

**STATEMENT
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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR**

**BEFORE THE
HOUSE ARMED SERVICES
MILITARY PERSONNEL SUBCOMMITTEE**

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Chairman Wilson, Ranking Member Davis, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today to discuss the Department of Labor's (DOL or Department) implementation of the VOW to Hire Heroes Act of 2011 (VOW Act) and the recommendations of the Presidential Veterans Employment Initiative (VEI) Task Force for the Transition Goals, Plans, Success (GPS) program.

President Obama, Acting Secretary of Labor Seth Harris, and Assistant Secretary for Veterans' Employment and Training Service (VETS) Keith Kelly are committed to ensuring that these brave men and women have the opportunities, training, and support they deserve to succeed in the civilian workforce. The Department will continue to work with the Members of the Subcommittee to provide our returning Servicemembers, Veterans, and their families with the critical resources and expertise needed to assist and prepare them for meaningful careers, maximize their employment opportunities, and protect their employment rights. The Transition Assistance Program (TAP) is an integral part of these efforts.

Transition Assistance Program (TAP) Employment Workshop

TAP, as codified under 10 U.S.C. 1144, is an interagency effort among the Departments of Labor, Veterans Affairs (VA), Defense (DoD), Homeland Security (DHS) and other Federal agencies aimed at providing separating Servicemembers and their spouses with the training and support they need to successfully transition to the civilian workforce. Through TAP, DOL brings to bear its extensive expertise in employment services to provide a comprehensive three-day Employment Workshop at U.S. military installations around the world.

To date, the Department has provided training and services through Employment Workshops to over 2.6 million separating or retiring Servicemembers and their spouses. Last year alone, DOL conducted more than 4,500 Employment Workshops to over 160,000 participants at domestic and overseas locations.

Veterans Employment Initiative (VEI) Task Force for a Career-Ready Military

In August 2011, the Department initiated a major effort aimed at revamping and updating the Employment Workshop curriculum to bring it up to date with emerging best practices in career development and adult learning through new delivery methods, student

hand-out materials, and tools to help Servicemembers match their military experience to jobs that require similar training and skills. The result is an enhanced Employment Workshop that provides a highly effective training forum to prepare Servicemembers for a successful transition to the civilian workplace.

Around the same time that DOL initiated the Employment Workshop redesign, the President established the joint VEI Task Force to develop proposals to maximize the career readiness of all Servicemembers. This effort built on the existing TAP program to improve transition-related activities and services, and provide a clear path to civilian employment; success in an academic or technical training program; or the successful start-up of an independent business or non-profit organization.

The Task Force includes representatives from DOL, DoD, VA, DHS and the Department of Education, the Small Business Administration, and the Office of Personnel Management. The President approved the Task Force's recommendations to fundamentally redesign TAP, which launched an effort to adopt the enhanced training and service-delivery mode in July of 2012, called the Transition Goals, Plans, Success program or Transition GPS.

The VOW to Hire Heroes Act of 2011

The Task Force also established goals for partner agencies to bolster their respective components of the TAP program and incorporate the requirements of the VOW Act, which the President signed into law in November 2011. In particular, the VOW Act mandated several reforms to further enhance TAP, including mandating participation in the DOL Employment Workshop for nearly all transitioning Servicemembers.

In addition, the VOW Act required that DOL use contract facilitators in delivering its Employment Workshops to ensure a standardized, high-quality professional cadre of facilitators. Over the past few months, the Department completed the transfer to contract facilitation, as well as the full implementation of the new Employment Workshop curriculum at all military installations worldwide.

