

NARRATOR: Throughout this brief century, our nation's veterans have made countless sacrifices in the defense of freedom – sacrifices that have taken them away from home and family for long periods of time. When needed, these dedicated men and women have stepped forward without hesitation, risking their lives in places like Iraq, Afghanistan, and other areas of the world where the Global War on Terror is now being waged.

In recognition of their unselfish efforts, it's our nation's responsibility – and its privilege – to support these veterans, as they transition back into civilian life.

That's why – at the Department of Veterans Affairs – we provide a wide range of services and benefits to meet the unique needs of returning veterans.

These include comprehensive healthcare services ... educational assistance ... home loan guarantees ... and now, job placement assistance for employment within VA. This innovative program – a program designed for getting vets hired – is called the Veterans Employment Coordination Service, or VECS!

NARRATOR: Under the auspices of VA's Office of Human Resources Management, VECS is designed to attract, recruit, and hire veterans – in particular, those severely injured in Iraq and Afghanistan.

This new initiative is a key facet of VA's mission "to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan."

Those words – spoken by President Abraham Lincoln during his second inaugural address – reflect the philosophy and principles that continue to guide the Department of Veterans Affairs.

In fact, the promise our nation has made to care for its veterans is the foundation for this new employment program.

VECS is designed to create opportunities relating to the hiring process – helping to make sure that veterans can successfully transition themselves into our workforce.

(Veteran #1 offers brief comment about how the transition from military to civilian life was made easier through help received from VA during his/her hiring process)

(Veteran #2 offers brief comment about how the transition from military to civilian life was made easier through help received from VA during his/her hiring process)

An essential ingredient of the VECS initiative involves ensuring that managers and supervisors take full advantage of special hiring authorities. These authorities – ones that are in effect right now – specifically apply to increasing the number of veterans within our workforce.

For veterans of Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom – OIF and OEF – returning to civilian life can be a challenge, especially when it comes to finding suitable employment.

(Dennis May offers brief comment about how VECS facilitates the employment process for OIF/OEF veterans)

Along with meeting our nation's obligation to its veterans, there's another important reason VECS has been established. Consider that – in terms of employment – these returning veterans represent some of the most highly motivated, disciplined, and experienced candidates available. Through VECS – after being honorably discharged – veterans who would like to continue serving their country can more readily do so. As part of this innovative employment

program, VA will use every available hiring mechanism to make sure that the talents and skills of these dedicated individuals become part of the Department.

That's because enhancing employment opportunities for veterans isn't simply the obligation of a grateful nation. It's good government! And it's good business!

(Veteran #3 offers brief comment about how excited and grateful s/he is to be employed and how his/her strong work ethic will contribute to VA's success)

(Veteran #4 offers brief comment about how excited and grateful s/he is to be employed and how his/her strong work ethic will contribute to VA's success)

Along with hiring veterans within VA, VECS encourages other Federal Government agencies to be pro-active in their employment practices – helping ensure that veterans are given every opportunity for employment following their military service.

In hiring our nation's veterans, VA leads by example. With more than one quarter of a million employees in its workforce – the second largest of any Federal agency – nearly one-third are veterans. And many of those have service-connected disabilities.

As a matter of fact, VA ranks first among non-Defense agencies when it comes to employing disabled veterans – offering reasonable accommodations to assist them in performing essential functions of their positions. This is accomplished by making adjustments to job duties ... changing the work environment ... or ensuring access to the job application process, so qualified applicants who are disabled can be considered for the position.

(VECS coordinator offers brief comment about VA's practice of hiring disabled veterans and the benefits that their employment offers the Department)

Making veterans a significant part of the VA workforce goes well beyond meeting certain obligations we have as a nation. Their hiring fits into VA's obligation to care for our nation's veterans.

The Veterans Employment Coordination Service – VECS – has evolved from a variety of programs designed to attract and employ veterans ... programs that have grown in both size and sophistication over the past several years.

In fact, human resource offices throughout the Department joined together to make VA the gold standard when it comes to employing veterans.

That involved designating various HR Specialists as Veteran Employment Coordinators. They're primarily responsible for guiding local efforts to attract and recruit veteran applicants for placement within the VA workforce.

(Veteran #1 offers brief comment about the help s/he received during the selection process)

(Veteran #3 offers brief comment about the help s/he received during the selection process)

NARRATOR: Managers and supervisors are urged to consult with their local VEC about current vacancies and anticipated job openings.

VA is also positioning regional Veterans Employment Coordinators throughout the country.

Working closely with local coordinators, their role is to provide direct, hands-on assistance to veterans returning to the workforce after tours in Iraq or Afghanistan – especially those who've suffered severe injuries.

(VEC coordinator offers brief comment about his/her role in the VECS program and how s/he interacts with local coordinators to assist them in their efforts to hire OIF/OEF veterans)

VEC coordinators play an important role in making sure that OEF and OIF veterans – in particular, those who are severely injured – are afforded every opportunity for employment within VA. Part of their responsibilities are to visit military transition centers on a regular basis ... represent VA at military job fairs ... attend military association and veteran service organization conferences and meetings ... as well as participate in other events that target veterans and transitioning military members. VECS promotes VA career opportunities in other important ways.

For example, the regional coordinators also work in close collaboration with warrior transition units and wounded warrior regiments ... transition centers ... Veterans Service Organizations ... VA's Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Program ... along with other groups that represent veteran stakeholders.

VECS values its relationship with other programs, like the Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Service – which is designed to help service members transition seamlessly from the military into suitable employment. That's done through successful rehabilitation, training, and education.

VA's partnership with DoD in the Computer-Electronic Accommodations Program – CAP – is another important initiative. CAP helps to ensure that veterans have the resources necessary to succeed. The program works with Federal agencies to eliminate barriers to employment – ones that may affect disabled veterans. It does this by providing accommodations that help ensure their inclusion into the Federal workforce – and ultimately, their productivity when on the job.

The Department of Veterans Affairs has one of the most unique and noble missions within the Federal Government – part of which is to provide our nation’s veterans with the opportunity to successfully transition back into productive civilian lives.

At a time when the men and women of our Armed Forces are being asked to increasingly sacrifice in the defense of this nation it’s important for VA to continue setting an example – by making every effort to hire those who’ve served so honorably.

Through VECS, the door of opportunity is being opened wide to encourage the employment of our nation’s veterans – in particular, disabled veterans.

(Veteran #3 offers brief concluding comment about his/her feelings of honor to be part of VA)

(Veteran #2 offers brief concluding comment about his/her feelings of honor to be part of VA)

(Veteran #1 offers brief concluding comment about his/her feelings of honor to be part of VA)

(Veteran #4 offers brief concluding comment about his/her feelings of honor to be part of VA)

NARRATOR: With VECS, VA is proactive in hiring veterans who want to work for the Department. This involves using special hiring authorities to ensure that veterans are given preference when competing for available positions.

For more information about VECS, go to the Department of Veterans Affairs website at va.gov/vecs.

The VECS program is an excellent opportunity for those involved in hiring VA employees to be heroes to our Nation's veterans – veterans who've given so much of their tomorrow for our today!

The Veterans Employment Coordination Service! VECS! Getting vets hired!