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BEFORE THE  
HOUSE ARMED SERVICES MILITARY  
PERSONNEL SUBCOMMITTEE**

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Chairman Wilson, Ranking Member Davis, and Members of the Subcommittee, I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss the recommendations of the Presidential Veterans Employment Initiative (VEI) Task Force, including the Transition Goals, Plans, Success (GPS) program and the status of the Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) implementation of the requirements of the VOW to Hire Heroes Act of 2011 (VOW Act).

**Presidential Veterans Employment Initiative (VEI) Task Force**

In August 2011, the President announced his comprehensive plan to address the issues of unemployment and the educational and entrepreneurial opportunities for, returning Servicemembers and Veterans struggling to find a job suitable with their experience and talent. A key part of the President's plan was his call for a "career-ready military." He specifically directed the Department of Defense (DoD) and VA to work closely with other Agencies and his economic and domestic policy teams, in leading a joint VEI Task Force. The task force's main goal was to develop a new training and services delivery model to ensure all Servicemembers have the support they need and deserve when they transition from military to civilian life. In December 2011, the task force provided four recommendations to the President for a redesigned Transition Assistance Program (TAP), called Transition GPS.

The first recommendation was to adopt standards of career readiness for transitioning Servicemembers so when they leave the military they have met defined standards of career readiness.

The second recommendation was to implement a revamped TAP curriculum (now known as Transition GPS) to provide Servicemembers with a set of value-added training programs and services to equip them with the set of tools they need to pursue their post-military goals successfully. VA was charged with re-defining the introduction of VA benefits and services to transitioning Servicemembers, and for the development of the Technical Training Track, one of three two-day Transition GPS Tracks that Servicemembers have the option of attending. The new Transition GPS extends the length of the transition program period from three days to five to seven days, strengthens, standardizes, and expands counseling and guidance for Servicemembers before leaving the military, and transforms the military's approach to education, training, and credentialing for Servicemembers.

The third recommendation was to implement a "Capstone Event." This means Servicemembers should have the opportunity shortly before they depart the military to validate and verify they have met the Career Readiness Standards, receive the services they desire, and be directed to the resources and benefits available to them as Veterans.

The fourth recommendation was to implement a "Military Life Cycle" transition model to prepare Servicemembers for transition over the entire span of their military career and not just in the last few months of their service in the military. The Capstone Event and Military Life Cycle will be implemented by the end of fiscal year (FY) 2013 and FY 2014 respectively.

These overarching recommendations intend to transform Servicemembers' transition to Veteran status into a well-planned, organized progression which equips

them to make informed career decisions and advances them toward achievement of their goals. The end state will be a transformed process that takes place throughout a Servicemember's military career, in addition to the new Transition GPS program.

### **VOW Act**

In November 2011, Congress passed and the President signed the VOW Act, which included steps to improve the existing TAP for Servicemembers. Among other things, the VOW Act made participation in several components of TAP mandatory for all Servicemembers (except in certain limited circumstances), including pre-separation counseling, a VA briefing, and DOL's Employment Workshop by November 21, 2012. TAP is conducted under the auspices of a memorandum of understanding between VA and the Departments of Labor (DOL), Defense (DoD), and Homeland Security, who work together to coordinate transition programs on installations.

In July 2012, President Obama publicly announced the redesign of the Transition GPS program to assist our separating Servicemembers with successfully transitioning to the civilian workforce, starting a business, and/or pursuing higher education.

### **VA's Implementation of VOW / VEI**

VA met the VOW Act timeline. As of November 21, 2012, VA is providing the VA Benefits Briefing to 100 percent of transitioning Servicemembers. As of April 1, 2013, briefers have been deployed to conduct the enhanced VA briefings at 37 percent of the 208 Transition GPS locations within the United States. The other 63 percent of the locations are still receiving the legacy briefings. To date, VA has deployed 165 contract briefers to deliver the enhanced program and by the end of FY 2013, all 208 locations within the United States will be receiving enhanced briefings.

