

**A REVIEW OF THE INTERAGENCY TRANSITION AS-
SISTANCE PROGRAM AND THE NEED FOR EN-
HANCED OUTCOME MEASUREMENTS**

HEARING

BEFORE THE

**SUBCOMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC
OPPORTUNITY**

OF THE

**COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
ONE HUNDRED FIFTEENTH CONGRESS
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A REVIEW OF THE INTERAGENCY TRANSITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM AND THE NEED FOR ENHANCED OUTCOME MEASUREMENTS

Wednesday, November 8, 2017

COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS,
U. S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
Washington, D.C.

The Subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 2:03 p.m., in Room 334, Cannon House Office Building, Hon. Jodey Arrington [Chairman of the Subcommittee] presiding.

Present: Representatives Arrington, Wenstrup, Rutherford, Banks, O'Rourke, Takano, and Correa.

STATEMENT OF JODEY ARRINGTON, CHAIRMAN

Mr. ARRINGTON. Good afternoon, everyone. I want to thank everybody for being here, joining us at the Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity's hearing today entitled "A Review of the Interagency Transition Assistance Program and the Need for Enhanced Outcome Measurements."

As we approach Veterans Day this weekend, today's hearing is timely, as today, we will discuss the critical period in a servicemember's career where they go down the path from Active Duty to civilian. The goals of today's hearing are to discuss the administration of the Transition Assistance Program, also known as TAP, as well as transitioning servicemember's ability and flexibility to attend TAP in an appropriate time prior to their separation from the military.

TAP is a critically important—rather, is critically important for today's servicemembers, because if we can get it right at the outset of a servicemember's transition from Active Duty, then I believe we can mitigate—I am sorry. I am having like an allergen reaction here and so I may be calling on somebody to help me. I will try to make it through this. I am really not just choked up. I do care a lot about the TAP program, but I am not getting carried away. We are prone to theatrics from time to time, but not that good. So bear with me. I apologize.

TAP is critically important for today's servicemembers. We have got to get it right. If we do, we mitigate many issues that have plagued and continue to plague previous generations of American veterans.

The information on financial management, job search skills, and veterans' benefits are much improved from what was being pro-

vided to servicemembers under previous versions of TAP, which many referred to as, quote, death by PowerPoint. And while TAP's structure and curriculum have been greatly improved over the years, we can and should do more to prioritize the successful transition of our servicemen and -women into their civilian lives.

Before I turn this over to my Ranking Member, I want to briefly make a few points. The GAO report that is being released today provides great information on how the Department of Defense is tracking the participation rate of servicemembers attending the TAP program. DoD's publicly released data for fiscal year 2016 shows that 94 percent of National Guard and Reserve members completed pre-separation counseling and TAP.

However, the real figures reported by GAO found that DoD was missing data for some of the TAP-eligible national guardsmen and reservists and that the actual percentage could be as low as 47 percent. And GAO also found that while DoD talked about a 97 percent attendance by Active duty members, that number did not account for all TAP-eligible servicemembers and, therefore, the percentage could be much lower.

While DoD may say that that is just because forms were lost, that doesn't mean that servicemembers didn't actually attend the training. It is important to make sure we track every servicemember. And in the year of 2017, saying that we lost data is unacceptable. I want to thank GAO for uncovering this problem, and I do trust the DoD will work to ensure all servicemembers are being tracked, regardless of whether or not they are Active or Reserve component.

I also want to echo the comments from the past three chairmen of this Subcommittee by saying that I believe DoD is missing the mark by not placing more emphasis on higher education and other 2-day tracks that are part of TAP. Several years ago, Congress made it mandatory for DoD to allow the participation in this training for those servicemembers who wish to do so. And I will be honest that in light of this requirement, I am more puzzled as to why DoD would reject a recommendation from GAO that they do a better job of tracking this participation. Why would the Department reject an effort to track the compliance with the law?

