

**STATEMENT OF  
CURTIS L. COY  
DEPUTY UNDER SECRETARY FOR ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY  
VETERANS BENEFITS ADMINISTRATION  
DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS  
BEFORE THE  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY  
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS**

**SEPTEMBER 12, 2013**

Good morning, Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Takano, and other Members of the Subcommittee. I am pleased to join you this morning to discuss the implementation and performance of the Veterans Retraining Assistance Program (VRAP) as well as the collaboration between the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and Department of Labor (DOL) in our efforts to ensure successful transitions from training to employment.

Implementation of VRAP

On November 11, 2011, the President signed into law the "VOW to Hire Heroes Act of 2011" (Public Law 112-56). Within this law, section 211 established VRAP to assist unemployed Veterans, ages 35-60. VRAP provides up to 12 months of educational assistance to Veterans enrolled in a VA-approved program at a community college or technical school that will train the Veteran for employment in any one of 211 high-demand career fields. To be eligible for participation, the Veteran must not have been enrolled in any Federal or state job-training program in the six months ending on the date of application, must have received other than a dishonorable discharge, must have no other VA education benefits available for use, and cannot be in receipt of compensation for a service-connected disability rated totally disabling by reason of

unemployability. The law authorized VA to provide VRAP benefits to 45,000 participants who met eligibility requirements beginning in fiscal year (FY) 2012 and an additional 54,000 participants beginning in FY 2013.

In just under 6 months of the law being enacted, VA and DOL collaboratively leveraged existing IT systems to begin accepting applications on May 15, 2012, to meet the statutory program start date of July 1, 2012. VA received over 45,000 applications in the first 4 months the application was available. As of August 29, 2013, VA has received more than 136,000 VRAP applications and issued over 119,000 certificates of eligibility to Veterans. VA has provided over \$418 million in program benefits directly to more than 63,000 Veterans. More than 30,000 VRAP participants are currently enrolled in school. VA continues to look for ways to increase the number of VRAP beneficiaries and has notified the Regional Processing Offices to continue accepting applications until 99,000 Veterans have enrolled in training or October 1, 2013, whichever occurs first.

### **Partnership with DOL**

The 211 high-demand career fields eligible for training assistance under VRAP were identified by our partners at DOL. To date, the most popular areas of study under VRAP are: Computer support specialist; Substance abuse and behavioral disorder counselor; Business operations manager; General and operations manager; Heating, air conditioning, and refrigeration mechanic; Heavy and tractor-trailer truck driver; Cook; Medical assistant; Paralegal and legal assistant; and Registered nurse. These ten careers account for over 48 percent of all VRAP enrollees.

VA entered into a memorandum of understanding with DOL, prior to the inception of VRAP, with the goal of ensuring Veterans have a smooth transition from training to employment. VA compiles a weekly report for DOL that indicates the location of VRAP applicants. VA and DOL are nearing completion of a new data transfer agreement with DOL to increase the level of data shared between the two Departments. VA is working with DOL to receive employment outcomes as it becomes available. We defer to DOL to discuss employment services offered to VRAP participants.

### **VRAP Outreach**

VA developed an aggressive outreach campaign to raise awareness about VRAP. VA produced and aired two radio public service announcements on more than 1,600 stations. VA also produced and aired two Internet and television advertisements on the following networks: CBS, ABC, Verizon, Comcast, the Pentagon Channel, Disney, and ESPN. These advertisements were geographically targeted to reach the 25 counties or metropolitan areas with the highest unemployment. VA also created multiple print advertisements and worked with several periodicals to have advertisements published to include the Military Times and its service branch counterparts.

To increase VA's Internet presence, VA created a VRAP Web site, which has had more than 3 million visits since its inception. The success of the VRAP Web site can be attributed to our Google Ad campaign that resulted in over 30,000 visits to the site as well as our direct e-mail notifications of the program sent to more than 800,000 Veterans. Over 200,000 e-mails were read, and over 75,000 of those who

read the e-mail visited our VRAP Web site. Additionally, VA continues to discuss the VRAP program using our numerous social media presences.

VA collaborated with DOL and the Department of Defense to ensure VRAP was included in the newly revised Transition Assistance Program (TAP). The new TAP provides Servicemembers with information on VRAP, so they are aware of the program and its benefits. VA has also worked with Veterans Service Organizations, such as the American Legion and Veterans of Foreign Wars, to train their national staff on VRAP and to provide information to them for dissemination at their national, regional, and local conferences, as well as for inclusion in their national membership publications. VA created postcards, posters, and pamphlets for distribution at national, regional, and local events such as job fairs. VA coordinated with several nationwide retailers to have VRAP flyers distributed to their customers during Veterans Day 2012. In addition, VA sent e-mails to over 1,000 community colleges and trade schools to publicize the program.

VA is not only focused on contacting potential VRAP applicants but is also making significant efforts to reach those Veterans who received a certificate of eligibility and have not yet enrolled in school. We currently have over 75 e-mail distribution lists containing over 3,000 e-mail contacts and continue to actively spread the word about the VRAP opportunity.

### **VRAP Success Stories**

VRAP has proven to be a valuable program to Veterans who are eligible to take advantage of its benefits. Eligible Veterans have been able to turn negative personal

circumstances into accomplishments by pursuing education opportunities through VRAP. One particular Veteran, John Luque, had completed 4 years of active duty in the Navy before leaving the service and starting a career in real estate. Unfortunately, once the real estate market crashed, his projects dropped overnight, and John became unemployed and homeless. John then moved to Utah and received assistance from the Utah Department of Work Force Services who recommended that he go to college. After initially thinking that he was not qualified to be a “student,” John took a placement test and was able to successfully enroll at Salt Lake Community College. Working with the VA’s VetSuccess on Campus Counselor at the school, John applied for VRAP benefits and has now almost completed his associate’s degree in business. VRAP has afforded John the opportunity to achieve his goals of opening a non-profit organization that provides emergency housing for homeless Veterans and becoming a Veteran community organizer. VA has a full video describing John’s story on the VA YouTube Channel.

Richmond Community College posted an article on its Web site on May 30, 2013, about another Veteran who has excelled in school using VRAP. The Veteran has made the Dean’s List and was recently awarded a scholarship from the Air-Conditioning, Heating, and Refrigeration Institute to assist with the costs of his program’s second year. VA recognizes the success that Veterans can achieve by utilizing VRAP and supports pending legislation to extend the program to additional Veterans.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my statement. I welcome any questions you, or the other members of the Subcommittee, may have for me.