VA is also in the process of working with DoD in defining a memorandum of agreement to begin deploying the enhanced briefings overseas. VA is already working with the Army in delivering virtual briefings to Servicemembers across the globe, in which instructors provide Live Meeting sessions to students grouped together, learning

the content material at the same time. Additionally, we are working with DoD to develop online courses of the VA briefings to be housed on DoD's Joint Knowledge Online website, which allow participants to access courses according to their own schedules and to train at their own pace.

### **VA's Transition from Legacy TAP**

Before discussing the enhanced VA briefings, I would like to explain VA's legacy TAP briefing. VA's legacy briefing is slide-intensive and provided by trained VA personnel (to include Military Services Coordinators (MSCs), Veterans Service Representatives (VSRs), etc.) from our regional offices on military installations in the United States and Puerto Rico. This legacy briefing is also provided to Servicemembers stationed outside the United States by overseas MSCs who are temporarily assigned in the United Kingdom, Germany, Italy, Spain, Okinawa, Japan and Korea. Additionally, VA provides transition assistance briefings to demobilizing Reserve and National Guard members at the request of the Services. These briefings are typically held at the unit's home station after completion of a deployment.

VOW/VEI required VA to create enhanced benefits briefings within the Transition GPS Core Curriculum, as well as develop curriculum to provide the Transition GPS career technical training track, which is training for those seeking job-ready skills and industry-recognized credentials in shorter-term training programs. VA's revised briefings for Transition GPS take the place of the legacy briefing and include six hours of interactive instruction, replacing the previous lecture and slide-deck presentation. The new format is dynamic, instructor-led, and classroom-based. Questions, activities, videos, and research are interspersed to keep Servicemembers engaged. It is flexible to enable blended delivery methods in support of long-term Service objectives. The six hours are broken down into two briefings known as the VA Benefits I Briefing which is four hours in duration and includes information provided in the legacy Disabled Transition Assistance Program (DTAP), and the VA Benefits II Briefing which is two hours long. They are provided by both VA employees and contract personnel that are instructors who go through a rigorous two-week training prior to facilitating the classes.

Rather than viewing a lengthy slide presentation, Servicemembers participating in Benefits I and II Briefings experience interactive activities that teach them how to review, apply for, and receive the benefits and services they have earned. The VA Benefits I Briefing informs Servicemembers about VA benefits including education, health care, compensation, life insurance, and home loans, as well as vocational rehabilitation and employment benefits and counseling provided by VA. The VA Benefits II Briefing provides an orientation to benefits registration (including an introduction to the eBenefits portal and MyHealthVet) and a detailed overview of the disability compensation process. It also provides additional information about healthcare options available through VA.

### **Transition GPS Technical Training Track**

As part of the roll out of the Transition GPS Curriculum, Servicemembers will have the option of selecting from three two-day tailored tracks within the Transition GPS curriculum: an education track for those pursuing a college education; a career technical training track for those seeking job-ready skills and industry-recognized credentials in shorter-term training programs; and an entrepreneurship track for those wanting to start a business. VA developed and piloted the technical training track curriculum, which consists of 16-hours of instruction during which participants will define career goals, identify prerequisites and credentialing options, and find technical training opportunities.

After piloting the track at the Marine Corps Base in Quantico, Virginia and demonstrating it to key stakeholders in February 2013, VA is currently making modifications and will pilot the revised technical training track curriculum in June 2013 for the remaining Service components. VA and its agency partners will assess the technical training track pilots during July 2013 and begin deployment shortly thereafter.

### **Measuring the Quality of Briefings and Briefers**

Quality delivery of VA's products and services is essential to the success of Transition GPS and implementing the task force's VEI recommendations. As previously mentioned, there have been many changes to the VA briefing and curriculum. During the summer of 2012, pilots were conducted to test the revised VA Benefits curriculum and, as a result, modifications were made to how the current briefings are delivered today. VA continues to make improvements to the curriculum on a quarterly basis through feedback provided by Servicemembers, briefers, and VA subject matter experts to ensure consistency and accuracy of the program and individual presentation skills.