These tracks are critically important because, under the right circumstances, the post-9/11 GI Bill can provide upwards of \$300,000 in benefits to our veteran. And with the thousands of schools and training programs clamoring for student veterans, we must do everything we can to make sure that our servicemembers are provided with all the information and tools they need to make an informed choice on the right school and how to use their educational benefits.

Another issue that I hope to hear more about today is how the Department of Veterans Affairs, Labor, and Defense are measuring and tracking performance and the long-term outcomes of TAP. That is, is it working? Do we know it is working? How do we know it is working? Where is the data? I have always been a proponent of the need to measure outcomes for any program. Without measurable outcomes, it is impossible to know for certain if the curriculum is working, if the servicemembers are receiving the adequate resources and training for transition of Active Duty.

I wanted to take a moment to commend DoD, VA, and DOL for working together to transform TAP over the past 2 years. I know it is a challenge to get this right, and I think a lot of strides have been made. The report, the GAO report stated, while unemployment rates for veterans continue to remain low, over half of post-9/11 veterans will face a period of unemployment upon transition. It is our job to continue to work together to improve the process and facilitate a smooth transition to address the unemployment gap.

I look forward to hearing from our panelists, and I appreciate all of you guys for being here today.

I now yield to the Ranking Member, Mr. O'Rourke, for any opening remarks he may have.

STATEMENT OF BETO O'ROURKE, RANKING MEMBER

Mr. O'ROURKE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I think we all on this Committee agree that it is critically important that we get this transition between life in service to country in our Armed Forces and life as a civilian as a veteran right and that we don't have it right today. When we look at access to health care, to housing, the ability to integrate in the workforce or in higher education, we are still falling far short of the mark.⁷

Yesterday, we were able to celebrate passage of a bill that improves access to mental health care for veterans who have an other than honorable discharge, improving their likelihood of successfully transitioning and, frankly, of living, since they have twice as high a suicide rate as veterans who have a higher level of discharge.

I want to make sure that we are paying close and careful attention to the TAP program, that we understand, as the Chairman has said, what it is that we are investing in it and how we can measure its performance, the outcomes, the help that it should be delivering to those servicemembers who are transitioning into civilian life.

Perhaps the two most important powerful hearings that I have been in, one I know Dr. Wenstrup was in with us because I think it was our first term in Congress and on this Committee, was with family members who had lost a son or daughter to suicide. And they gave us incredibly powerful, helpful testimony in how we can improve the transition process from Active Duty into civilian life, where we had failed before, and how we could improve upon it.

I especially think of the Somers family, Howard and Jean, parents of Daniel Somers, who took his life, who have, every single day since Daniel's passing, been working with me and my colleagues and the administration, whether it was President Obama or President Trump, to improve this period of transition, and have even offered a specific policy idea in a reverse boot camp that I think merits more study and discussion and perhaps moving forward on.

The other was one that we had this year with a panel that was talking about some of the consequences of untreated post-traumatic stress disorder. And I remember Sebastian Junger, who Dr. Wenstrup really turned me on to and gave me a copy of his book, talking about the crisis that transitioning servicemembers face as they try to integrate into civilian life, far too often unsuccessfully, unable to get to work, to transition into academic life, to transition

into family life, and the very real mortal toll that is taking on our population of veterans in this country as long as we do not figure this out and have a more effective, seamless transition.

So I am very interested in the answers to the questions that the Chairman raised and that I am sure other Members of this Committee are going to raise. I am very much looking forward to the testimony from GAO, my favorite agency in government, which keeps us all accountable, Department of Defense, Department of Labor, Veterans Affairs, and the different representatives of the service branches.

So grateful to you, Mr. Chairman, for bringing this hearing together, very much looking forward to the answers we are going to get today.

Mr. ARRINGTON. Thank you, Ranking Member.

And now let's welcome our first panel to the witness table. Joining us today, Ms. Cindy Brown Barnes, Director of Education, Workforce, and Income Security for the U.S. Government Accountability Office, GAO; Ms. Margarita Devlin, Executive Director of the Benefits Assistance Services at the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs; General Ivan Denton, Director of the Office of National Programs for the Veterans' Employment and Training Service at the U.S. Department of Labor; and Mr. Judd Lyons, Director of the Defense Personnel and Family Support Center for the Office of Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness at the U.S. Department of Defense.

