

STATEMENT OF FREDERICO JUARBE JR.  
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VETERANS' EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING  
BEFORE THE  
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON BENEFITS  
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Mr. Chairman and members of this Subcommittee:

It is indeed an honor and a pleasure to appear before you today to discuss the Transition Assistance Program (TAP). The Veterans' Employment and Training Service (VETS), with our partners, are continually working on ways to improve the delivery of TAP services and provide greater accessibility to this successful program designed to assist our separating servicemembers who are transitioning to civilian life. I am pleased to be here with our partners from the Departments of Defense, Veterans Affairs and Transportation to share with you some of our recent cooperative efforts in this important program.

The National Defense Authorization Act of 1991 (Public Law 101-510) established the Transition Assistance Program (TAP). It authorized comprehensive transition assistance services and benefits to military personnel and their spouses who will separate from the service within 180 days.

The Veteran's Education and Benefits Expansion Act of 2001 (Public Law 107-103) amended the program to authorize members of the Armed Forces and their spouses to attend TAP workshops within 24 months of retirement or within 12 months of separation. In order to participate in TAP, the servicemember must have served on active duty for at least 180 days. If the military member is being retired or separated for a disability, the 180 days is waived.

TAP workshop subjects include, but are not limited to, career exploration, job search strategies, preparing effective resumes, understanding and preparing for job interviews, evaluating job offers, stress, self-appraisal, and identification of sources of support and assistance.

TAP workshops generally consist of comprehensive 2- to 3-day sessions that take place according to local separation demands throughout the United States. The workshops are primarily facilitated by Disabled Veterans Outreach Program Specialists (DVOP) and

Local Veteran Employment Representatives (LVER) from the State Workforce Agencies (Employment Offices). Due to the remote location of some military bases and the large number of military separations at some locations, contract personnel were added in fiscal year 1992 to facilitate TAP workshops. The contractor employs part-time professional training personnel who assist in workshop presentations located in 11 states.

We currently provide TAP workshops at 170 military installations throughout the United States. In fiscal year 2001 there was an average of 265 workshops and over 9,200 participants each month. The number of Department of Defense (DOD) separations in CONUS (Continental United States, including Alaska, Hawaii and Puerto Rico) was reported for fiscal year 2001 to be 162,599. Of this number, 110,796 separating servicemembers and their spouses attended TAP workshops conducted through VETS.

The tragic events of September 11, 2001, have caused a significant slowdown in military separations. It is, therefore, anticipated that our participation numbers will be lower this fiscal year. We will, however, continue to provide these important workshops.

Another effective method of reaching separating servicemembers, particularly those stationed at remote bases or those at sea, is the VETS' web site called "Use your Military Experience and Training" (UMET). This web site provides servicemembers and veterans with extensive information on credentialing, including, for example, what it is, how it affects them, what costs are associated and what resources are available to defray those costs. In addition to this general information, UMET provides some occupation-specific information. Specifically, for the 25 civilian occupations related to the top military occupational specialties of military personnel who transitioned in fiscal year 1997, UMET provides detailed information on civilian credentialing requirements as they relate to military training and experience. These 25 occupations represent about 45% of all the service people who leave the military needing a credential to work in the field for which they have been trained. In this sense, UMET serves as an automated career counselor that informs veterans about what they need to know to prepare for and become licensed and/or certified.

UMET is also intended to enhance credentialing opportunities by informing credentialing boards and employers about the unique qualifications of servicemembers and veterans. The site contains information on key attributes of transitioning military personnel, the types of education and experience that are provided in the military, and various employer-sponsored programs designed to enhance certification opportunities for current and former military personnel.

TAP has been successful in providing the needed skills for enhancing employment opportunities to separating servicemembers. A Congressionally mandated evaluation of the program entitled, Transition Assistance Program: Initial Impact Evaluation (November 1993) found that servicemembers were pleased with the program and that TAP had a positive effect on their post-separation employment experiences. The Initial Impact report also noted that TAP participants found employment approximately three weeks sooner than their non-participant counterparts. VETS also conducted focus groups

at 21 military installations, which reflected that these servicemembers were satisfied with the program.