DOL Employment Workshop Redesign – Pilot

DOL has worked closely with its partner agencies, including those on the VEI Task Force, to ensure that the redesigned Employment Workshop is seamlessly integrated into the overall

Transition GPS model. In February 2012, DOL conducted a three-month pilot of the redesigned TAP Employment Workshop at eleven military bases, including:

- Air Force (2) – Travis AFB, CA, McGuire AFB, NJ
- Army (4) – Ft Bragg NC, Ft Belvoir VA, Ft Knox KY, Ft Drum NY
- Coast Guard (1)– US Coast Guard Training Center Cape May, NJ
- Marine Corps (2) – Marine Corps Base Quantico, VA, Marine Corps Air Station Miramar, CA
- Navy (2) – Naval Air Station Jacksonville, FL, Naval Base San Diego, CA

During this pilot phase, the Department also conducted a formal third-party evaluation to determine if the redesigned curriculum provided exiting Servicemembers with the skills, tools, and resources needed to transition back into civilian employment. The evaluation’s findings and recommendations were based on over 5,200 comments from: (1) observational visits to the 11 military bases piloting the new TAP curriculum; (2) in-person interviews with facilitators involved in conducting the pilot-tests at these bases; (3) a survey of participants attending workshops at the pilot sites; and (4) a survey of facilitators conducting these workshops. Proposed revisions included:

- Reduce the size of the participant manual.
- Improve content by correcting editing mistakes, inaccuracies, outdated material, and by ensuring that high interactivity is built into the curriculum.
- Develop remedial/retraining methods to help current TAP facilitators become familiar with the newly designed curriculum.
- Rollout new revised DOL Employment Workshop by July 2, 2012 in conjunction with DoD Transition GPS Pilots.

Based on the findings above and comments from hundreds of different organizations and individuals, including Federal and State governmental entities, Veterans’ Service Organizations (VSOs), Members of Congress, experts in adult learning, State Workforce Agencies, Veterans, and transitioning Servicemembers, DOL fine-tuned the Employment Workshop curriculum and finalized it in June 2012.

Transition Goals, Plans, Success (GPS) Program

In July 2012, President Obama announced the launch of “Transition GPS” which is the culmination of the TAP redesign efforts, which establishes career readiness standards, extends the transition preparation through the entire span of a Servicemember’s career, and provides counseling to facilitate the development of an Individual Transition Plan (ITP). The

ITP provides a framework for the Servicemembers to achieve realistic career goals based on an assessment of their personal and family needs as well as unique skills, knowledge, experience, interests and abilities.

The enhanced TAP consists of a five-day series of training sessions and workshops that make up the core curriculum which all Servicemembers are required to attend. As part of the core curriculum, transitioning Servicemembers also have the option of participating in tailored tracks including: (1) an education track; (2) a technical training track; and (3) an entrepreneurship track.

The Transition GPS Core curriculum was piloted from July to August 2012 at seven installations, with pilots conducted by each of the Services, including both the Active and Reserve Components. Each location had representatives from DoD, VA and Labor on-hand to provide assessment of the curriculum for the Core Transition GPS and the Department of Labor Employment Workshop. The result is a well-received, well-tested curriculum that was developed to be responsive to customer input and inclusive of training best practices for adult learners.

3-Day DOL Employment Workshop - Curriculum

The redesigned DOL Employment Workshop focuses on experiential learning and best practices, with an increased emphasis on networking and communicating the Veteran's job skills to the employer. The new curriculum is specifically geared toward the mechanics of getting a good job, exploring career interests, searching the labor market, building resumes, preparing for interviews, and negotiating job offers.

For example, on Day 1 participants learn how to develop a "Change Management Plan" to identify an overall strategy for transitioning into the workforce, explore new careers that complement the skills and expertise learned through their military service, develop a master job application from which targeted resumes can be built, and learn how to research the job market using the latest search tools.

On Day 2, participants learn how to analyze the job market, understand the difference between applications and resumes, use social media in job searches and networking, and develop targeted resumes.

During Day 3, participants learn about Federal jobs and how that process differs from the private sector. Finally, they work extensively on their interviewing skills and end the workshop with a mock interview exercise.

I am happy to report that the new curriculum has been well received as demonstrated by preliminary feedback from over 2,000 attendees during January and February of this year, who gave the Employment Workshop an overall rating of 4.4 on a scale of 1-5, with 5 being the highest rating. The data strongly suggest that the Department's revised Employment Workshop is meeting the high expectations of its customers.

Continued Support through Priority of Service

During the DOL Employment Workshop, Servicemembers will be given a "Gold Card" which entitles them to enhanced intensive services for six months by an employment specialist through the almost 2,700 American Job Centers (AJC). The AJCs serve as the cornerstone for the Nation's workforce investment system and provide a range of services from counseling, resume writing workshops, job skills assessments, occupational training, and on-the-job training and job placement services.