Thanks again for your time and insights.

Ms. Brown Barnes, you are now recognized for 5 minutes.

STATEMENT OF CINDY BROWN BARNES

Ms. BROWN BARNES. Chairman Arrington, Ranking Member O'Rourke, and Members of the Subcommittee, I am pleased to be here to discuss the report we are issuing today on the Transition Assistance Program, or TAP.

Since 2015, hundreds of thousands of servicemembers have left the military and transitioned into civilian life, with many more to follow. To help them, the VOW to Hire Heroes Act of 2011 mandates that DoD require all eligible separating servicemembers participate in TAP to get the support they need in landing a job, going back to school, starting their own business, or retiring.

Today, I will cover, one, how DoD publicly reports its TAP performance goals; two, how many servicemembers went through TAP; three, how many were deemed to be career-ready; and finally, four, how well DoD monitors key areas of program implementation.

In summary, we found that DoD needs to improve performance reporting and monitoring of TAP requirements. The figure shown on the monitor is a comparison of DoD's public and internal reports. We found that DoD's public reporting may have misstated TAP performance, because DoD did not disclose the data we[C1][HL2]re missing for 48 percent of National Guard and Reserves and 12 percent of Active-duty servicemembers in fiscal year 2016. When DoD publicly reported that it had exceeded its performance goals, it excluded these individuals, even though they were eligible for TAP.

However, DoD's internal reports tell a different story. The top two blue bars show that publicly, DoD reported that over 90 percent of Guard and Reserves attended TAP's required courses were deemed career-ready or were referred to partner agencies. Had all eligible Guard and Reserves been included in the calculation, their percentage could have been as low as about 46 percent instead of 94 percent—this is shown in the two beige or lighter color bars immediately below—in which case DoD would not have met its performance goals.

Turning to the third and fourth blue bars, DoD's public reports show that a higher percentage of Active Duty servicemembers met the agency's performance goals. But the percentage is lower, according to DoD's internal reports, again, because the calculations were not based on the entire TAP-eligible population.

We recommended that DoD's public reports either be based on all TAP-eligible servicemembers or else clarify the extent of the missing data. DoD agreed to include the disclosures for the missing data in all of its public reports for fiscal year 2018 and beyond.

With regard to participation, DoD met its goal. Eighty-five percent of Active-duty servicemembers took required TAP courses, while 3 percent did not. We do not know about the remaining 12 percent due to missing data.

As far as the additional 2-day classes, we found that fewer than 15 percent of servicemembers participated and that assessing higher education was the most frequently taken class. DoD also met its 85 percent goal for the proportion of servicemembers who were deemed career-ready, and if they did not, they were referred to partner agencies for additional support services as required.

In terms of when TAP should be taken, the law requires servicemembers to begin the process at least 90 days before they leave the military. While nearly three-quarters started TAP on time, TAP staff told us that those who did not may find it difficult to complete the program or take advantage of additional transition resources. Similarly, servicemembers are required to complete TAP no later than 90 days before leaving the military, but over 53 percent of them did not finish TAP on time.

In terms of monitoring, we found that DoD does not currently monitor compliance with three requirements: Timeliness of TAP participation, whether servicemembers are able to take additional 2-day classes if they want, and whether they take the online version of TAP under appropriate circumstances. We recommended monitoring and reporting for all three areas and that the reports should be shared with unit commanders to ensure compliance.

DoD generally agreed with our recommendations, except for tracking access to the 2-day classes. DoD said these classes are part of attaining career readiness standards, a measure which is already being tracked. We continue to believe that DoD needs to separately track access to the additional classes and not just attendance to ensure compliance with the relevant law.

Thank you. I would be happy to respond to any questions you may have.

[THE PREPARED STATEMENT OF CINDY BROWN BARNES APPEARS IN THE APPENDIX]

Mr. ARRINGTON. Thank you, Ms. Barnes.
Ms. Devlin, you are now recognized for 5 minutes.

