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TEXAS VETERANS COMMISSION

WITNESS TESTIMONY OF SHAWN DEABAY
DIRECTOR, VETERANS EMPLOYMENT SERVICES, TEXAS VETERANS COMMISSION
TO THE U.S. HOUSE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AFFAIRS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY
FIELD HEARING – WACO, TEXAS

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INTRODUCTION

Good Morning, Chairman Flores, Ranking Member Takano and Members of the Subcommittee. On behalf of our Chairman, Eliseo “Al” Cantu, and the Commissioners of the Texas Veterans Commission, I would like to thank the Subcommittee for this opportunity to testify before you today and for your interest in the efforts the state of Texas has undertaken in order to serve the 1.7 million Veterans in our state.

My name is Shawn Deabay and I have the privilege of serving as the Director of Veterans Employment Services at the Texas Veterans Commission. As such, I am responsible for the management and execution of the Jobs for Veterans State Grant (JVSG) from the U.S. Department of Labor Veteran Employment and Training Services (DOL-VETS) for the state of Texas. I also provide oversight to our new Veterans Entrepreneur Program (VEP).

Joining me today is Mr. Duncan McGhee, the Program Manager for the Veterans Entrepreneur Program (VEP). A veteran of the United States Army, Duncan brings over 30 years of private sector experience as a “serial entrepreneur” prior to building this new program at the Texas Veterans Commission.

TEXAS VETERANS COMMISSION

The Texas Veterans Commission is the Veterans advocacy agency for the state of Texas. Our mission is to advocate for and provide superior service to Veterans in the areas of claims assistance, employment services, education, and grant funding that will significantly improve the quality of life for all Texas Veterans, their families and survivors. The Texas Veterans Commission provides these services through four program areas: Claims Representation and Counseling, Veterans Employment Services, Veterans Education Program, and the Fund for Veterans’ Assistance. Additionally, the Texas Veterans Commission has three initiatives that connect Veterans with services: Veterans Communication and Outreach, Women Veterans Initiative, and the Veterans Entrepreneur Program.

No other state has centralized all of these program areas within their state's Veterans agency. Texas is becoming recognized for aggressively leading on Veteran issues. National leaders have referred to the "Texas-model" when advocating for the integration of Veterans services. This integration allows the agency to remain Veteran focused, with no competing priorities.

VETERANS EMPLOYMENT SERVICES (VES)

The Texas Veterans Commission offers employment services to all Veterans in Texas through our Veterans Employment Services (VES) program. The goal of these services is to match Veteran job seekers with the best opportunities available. In addition, employers are matched with qualified Veterans.

Veterans Employment Representatives (VER) provides a full range of employment services. VERs are specifically trained to assist Veterans with job applications, resume preparation, job matching, job searches, and other employment services. VES has 152 VERs located in 92 Workforce Centers in 75 cities throughout Texas to provide one-on-one assistance to Veterans.

Approximately 99% of funding for VES is provided through a federal grant from the Department of Labor, Veterans' Employment and Training Services (DOL-VETS), with additional state General Revenue to support three (3) FTEs for the Family Employment Assistance Counselor (FEAC) program. Under this grant program, funds are allocated to TVC in direct proportion to the number of Veterans seeking employment within their state.

VETERAN BUSINESS REPRESENTATIVES (VBRs)

To help Texas Veterans get back to work or into better jobs, there must be a substantial coordination with employers. Providing support to employers creates more opportunities to better serve Veterans. Helping employers fill job vacancies provides the greatest potential to positively affect employer relations and improve the well-being of all Veterans.

Through media coverage and active marketing, TVC has been inundated with employer phone calls and email correspondence from across Texas and the nation, eager to hire skilled Veterans. Because of this increased demand TVC expanded the Business Outreach Program to four positions, in 2011, and designating them as Veterans Business Representatives (VBR). The VBR's are strategically located in Houston, Dallas/Fort Worth, San Antonio and Austin and are vested in building relationships with large companies and influential Texas employers in an effort to promote the hiring of highly qualified Veterans. They work hand in hand with Texas Workforce Commission business service units (BSU) to outreach to employers and employer organizations such as SHRM and local chambers of Commerce.

A VBR is an advocate for job-seeking Veterans, through employer outreach activities. VBRs use employer outreach as a tool to promote the advantages of hiring Veterans to employers and employer groups. The focus of the program is on marketing job seeking Veterans/eligible spouses as individuals who have highly marketable skills and experience.