Veterans and eligible spouses receive priority of service in all qualified DOL- funded employment and training programs. As a result, DOL offers continuous employment services support to veterans and leverages department-wide programs to ensure holistic job services are provided. In addition, veterans with significant barriers to employment will receive intensive employment services at AJCs by Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program (DVOP) specialists funded through the Jobs for Veterans Service Grant (JVSG) program.

H.R.631 – "Servicemembers' Choice in Transition Act of 2013"

H.R. 631, the "Servicemembers' Choice in Transition Act of 2013," would amend TAP to require it to consist of at least five days of instruction as follows: (1) at least one day of service-specific pre-separation training; (2) up to one day for instruction in preparation for employment, preparation for education or career or technical training, preparation for entrepreneurship, or other options determined by the Secretary of the military department concerned; (3) at least two days of in-depth instruction of the participant's choice in any of

the aforementioned subjects; and (4) up to one day of training in VA benefits provided as well as other subjects determined by the Secretary of the military department concerned.

The Department has serious concerns about H.R.631 because we believe it would significantly undercut our efforts to support the intent of the VOW Act to provide separating Servicemembers with the training and support they need to successfully transition to the civilian workforce. H.R.631 would undermine the implementation currently underway for the redesigned DOL Employment Workshop and the new Transition GPS training and delivery model that DoD, VA, DOL and other agencies have been working together to execute.

Section 1144 of Title 10 requires the Secretary of Labor to “establish and maintain a program to furnish counseling, assistance in identifying employment and training opportunities, help in obtaining such employment and training and other related information and services to members of the armed forces...” Congress, through the VOW Act and other legislation, also mandated that DOL include certain elements in the TAP Employment Workshop.

The VOW Act further enhanced TAP by requiring mandatory participation for almost all transitioning Servicemembers and requiring contractor facilitation of the Employment Workshop to ensure a standardized curriculum. As the VOW Act intended, Servicemembers benefit from taking the DOL Employment Workshop regardless of their immediate plans upon leaving military service. Even Servicemembers who intend to enroll in school or start a business will need the skills that are provided during the DOL Employment Workshop, such as translating their military skills and building a résumé of their accomplishments.

Moreover, as the Members of the Subcommittee know, the Department just completed a major effort aimed at redesigning the Employment Workshop curriculum to align it with emerging best practices in career development and to make it more engaging and relevant in light of the unique challenges facing returning Servicemembers. The redesign of the Employment Workshop was an extensive process that evolved over 2 years, involving many federal agencies, pilot programs and curriculum reviews. DOL wanted to ensure we were providing the best possible product.

After extensive review and consultation with experts on training, education and the military services, DOL determined that the optimal delivery was a three-day format. This decision was based on the amount of time it would take to properly deliver all the material

required under Section 1144 of Title 10 and to meet the learning objectives and ensure an effective and efficient program to prepare our separating Servicemembers for their transition to the civilian workforce.

Over the past few months, the Department completed the transfer to contract facilitation and full implementation of the new Employment Workshop curriculum at military installations worldwide. As stated previously, the new curriculum has been well received and while the data strongly suggest that the Department's revised Employment Workshop is headed in the right direction, H.R. 631 could significantly undermine these efforts.

Under H.R.631, the Department would have to completely redesign the new curriculum in structure, content, and delivery in consultation with other agencies, which would significantly increase program costs. Moreover, the Department would likely have to re-compete and re-negotiate the facilitation contract. The Department has serious concerns about the feasibility of implementing all of the proposed changes in only six months.

Most importantly, however, the overall impact of this legislation would delay effective assistance to transitioning Servicemembers. These men and women deserve the best possible services we can provide, and this bill would force us to start over.

Conclusion

The Department looks forward to working with the Subcommittee to ensure that our transitioning Servicemembers have the resources and training they need to successfully transition to the civilian workforce. Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Davis, distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, this concludes my statement. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I would be pleased to answer any questions you may have.