STATEMENT OF MARGARITA DEVLIN

Ms. DEVLIN. Chairman Arrington, Ranking Member O'Rourke, thank you for the opportunity to discuss the Department of Veterans Affairs contribution to the Transition Assistance Program, or TAP.

With Veterans Day rapidly approaching, this is an opportune time for this hearing to take stock of our efforts to help our transitioning servicemembers and their families and how VA can continue to improve these services.

As a result of the VOW Act passed by Congress in 2011, TAP was redesigned as a cohesive, modular, outcomes-based program that standardized services to better prepare servicemembers to achieve their post-military career goals. The VOW Act also mandated participation in TAP, with a few limited exceptions.

Outcomes from the increased focus and emphasis on education and career development by both VA and DOL content can be seen reflected in the dramatic reduction in veteran unemployment, which has steadily decreased to a low of 2.7 percent in October 2017.

VA's portion of TAP is delivered at over 300 military installations worldwide, through the support of approximately 300 trained VA benefit advisors, and is also available online via DoD's Joint Knowledge Online portal.

VA is collaborating with DoD to align TAP offerings within the military life-cycle framework, which embeds transition planning and preparation throughout the servicemember's military career. For example, as part of accession and onboarding, servicemembers are required to establish a self-service logon and create an e-Benefits account, which gives them and their family member's self-service capabilities for VA and military benefits.

VA benefit advisors deliver the mandatory Benefits I and II courses, which provide education on VA benefits, such as health care, education, vocational rehabilitation and employment, disability compensation, life insurance, home loans. They also assist with capstone events, provide military life-cycle briefings, and provide individual assistance to transitioning servicemembers upon their request.

In fiscal year 2017, approximately 95 percent of our benefits advisors were either veterans themselves or were spouses of veterans or servicemembers. In fiscal year 2017, through August, VA provided more than 63,000 events to more than 500,000 transitioning servicemembers and their families.

VA regularly updates the TAP curriculum to ensure that it aligns with current laws on eligibility, entitlement, and VA benefits and services. VA also designed a new curriculum designed specifically for members of the National Guard and Reserve, as they have unique needs due to their missions and mobilizations, and eligibility for VA programs is often more complex to adjudicate.

VA consistently receives high evaluations from servicemembers who attend Benefits I and II briefings. We average satisfaction rates of 96 percent on information learned, 96 percent also on effec-

tiveness of the facilitators, and 94 percent on confidence gained from the material.

Despite high satisfaction rates, anecdotal information from stakeholders and veterans suggests that a more holistic view, including the psychosocial aspects of the transition to the civilian life, would give VA's TAP program more real-life relevance and would increase the quality of the overall experience. To address this, VA is currently redesigning our TAP curriculum into a more interactive course that addresses the overall transition journey.

VA is leveraging instructional design, based on adult learning principles, to focus on transition decisions and actions that transitioning servicemembers need to consider with respect to their available VA services and benefits. VA also plans to include classroom time for facilitated enrollment and submission of applications for health care and other benefits. VA is scheduled to pilot the new curriculum in January of 2018[C3], with worldwide deployment planned for later this spring of 2018.

To further understand the needs of transitioning servicemembers, VA is working with interagency partners to collect feedback on post-separation outcomes. In 2017, VA awarded a contract to develop a post-separation survey protocol, which will be submitted to the Office of Management and Budget for review in 2018. VA is also collaborating with our VSO partners, veteran peer groups, and other thought leaders to obtain outside input based on the feedback they hear from transitioning servicemembers.

VA is strongly committed to working with DoD and interagency partners to improve TAP by strengthening the curriculum, fully integrating TAP objectives into the military life cycle, and analyzing post-transition survey data. Through these efforts, VA is poised to have greater access to all those in uniform, both Active Duty and National Guard and Reserve, and dramatically reduce the stress of transition.

Thank you for allowing me to address the Committee. Mr. Chairman, this concludes my statement, and I welcome any questions.

