

**TESTIMONY OF**

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR**

**BEFORE THE**

**SUBCOMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY  
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AFFAIRS**

**U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**September 19, 2005**

Chairman Boozman, Ranking Member Herseth, and distinguished members of the Subcommittee. It is my honor to appear before this committee today on behalf of Secretary Elaine Chao to update you on the efforts of the Department of Labor (DOL) to provide Transition Assistance Program services to returning members of the National Guard. I will focus on the activities at Pease Air National Guard Base in New Hampshire and their "Reunion & Reentry from Combat" program.

The mission of the Veterans' Employment and Training Service (VETS) is to provide veterans and transitioning servicemembers with the resources and services to succeed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century workforce. One of the ways that we meet that mission is by providing employment workshops to separating active, Guard, and Reserve servicemembers as part of their transition to civilian life.

**Employment Workshop Overview**

DOL is authorized by Chapter 58 of title 10, U.S. Code, to assist the Departments of Defense (DOD) and Veterans Affairs (VA) in providing transition assistance services to separating servicemembers 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. In the United States, Disabled Veteran Outreach Program (DVOP) specialists and Local Veterans Employment Representatives (LVER) lead most employment workshops. In some cases, due to the distances from some State Employment Service Offices to the military installations, and to assist with the rapid growth of the program, contract facilitators were added in early Fiscal Year 1992 and Federal staff in Fiscal Year 1996. In overseas locations, contract staff leads most employment workshops.

To maintain a quality of service delivery and ensure uniformity between locations, all workshops use a common workbook and program of instruction. In addition, all

facilitators, whether DVOP/LVER, Federal staff, or contract, are trained and certified by the National Veterans Training Institute (NVTI).

In Fiscal Year 2004, over 133,000 separating military personnel were trained in 3,397 employment workshops at military installations across the Nation and worldwide. In Fiscal Year 2005, VETS will complete approximately 4,000 workshops at military installations in the United States and overseas.

The VETS employment workshop is a comprehensive two and one-half day session where participants learn about job searches, career decision-making, current occupational and labor market conditions, résumé cover letter preparation, 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. Components of an employment workshop include: career self-assessment; résumé development; job search and interview techniques; U.S. labor market information; civilian workplace requirements; and documentation of military skills.

### **Reserve and National Guard (RC) Employment Workshop**

Our global military commitments have necessitated a mobilization of Guard and Reserve members that is unprecedented in modern times. The employment workshop is available for most separating servicemembers at one of the 215 transition offices located on military installations in the United States.

However, Reserve and Guard members usually transition at fewer locations, referred to as demobilization sites. Typically the demobilization process is rapid, taking a matter of days once the servicemembers arrive back in the United States from overseas. For example, the Army standard is to demobilize units in 5 days, and it is not uncommon for military installations to get two or fewer days advance notice before returning troops arrive. During demobilization, servicemembers may be expected to participate in as many as 18 separate briefings or activities such as physical examinations at various locations. This leaves little or no time for a full 2 ½ day employment workshop. Nevertheless, we have found that many Guard and Reserve servicemembers would benefit from such transition assistance. Our State Directors are working directly with the reserve and guard commanders to make special arrangements following demobilization in order to present a modified Transition Assistance Program (TAP) employment workshop to Guard and Reserve separating servicemembers.

The following represents some highlights of other initiatives and pilot activity undertaken by VETS:

- Our state directors have contacted each state Adjutant General to offer outreach and assistance to returning members of the Guard and Reserves during the demobilization process.

- The Massachusetts State Workforce Agency and VETS staff have been working closely with the Massachusetts National Guard to conduct a Pilot of a Mini-TAP session from October 1-2, 2005.
- The Massachusetts National Guard is planning a mandatory drill weekend for 150 individuals who will attend the Mini Tap sessions. They will also attend a Job Fair the following day. The National Guard will allow any unemployed servicemembers a drill day to attend on a volunteer basis, so the numbers may be larger than expected on the dates indicated. Additional sessions may be provided after determining the success of the October 1-2, 2005 event.
- In Oregon, 650 Army Guard members recently demobilized en masse. In preparation for this demobilization, NVTI provided facilitation training on employment workshops for 10 VETS/ State Workforce Agencies (SWA) employees and 10 Guard facilitators.
- In Michigan, we are planning four-day workshops to include after-hours employment assistance information. This will integrate separating active servicemembers, Guard/Reservist and case management clients in an employment workshop-like program.
- Minnesota is continuing to develop its program for Guard and reserve members in concert with VA. In the last two weeks, they have participated in two modified TAP workshops for Guard members. Unlike a standard TAP program, which provides a very good overview of the employment picture, this program is modified based on the specific needs of each unit. As an example, a returning combat unit may need additional information on Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and available medical benefits and they will concentrate more in this area (using our partners in the VA as well). Another unit that is mainly transportation may need more emphasis in another area, so they will concentrate on their needs. This program remains fluid in order to provide each unit with what they, and their commanders, feel they need most. This also includes input and participation from the spouses so they are certain to cover their issues/needs. All of these presentations still include available services of VETS, DVOP/LVER, VR&E, the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act (USERRA) briefings, and job-search workshops.

VETS has supported the New Hampshire joint initiative called the “Reunion and Reentry from Combat” program. VETS’ role in this joint initiative is to collaborate with the Employer Support of Guard & Reserve (ESGR) and New Hampshire Employment Security (NHES) to develop a program to provide employment related information to Guard and Reserve forces returning from deployment. Information stations from each partner agency are co-located in one central area during the demobilization process to make information and services available on the following:

- Reemployment Rights under USERRA information is provided by the VETS' State Director. USERRA complaints may be taken on site, if appropriate.
- Information regarding recognition of employers supportive of the Guard/Reserves (employer recognition program) and reemployment rights, mediation and assistance is provided by the ESGR, and, as required, referrals are made to VETS.
- Employment related services for those seeking jobs or training (including spouses) is provided by NHES.
- Unemployment compensation information is provided by NHES and claims may be initiated on site.

VETS also provides a Transition Assistance Program (TAP) in New Hampshire for Guard and Reserve members. All deploying servicemen and women, and their spouses, are given an assessment interview by state veterans employment staff. For job seekers or those seeking training opportunities, an on site assessment interview is conducted. Follow up interviews are scheduled as needed. A formal, three-day TAP workshop, modified to address the needs and concerns of the returning servicemen and women, is made available to anyone who expresses an interest. A DVOP or LVER facilitator, or the DVET, is available at each deployment or demobilization to explain the TAP agenda and promote participation.

New Hampshire Employment Security policy, as stated by the Commissioner, is that an Employment Assistance Workshop will be made available at any time and at any location statewide, to suit the needs of our returning troops.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my testimony. I will be happy to respond to any questions.