

TESTIMONY
of Joseph K. Forney
before
Veterans Affairs Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity
April 20, 2005

Good afternoon. My name is Joseph Forney. I would like to thank Chairman Boozman and the members of the Committee for holding this hearing today. I will submit my written testimony for the record, and give a brief oral statement regarding my experience with the Department of Veterans Affairs Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment program (VR & E). I will also try to answer questions regarding my experience with the VR & E.

After an injury while on active duty in the United States Navy in 1977, and two years of hospitalization, I began thinking about vocational rehabilitation. My goal was private employment. My original Military Occupational Specialty, Signal Men, did not have civilian application. Being eligible for Chapter 31, I inquired as to how to begin attending college to rejoin the workforce. Unfortunately the severity of my injuries made it difficult to attend college on a continuous basis. With ongoing medical considerations and chronic health problems, I attended college at both the junior college level and California State University intermittently for a total of 14 years.

One option that would have been very beneficial for many Service Disabled Veterans would have been to a concentrated rehabilitation curriculum focused on entrepreneurship. If this vocational option were readily available, it is my belief that many veterans with disabilities would rehabilitate themselves by successfully starting their own small businesses.

This goal can best be accomplished by:

- Ending the requirement that Chapter 31 veterans be incapable of placement in a regular job before being eligible for pursuit of a self-employment vocational goal.
- Removal of Chapter 31 delimiting date for self-employment purposes in recognition of the fact federal efforts to meet contracting assistance goals have, in the words of the highest federal procurement officials, been “abysmal.”
- Creating a Department of Veterans Affairs Business Development Program for Chapter 31 Veterans with 1) sole source authority comparable to the 8(a) sole source authority, 2) an 8 year period of business development assistance for each participant, 3) intensive business development training and technical assistance provided by OSDBU, Veterans Corporation and other qualified business assistance personnel; 4) assurance comparable to that provided to 8(a) contract recipients that once a contract is placed with the Chapter 31 Business Development Program, that contract must remain within the Chapter 31 Program unless authorized for release by a VA OSDBU Director and the Chapter 31 Director.