[THE PREPARED STATEMENT OF MARGARITA DEVLIN APPEARS IN THE APPENDIX]

Mr. ARRINGTON. Thank you, Ms. Devlin.

General Denton, you are now recognized for 5 minutes.

STATEMENT OF IVAN E. DENTON

Mr. DENTON. Thank you.

Good afternoon, Chairman Arrington, Ranking Member O'Rourke, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee. Thank you for the opportunity to participate in today's hearing so that Department of Labor can discuss how we are working with both DoD and VA to improve TAP.

As the director of the Office of National Programs in the Veterans' Employment Training Service, my office is responsible for managing the Employment Workshop and the Career Technical Training Track, which we now commonly refer to as CTTT.

Prior to discussing TAP employment-related improvements, I would like to highlight three relevant points to this testimony. First, the American economy is improving. As of October, veteran

unemployment rate is down 2.7. Additionally, unemployment compensation claims and participant numbers have dropped to a third of what they were 5 years ago. While there are still approximately 280,000 veterans without jobs that are unemployed, there are 6.1 million job openings. Transitioning servicemembers and veterans can help fill these jobs, and employers are eager to hire them.

Second, the Department proudly served over 1 million veterans, guardsmen and reservists last year. DOL provides funds to the States to operate over 2,400 American Job Centers, which provided employment, training, and support services to over 13 million Americans last year. Over 850,000 of those Americans were veterans, guardsmen, or reservists. Additionally, the Department, of course, provided the employment workshop to over 180,000 last year, which includes, of course, the Guard and Reserve.

Third, Secretary Acosta recently stated four employment goals to assist our veterans, which include: Creating clear career pathways; second, eliminating barriers to employment; third, enabling and promoting apprenticeship opportunities that lead to meaningful careers, as also emphasized in the President's executive order, which is titled "Expanding Apprenticeships in America"; and then finally, increasing the portability of licenses and credentials for both those transitioning, to include spouses.

As it relates to employment improvements that align with the TAP GAO report, I would like to highlight four goals: First, the Department is working with the interagency partners to improve TAP timeliness rates. We assess, in line with both the law and DoD's policy, a transitioning servicemember should begin TAP as early as possible. This allows the servicemember adequate time to participate in one or more of the transition tracks and to include a DoD Skill Bridge, which is growing in its popularity.

Second, the Department continues to improve the Employment Workshop. While the Employment Workshop has consistently received high marks from the participants, we recognize the need for continuous improvement. This is why we have been collaborating over the last year with employers, HR professionals, Veteran Service Organizations, and others to refine their curriculum as part of a regular, deliberate TAP curriculum working group review process.

Major revisions to the DOL EW include: Shifting from a job search approach to a career search approach; and second, highlighting the importance of the three supplemental career tracks and how each can positively impact long-term wage outcomes.

Third, the Department will improve the training available to individuals interested in the apprenticeship and technical careers, and will work with our interagency partners to increase the CTTT participation rates.

In April 2017, DOL assumed responsibility for what we call CTTT, the Career Technical Training Track, which is one of the three tracks. CTTT focuses on apprenticeships and industry recognized credentials. The Department is currently conducting a comprehensive review and will have a revised curriculum out in 2018.

Fourth and finally, the Department will leverage the Veterans' Data Exchange Initiative to improve employment outcomes. In November 2016, the Department began a data transfer process from

the Defense Manpower Data Center. This initiative allows us to gain a better understanding for characteristics of transitioning servicemembers and proactively reach out to them via email to connect them with employment training resources. We are also partnering with our Chief Evaluation Office within DOL to do this.

In conclusion, our long-term TAP strategic goal is for the Nation as a whole to recognize military service as a path to a high-quality civilian career. The future of our country's all-volunteer force depends upon this recognition, and the Department is proud to support this national effort and looks forward to working with the Subcommittee.

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, thank you for allowing me to be here today, and look forward to questions.

[THE PREPARED STATEMENT OF IVAN DENTON APPEARS IN THE APPENDIX]

Mr. ARRINGTON. Thank you, General Denton.