We also have set high standards for our contract briefers delivering the enhanced briefings. During the two-week training process where they learn presentation skills and the VA curriculum, they also take a written exam comprised of 30 questions that measure their ability to research and understand VA benefits. The exam ensures the contract briefers are able to utilize resources to answer questions related to VA benefits.

A presentation evaluation was also put in place to measure instructor proficiency in presenting the 4-hour and 2-hour VA benefits briefings. Trainees must show 80 percent proficiency in their platform skills to pass the training. Criteria for evaluating briefers includes accuracy in relaying content; professionalism; student engagement; use of technology; and control of the classroom. Once in the field, briefers must demonstrate at least a 90-percent proficiency on quality assurance evaluations to continue providing briefings. Briefers who do not meet the minimum proficiency will be provided additional guidance, education, and assistance to help them achieve the minimum quality standards.

In addition to VA Benefits I and II Briefings, VA contract briefers also offer individual guidance, providing one-on-one benefits assistance to Servicemembers. Individual assistance does not include assisting Servicemembers in filing disability compensation claims. VA contract briefers answer specific questions inherent to the VA benefits briefings and assist in the navigation of eBenefits. They also refer

Servicemembers who need assistance with disability claim development and other VA services to the appropriate Veterans Service Organization, Military Services Coordinator, VA Regional Office, VA Medical Center, National Call Center, or Vet Center, as well as referring them to DoD points of contact, installations, and resources.

### **Measuring Success of Transition GPS**

Measuring the overall success of the VOW Act and VEI is multi-faceted, comprehensive, and requires close coordination with all VEI Task Force members. VA continues to work with our partner stakeholders through a DoD/VA Executive Steering Committee and is participating in a Performance Management Working Group. The Working Group has identified 17 performance metrics for which we are establishing baselines in fiscal year 2013. DoD has also implemented a participant assessment application, which went live on April 1 to track participant satisfaction with all components of the Transition GPS program, to include the VA curriculum. We are expecting the first consolidated report in June 2013.

In addition, VA has begun to collect demographic data to assess participation and attendance and to understand and refine the resources required to provide optimum delivery of services to military personnel and their families. We are also measuring our throughput data to compare to DoD's annual projections of approximately 307,000 Servicemembers participating in TAP per year. The collection of this information will allow us to determine if VA has the right capability in the right place. Currently, we are on track, however, to validate the demand numbers and staffing, we need to fully roll out the program prior to making any major adjustments or modifications to VA's current implementation and staffing strategy.

As the implementation process continues, we expect to gain insights into what is operationally working and what needs improvement, and we will appropriately modify the program to address needs of Servicemembers. The Task Force may also modify aspects of the program to address areas in which Servicemembers' transition outcomes

may be falling short and to ensure Career Readiness Standards for Servicemembers are met.

### **Legislation and Potential Impacts**

Recently, a bill was introduced in the House, H.R. 631, "Servicemembers' Choice in Transition Act of 2013," that would amend section 1144 of title 10, United States Code, concerning TAP to add a new subsection delineating the Program's format and content. This bill would require that TAP consist of at least five days of instruction to include: (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, 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 subjects described under (2), above; and (4) up to one day of instruction in benefits provided under laws administered by VA and in other subjects determined by the Secretary concerned.

It is our view that the programs implemented as a result of the VOW Act and the President's VEI satisfy the intent underlying H.R. 631. We believe those initiatives should be afforded the opportunity to be fully implemented and assessed before further legislation in this area is enacted. Allowing agencies to proceed under current plans would provide greater flexibility in implementing improvements and making adjustments based on accurate data analysis during assessment.

### **Conclusion**

VA is honored to continue our role in assisting with the transition of Servicemembers from military to civilian life. This program is designed to give men and women in the Service and their families an opportunity to hear and learn more about their benefits, research benefits to fit their individual needs, and equip them with a plan for success outside of the military. VA continually seeks to improve the quality and breadth of our outreach services to all components -- Active Duty, Reserves, and National Guard -- and work with our agency partners. VA fully supports the

Administration's and Congressional efforts to ensure that transitioning Servicemembers are ready for employment or education upon separation.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my statement. I would be pleased to answer any questions you or other Members of the Subcommittee may have at this time.