

STATEMENT OF
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VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS OF THE UNITED STATES

BEFORE THE
VETERANS' AFFAIRS SUBCOMMITTEE
ON ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

WITH RESPECT TO

A Review of Veterans Preference in Federal Government Hiring

WASHINGTON, D.C.

April 20, 2016

Chairman Wenstrup, Ranking Member Takano and members of the Subcommittee, on behalf of the nearly 1.7 million members of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States (VFW) and our Auxiliaries, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to testify on veterans' preference in federal government hiring.

It is clear that veterans are an extraordinarily valuable asset to the federal government workforce. While veterans make up only nine percent of the adult population in the United States, they represent over 30 percent of federal government workers, with over 25 percent of those being preference eligible. According to the Office of Personnel Management, these numbers have climbed steadily in recent years. While veteran employees do seem to be concentrated in certain federal agencies such as Defense, Veterans Affairs, and Homeland Security, nearly all agencies have consistently increased the percentages of veterans they employ each year since 2009.

It makes sense that veterans would gravitate towards federal employment, as many of them see civilian public service as a way to continue serving their country after the military. The real winner, of course, is our nation, whose federal workforce benefits greatly from the experience, patriotism, and values that veterans bring with them to their civilian careers. For this reason, we believe that the federal government must continue doing all it can to recruit, hire and retain as many veterans as possible.

Although the data indicates that the veterans' preference is a successful program, there are certain opportunities for improvement that we have identified. First and foremost, we strongly support amending veterans' preference to ensure veterans who served in the Guard and Reserves are afforded the same hiring preferences as their active duty counterparts. Currently, veterans who served after September 11, 2001, are required to have served at least 180 consecutive days on active duty. We believe that this is inconsistent with the way the Department of Defense

(DOD) has utilized the Reserve Component in recent years. In the Post-9/11 era, National Guard and Reservists are frequently called to active duty for short periods of time in order to support deploying units, providing training support, and backfilling their duties at home duty station. These contributions have been critical to DOD's ability to fight the Global War on Terror with an all-volunteer force. For this reason, we strongly support changing the eligibility for veterans' preference to 180 cumulative days on active duty for veterans who served after September 11, 2001.

As for the feedback we receive from VFW members, the most common complaints are from veterans who applied for federal employment but were not hired. We find that there is a common perception in the veterans' community that veterans' preference all but guarantees federal employment. This, of course, is not the case, as veteran applicants must still meet basic job qualifications and be ranked based on their job-related competencies when applying for a position. The 5 and 10 point preference functions as more of a tiebreaker, rather than a guarantee of employment in all cases. We find that veterans also commonly assume that if they are not hired, then it must mean that a non-veteran was hired instead. While the veterans' preference makes it far more likely that a veteran will get an interview, it is not uncommon for several preference eligible veterans to interview for the same position.

To address these misconceptions, we suggest that the Transition Assistance Program (TAP) be reviewed to ensure that proper training is being offered on veterans' preference. This should include both the DOD module, and the Department of Labor's online version of TAP. Although it is already part of the curriculum, it is apparent to us that many veterans remain unclear on what it means and how it is administered.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my testimony and I will be happy to answer any questions you or the Subcommittee members may have.

Information Required by Rule XI2(g)(4) of the House of Representatives

Pursuant to Rule XI2(g)(4) of the House of Representatives, the VFW has not received any federal grants in Fiscal Year 2016, nor has it received any federal grants in the two previous Fiscal Years.

The VFW has not received payments or contracts from any foreign governments in the current year or preceding two calendar years.