Finally, Mr. Lyons, you are recognized also for 5 minutes.

STATEMENT OF JUDD H. LYONS

Mr. LYONS. Chairman Arrington, Ranking Member O'Rourke, distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you this afternoon.

As director of the Defense Personnel and Family Support Center, I am responsible for policy and program oversight of the Transition Assistance Program, or TAP. In that capacity, I work with a group of professionals who develop effective and clear policy for the Department to issue to the military services for their execution. We also believe that the TAP interagency collaboration is effective, responsive, and committed to advancing the ongoing implementation, assessment, and enhancement of TAP.

Since 2015, we have improved several areas of TAP, and I would like to address a few. We have updated the TAP evaluation plan twice, with both enhancements approved by the Office of Management and Budget, and we have annually updated our curriculum.

To improve accountability, we have charged the military departments to have their service inspectors general conduct inspections of TAP. Their first report is due in 2018.

Last November, the Department deployed a new TAP IT Enterprise System and electronic form, which further streamlined our data collection processes. This system precludes commanders from signing partially completed forms, thus increasing the completeness of servicemember documentation.

Finally, the Department has energized our private and public engagements. Our collaboration raises awareness of the value transitioning of servicemembers and veterans. Since August 2016, we have completed over 200 public and private engagements. In addition to these actions since 2015, we are committed to continuously improving the program to the benefit of the servicemember.

The Department greatly appreciates the importance placed on TAP by Congress and the GAO. We view the recent GAO study on TAP as an opportunity to receive external feedback to further advance this important program.

Generally, we concur with GAO's recommendations. We acknowledge that in 2016, our performance measures provided via public reporting did not provide a clear explanation of the extent of missing data. We have since made adjustments to address this, and will work even harder with the services to reduce the extent of missing data, particularly for our Reserve component servicemembers.

The Department agrees with GAO's recommendation to monitor and report timeliness of TAP participation, and we will work with the services to identify and implement the best solutions to improve in this area. We appreciate GAO's recommendation that DoD monitor and report which servicemembers request attendance to supplementary 2-day tracks and are able to attend the training. We will continue to actively promote and encourage participation in these tracks and research potential barriers to servicemembers accessing them.

The Department agrees with GAO's recommendation that DoD needs to monitor and report which servicemembers participated in TAP in a classroom setting or online. Based on availability of resources, we anticipate having the ability to accomplish this task, and we appreciate GAO's recommendation highlighting the need for commanders to access additional data on TAP. The services currently have procedures in place to make this new suggested information available to commanders. We will strengthen our efforts, working with the services, so the commanders will have access to this information.

Finally, the Department supports GAO's recommendation to minimize subjectivity involved with some of the career readiness standards, such as the quality of a resume. We will work with the services and Department of Labor to identify ways to mitigate such subjectivity by the end of fiscal year 2018.

Again, let me thank GAO for their comprehensive and insightful report and their recommendations to further advance TAP for the Nation. The Department recognizes that preparing servicemembers throughout their military life cycle to be career-ready upon transition is essential to the sustainment of the all-volunteer force. We cannot do this alone. We need the continued strong collaboration with our interagency partners, the support and hard work of our military services, especially at the installation level, and continued engagement with external stakeholders.

In closing, Mr. Chairman, I thank you, the Ranking Member, and the Members of this Subcommittee, for your outstanding and continuing support of the men and women who proudly wear the uniform in defense of our great Nation. As we pause to celebrate Veterans Day this weekend, let us never forget to all honor Americans who served in the Armed Forces, both in times of war and peace, and I look forward to your questions.

[THE PREPARED STATEMENT OF JUDD LYONS APPEARS IN THE APPENDIX]

Mr. ARRINGTON. Thank you, Mr. Lyons.

I will now yield myself 5 minutes for questions.

I don't imagine that there is anybody on the panel or here on the dais that would not think it would be a good idea to help our servicemembers transition from Active Duty to civilian life in the

smoothest, most effective manner. Can I get a head nod that we all agree that is a good thing?