VBRs advocate for Veterans with business, industry, and other community-based organizations by participating in a variety of outreach activities such as:

- Planning and participating in job and career fairs.
- Coordinating with unions, apprenticeship programs, and business organizations to promote employment and training programs for Veterans.
- Informing Federal contractors of their responsibility to recruit and re-train qualified Veterans.
- Promoting credentialing and licensing opportunities.

In 2011 and 2012, the VBRs helped employers recruit for 1,428 jobs. This resulted in 2,819 Veteran resumes being reviewed by employers. Over the next few years the military will continue to draw down troops at an unprecedented level in an economically challenging situation. The VBR program is bridging the gap between job-seeking Veterans and employers that are eager for Veteran employees.

VETERAN ENTREPRENEUR PROGRAM

There is another innovative component to meeting the Veteran employment need in Texas. In April 2012, the Texas Veterans Commission launched a pilot project to focus on promoting entrepreneurship among veterans which has hosted a series of seven seminars throughout the state and assisted over 1,000 Veterans towards entrepreneurship.

Based upon this highly successful pilot project, the Veteran Entrepreneur Program, was formally established by passage of Senate Bill 1476, authored by State Senator Royce West, during the 83rd Regular Session of the Texas Legislature. State Representative Ralph Sheffield, who also sponsored the legislation in the Texas House, successfully secured funding in the state budget to fund this new program.

The purpose of the Veteran Entrepreneur Program is to foster and promote Veteran Entrepreneurship throughout the state of Texas.

Today's Veterans are poised to be the backbone of a new generation of small businesses that can quickly build a sustainable new jobs base in Texas. Veterans are eager to build for themselves, their families, and their Veteran employees, long-term careers and secure retirements through small business ownership.

The goal of Veteran Entrepreneur Program is to create a veritable army of Veteran Entrepreneurs throughout the state of Texas. These Veteran Entrepreneur businesses will add value to the communities where they are established and create employment opportunities for other Veterans.

The Veteran Entrepreneur Program is delivering value to Veterans and the state of Texas in the following ways:

1) Bridging the gap between the available resources and Veteran Entrepreneurs. Through the Veteran Entrepreneur Seminar series and in response to requests from individual Veterans the Entrepreneur Program is connecting Veteran Entrepreneurs with community resources, funding sources and sources of continuing education.

2) Providing one-on-one business guidance and counseling. Veteran Entrepreneurs contact the Veteran Entrepreneur Program seeking answers to a broad array of business challenges across an amazing spectrum. From a mere introduction to simple business ideas to complex strategies for expanding and growing a business the Veteran Entrepreneur Program meets the challenge and, in every case to date, has exceeded expectations.

3) Conducting Seminars. The Veteran Entrepreneur Program conducts a series of seminars around the state that provide a one-stop-shopping experience where Veterans and a broad array of resources come together under one roof. Veterans are not only able to have their specific questions answered in this forum, they also enjoy the advantage of hearing their fellow Veteran Entrepreneurs interface with the resources and are exposed to new ideas and concepts in the process.

To date, the Veteran Entrepreneur Program has attained phenomenal success on a limited budget. From April of 2012 until now, the program has operated with a single, dedicated resource and achieved the following documented successes of veterans served:

Business Plan Assistance	17
Financing & Structure	38
Resource Information	1,146
Total	1,201

The Texas Veterans Commission Veteran Entrepreneur Program will continue to provide the services outlined above but currently is developing the next phase; a “Business Basics 101” course. This will be an application driven program wherein Veteran Entrepreneurs will enter the Program with an idea and leave with the tools, knowledge and funding necessary for successful business ownership.

The Veteran Entrepreneur Program is investigating several existing curriculum sources and engaging several Texas state universities in the creation of entrepreneur curriculum.

CLOSING

The state of Texas is leading on Veteran issues. The Governor, Lieutenant Governor, and the Texas Legislature demonstrated their commitment to the Veterans of Texas this past legislative session by passing a number of key legislative initiatives for Veterans and by obligating significant funding for programs to assist Veterans in our state. State leaders deserve recognition for taking bold actions to serve the Veterans of our state.

Veterans in Texas are also served by an active Congressional delegation that continually seeks to improve the services and benefits provided to them.

Our goal at the Texas Veterans Commission is to assist as many Veterans as we can while continuing to provide high-quality services. There will be thousands of military service men and women coming home over the next few years, which will increase the need for our services. We owe it to our nation's heroes to assist them with their employment needs when they come home. Employment stabilizes Veterans and their family's lives allowing them to make the difficult transition from military to civilian life.

Again, I want to thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. Thank you for the work are doing, and will do, on behalf of Texas Veterans, and all Veterans, of this nation's Armed Forces.