The overall success of the TAP program can be directly attributed to the excellent interagency relationships among the partners. This was never so evident than during the recent TAP Re-engineering project when representatives from the Departments of Defense, Transportation, Veterans Affairs, and Labor met to make decisions on how to improve the overall program.

The Re-engineering Committee identified the main challenges to make TAP more effective, including:

- A standard method for delivery of TAP;
- The varying needs and constraints on military bases to provide workshops;
- Some installations must compete for available classroom space each month;
- There are not always enough facilitators to support the demand;
- The TAP participant manuals constantly need updating; and
- There is still a problem in getting spouses to participate in the workshops.

The Committee went to work on those issues that could be changed immediately. One of the major concerns was the quality and accuracy of the TAP Participant's Manual. While the manual was extremely successful in years past, we knew we could make it better. The manuals are provided to every servicemember and spouse who attends the workshops and participants are encouraged to constantly refer back to these materials during their actual career search process. The problem in the past was that much of the information printed became outdated, such as referenced telephone numbers or addresses where participants can go to get additional assistance. Also, many of the suggested reading materials or web sites in the manual change over time. The last full rewrite of this manual was in 1997.

The Re-engineering Committee addressed this challenge in several ways. First, the Participant's Manual was rewritten and redesigned to bring it up-to-date with the current job search trends. Outdated information sources have been removed. A web site was developed that provides a wide range of topics, such as job search tools and tips, career assessment, education and training information, personal financial assistance, employment opportunities and veteran's benefits. The TAP Participant's Manual is available on-line from VETS' home page. In addition, the participants will no longer be given scores of possible Internet addresses to assist them in their transition. They now receive one web site address (<http://www.dol.gov/elaws/evets.htm>) that will link servicemembers and their spouses to information they want or need. This web site is maintained and updated every 90-days to ensure accurate information. This new electronic method is now available to separating servicemembers both in CONUS and overseas.

In addition to modernizing the TAP Participant's Manual, we updated the matching TAP Facilitator's Manual for instructors, and we have developed a web site that allows the facilitators to electronically communicate best practices, present questions, and receive the most current TAP workshop information.

The new printed versions of the TAP manuals are ready for shipping to the military TAP sites. The new Facilitator's manual has been sent to all current facilitators in time for them to become familiar with all the changes before they start teaching from new manual.

The Committee also looked at the current curriculum being taught to new TAP facilitators. This weeklong course is provided by the National Veterans' Training Institute (NVTI) on an as needed basis. Right now there are about four courses each year. NVTI has done an excellent job in updating the curriculum and ensuring the most recent materials are being provided.

There were a number of issues identified by the Re-engineering Committee that will require constant updating or were identified as long-term action items. To ensure these issues receive the attention and actions necessary, a permanent Interagency Transition Assistance Program Steering Committee is again being formed.

This Steering Committee will be made up of senior decision makers from each of the Departments with TAP responsibilities. The purpose of this committee is to jointly identify the major issues concerning TAP, make appropriate recommendations for improving these situations, and, as necessary, form subcommittees of TAP specialists to implement the recommendations.

Currently, we do not provide TAP workshops at military locations outside of the United States. The Department of Defense has expressed its desire that DOL provide such overseas workshops. We are exploring the possibility of stationing DVOPs & LVERs in overseas TAP locations on a rotational basis as well as other alternatives, such as contracting the facilitation of TAP workshops to military spouses. This would enable us to increase military spouse participation in TAP and provide employment opportunities for spouses overseas. We will continue to examine expanding TAP overseas and keep you informed.

Mr. Chairman, that concludes my statement. I want to assure you of my willingness to work with you and members of this Subcommittee, as well as our partners in TAP, to ensure every separating servicemember receives TAP as part of his or her pre-separation process.