thank you cards to be sent to the individual(s) who conducted the interviews.

The TAP seminar then graduated into lengthy discussions about what Veterans benefits we could expect, how to apply for benefits and how best to prepare applications for disability compensation with a Veterans Administration (VA) representative. We were given copies of the forms used to file for disability and other VA benefits; to include the required timelines for filing for these various benefits and disability. We were then informed of how long it takes for the VA to review our claims and make decisions on whether we qualify for disability and at what level. This is critical

information given the affect disability compensation can have on entitlement to various VA programs.

The discussions logically proceeded on various VA benefits and what level of disability is required to qualify for each benefit. As an example, we were introduced to Vocational Rehabilitation (training and education designed to teach a person skills necessary to succeed in the job market, given the disabilities an individual has). A thorough discussion on Vocational Rehabilitation followed, educating us on how to be sure our medical records included documentation of injuries or conditions we suffered from in order that the VA could accurately assess our qualifications for certain levels of disability. For example, we were informed Vocational Rehabilitation requires a disability rating of 20 percent or higher, thus proving the importance of accurate documentation in medical records to assist the VA in properly awarding a correct percentage of disability.

We were then instructed to enroll in the VA Health Care System, and that we must do so within one year of retirement or separation. We were also instructed to ensure we obtained copies of both our medical records and immunization records before leaving active duty status since after we separate the records are transferred to a central depository, where obtaining copies of records would then be a lengthy process.

We received instruction on obtaining a VA Home Loan eligibility certificate before retiring or separating. We learned also to access and print copies of our Verification of Education and Training (VMET).

The TAP Seminar concluded with practice interviews from various Human Resources volunteers from the local area. We were all given a chance to participate in individual and group interviews, receiving invaluable feedback from the interviewers on

how we could improve our approach to interviews and the messages we communicated during the mock interviews. We also had the opportunity to meet in a group and try to narrow down our specific interests for future employment based on our personal interests and qualifications.

If there were recommendations for improvement to the TAP seminar, they would include lengthening the seminar by one full day and taking steps to ensure spouses of active duty members attend. The 3-day seminar starts with a day packed with incredible amounts of information, such that a person leaves hoping the information was digested and accurately captured in notes. Adding a day to the seminar would help spread out the information presented and ensure the full measure of the information can be captured in notes and understood. The addition of another day would also allow more time for the mock interviews conducted on the afternoon of the final day. I spoke with many participants in my particular seminar who would have preferred the opportunity to participate in several interviews, rather than just one. Also, due to the extensive information presented to ensure spouses are familiar with benefits and disability compensation issues, the attendance of spouses seems to me to be critical. We mandate that spouses have to sign a document agreeing to less than the full measure of the Survivor Benefit Plan. In my opinion, we should similarly mandate spouse attendance at the TAP Seminar. Doing so would undoubtedly require compensation for missed work and/or childcare issues. However, since spouses endure tremendous sacrifices while the active duty members serve in the Air Force; spouses are more than entitled to an unfiltered, unedited understanding of the benefits and entitlements earned by the active

duty member. The spouses also deserve access to facts concerning entitlements in the event the active duty member passes away after retirement or separation.

The above recommendations for improvement should in no way detract from the tremendous product that is the TAP Seminar. Our Family Support Center's coordination with a wide array of experts to present priceless information to us before retirement or separation is indeed noteworthy. Funding for the TAP Seminar is critical and I fear this funding could dry up in favor of the "self-help" system many of our Air Force processes are transferring to, whereby members are expected to access websites to gain their own information and then try to call regional contact centers to get answers to questions. Service in our Air Force has never asked more of our Airmen in my 28-years of service than expected today. Lengthy and frequent deployments, temporary duty assignments away from home, unaccompanied assignments and long duty hours while at home station task our Airmen at levels that cause me great concern. The TAP Seminar offers tremendous resources and invaluable information to the men and women who've proudly served our country and must now transition to the world outside of military service. I thank you for your aggressive support of the TAP Seminar and all it offers us!