

Testimony of Vietnam Veterans of America



Presented by

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BEFORE THE

**House Veterans Affairs Subcommittee on Economics
Opportunity**

REGARDING

**“A review of Veterans Preference in Federal Government
Hiring”**

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Good afternoon Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Takano and members of the House Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity. On behalf of VVA National President John Rowan and all of our officers and members, we thank you for the opportunity for Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA) to appear here today to share our views on the implementation of Veterans Preference by the Department of Veterans Affairs as well as across the federal government.

In our legislative agenda for the 114th Congress, VVA called for measures to strengthen Veterans' Preference laws, focusing on better implementation by and accountability of managers. Much of the problem with veterans' preference is in the implementation. VVA does commend the current Administration for their focus through the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) on hiring veterans, particularly young veterans. These efforts have met with success in many departments and agencies across the government, and dramatically increased the number of veterans working for the Federal government for the first time since President Reagan's second term. The honorable Constance Horner was Director of OPM. It was her commitment to veterans that spurred her to force the bureaucracy to do better in regard to honoring veterans' preference in hiring.

President Obama's issuance of Executive Order (EOP) 13518 on November 9, 2009 has helped reinforce proper use of the Veterans Employment Opportunities Act (VEOA), as well as active utilization of other Federal hiring authorities to bring more veterans into the workforce. The percentage of veterans in the Federal workforce is now about a third of all Federal employees. While the initial impetus came from The White House, Director John Barry was personally and passionately involved in pushing for more veterans to be hired. The "Feds Hire Vets" program has seemed to be of some assistance. The Council on Veterans Employment established by that same 2009 Order has also helped a great deal to focus the attention of the departments and agencies on hiring and retaining veterans.

Despite all of the efforts expended to recruit and hire veterans, we still hear from young veterans that they cannot wend their way through the maze to find a job with the Fed. Additionally we hear from some who were hired and quit after a year or so because they were "bored" or "did not fit in." It seems clear to us that those who come straight from the military into the Fed need a

mentor, perhaps an older veteran, to start learning to negotiate the corporate culture and procedures at that agency, as well as being able to understand the feelings and attitudes of the newer veteran.

Setting up a formal orientation and mentoring program for veterans new to the organization has worked extremely well for many private employers, such as Prudential. It should definitely be tried in Federal agencies. Done properly, it will increase retention. Additionally, managers need to understand that the young veterans just out of the military are used to handling significant responsibilities, often in situations of life or death, depending on how well one does their job. The need to both challenge as well as support these veterans is crucial to their success, and to the overall success of the Federal entities.

Also part of the VVA legislative priorities is the institution of contracting with service disabled veteran-owned small businesses that are veteran preference eligible veteran staffed call centers. The purpose of these call centers would be to collect reports of violations of veterans' preference in Federal departments and agencies. Further, these call centers could be utilized to do a real investigation of each alleged violation. The current system of having the Director of Veterans Employment & Training (DVET), United States Department of Labor receive and investigate all such complaints just does not work very well.

Additionally, the institution of pro-active reviews of practices and patterns in the recruitment, hiring, and retention of veterans in each hiring authority location to the federal workforce would be a giant stride forward. As this is a new way to approach this, many details would need to be worked out.

The Disabled Veteran Affirmative Action Program (DVAAP) should be scrapped. The DVAAP plans for federal entities are never effectively checked for the actual result against the stated "goals" at the end of each year. This thing serves no purpose except to be "fig leaf" for agencies doing nothing or little to hire disabled veterans and other veterans' preference eligible. Furthermore, veterans are not another affirmative action group, period.

The main change to the actual VEOA is to delete the word "knowingly" from that section of the law. Nowhere in civil service or other law does it say that

a manager cannot be punished if he/she did not know they were violating the individual's rights to veterans' preference. In the 18 years since passage of VEOA the number of managers reprimanded and otherwise punished for violating veterans' rights is in the single digits. This is absurd on the face of it.

Thank you for allowing us to share our views on this vital issue with you here today. I would be pleased to answer any questions.

**VIETNAM VETERANS OF AMERICA
Funding Statement
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The national organization Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA) is a non-profit veterans' membership organization registered as a 501(c) (19) with the Internal Revenue Service. VVA is also appropriately registered with the Secretary of the Senate and the Clerk of the House of Representatives in compliance with the Lobbying Disclosure Act of 1995.

VVA is not currently in receipt of any federal grant or contract, other than the routine allocation of office space and associated resources in VA Regional Offices for outreach and direct services through its Veterans Benefits Program (Service Representatives). This is also true of the previous two fiscal years.

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Richard F. “Rick” Weidman is Executive Director for Policy and Government Affairs on the National Staff of Vietnam Veterans of America. As such, he is the primary spokesperson for VVA in Washington. He served as a 1-A-O Army Medical Corpsman during the Vietnam War, including service with Company C, 23rd Med, AMERICAL Division, located in I Corps of Vietnam in 1969.

Mr. Weidman was part of the staff of VVA from 1979 to 1987, serving variously as Membership Service Director, Agency Liaison, and Director of Government Relations. He left VVA to serve in the Administration of Governor Mario M. Cuomo as statewide director of veterans’ employment & training (State Veterans Programs Administrator) for the New York State Department of Labor.

He has served as Consultant on Legislative Affairs to the National Coalition for Homeless Veterans (NCHV), and served at various times on the VA Readjustment Advisory Committee, the Secretary of Labor’s Advisory Committee on Veterans Employment & Training, the President’s Committee on Employment of Persons with Disabilities - Subcommittee on Disabled Veterans, Advisory Committee on Veterans’ Entrepreneurship at the Small Business Administration, and numerous other advocacy posts. He currently serves as Chairman of the Task Force for Veterans’ Entrepreneurship, which has become the principal collective voice for veteran and disabled veteran small-business owners.

Mr. Weidman was an instructor and administrator at Johnson State College (Vermont) in the 1970s, where he was also active in community and veterans affairs. He attended Colgate University (B.A., 1967), and did graduate study at the University of Vermont.

He is married and has four children.