So now what we have to do is make sure our actions line up with our agreement that this is a good endeavor, and then we have to have data to know whether or not what we have decided as a program to do that is actually working or not. Otherwise, it is just a bunch of words from here and from you.

And so what are we doing to determine whether or not the programs that are offered are the right programs, that the folks that go through the programs, the tracks, are actually benefiting, and that long term, they are getting better and quicker employment rates, and engaging in education and training opportunities?

And I would like everybody to answer that, but I will start with you, Ms. Devlin.

Ms. DEVLIN. Thank you for the question. We do measure outcomes. We can't always attribute all of the outcomes directly to participation in the Transition Assistance Program. But I think the biggest effort that we are undertaking, which will give us I think what you are looking for, is that post-transition survey. Because what I hear sometimes is, when you are going through the Transition Assistance Program, you don't know what you don't know yet until you actually become a civilian and start that actual transition on the other side.

Getting the survey data from veterans who have recently transitioned at the 6-month, 12-month, and 18-month mark will give us data that is from their voices themselves about how the program influenced their ability to successfully transition and what they are going through in their life at those stages post-transition.

Mr. ARRINGTON. So you said you have some outcome data. What is the outcome data that you have today that we can link back to these programs and whether or not they are successful?

Ms. DEVLIN. Again, we can't always attribute these outcomes directly to participation in TAP, but, we through the senior steering group and executive committee, we track outcomes, such as graduation rates, unemployment rates.

Mr. ARRINGTON. That could have little, a lot, or nothing to do with these programs—

Ms. DEVLIN. Correct.

Mr. ARRINGTON [correct].—that we spend, what is it, hundreds of millions of dollars. So that is frustrating to me because, all too often, we don't have this sort of data. It is just activity. You report activity. I heard a lot of activity. We are doing this, we are doing that. Then we have timeframes, and sometimes they are followed. And we have requirements for reporting. Sometimes it is followed. Sometimes people don't care to follow that, even though that is part of the law.

But what we need more than anything is, are these programs working, so we can tell the taxpayers, your investment is actually supporting our veterans or not, and we can look the veterans in the eyes and say, this is a meaningful program for you.

So you mentioned this post-transition survey. Is that in the works? Are we going to implement that? Is that something that you guys are planning on implementing, and when are you going to implement it?

Ms. DEVLIN. Yes, we are. We are in the drafting process for the survey questions with our contractor. The interagency group is working on this together, although VA awarded the contract for the development. And we should be sending it to—we will definitely be implementing in 2018. And as soon as the draft is ready for submission to OMB, we will submit it for that review process so that we can start fielding the survey.

Mr. ARRINGTON. Sure. How long has this program been going—in existence, I should say?

Ms. DEVLIN. It is a brand-new effort.

Mr. ARRINGTON. No, I mean this program, the TAP program, as administered by the VA, your component of it.

Ms. DEVLIN. The TAP program, in its current state, it was post-VOW Act. The VA started administering the program in its current state in 2013.

Mr. ARRINGTON. Okay. At least 4 years without knowing whether or not it is working.

What about you, General Denton, where are your outcome measures, and how do you know your part of the program is working?

Mr. DENTON. First of all, that is a great question. Having just transitioned last year myself—I know you don't want to hear anecdotally—I think it works.

Mr. ARRINGTON. I think that is valuable.

Mr. DENTON. But I will tell you, actually, Judd and I went through TAP together last year and it was very helpful. And I will tell you, whether you are a sergeant or whether you are a general, that challenging question of “what are you going to do for your second career” is not an easy one. So I will tell you that my personal passion for this program has to do with—I left last December and was fortunate to get a job with Labor.

But to answer your first question, we are blessed at the Department of Labor to have an office called the Chief Evaluation Office. And it is led by a brilliant doctor who is an expert on long-term impact studies, which when I was in DoD, I didn't even know what that word meant. But I will tell you that we are about to do a contract to do a 36-month study on the long-term impacts, and I can get you the exact language of that. But we think it is going to be pretty landmark in nature, and we are going to be able to prove to you and the taxpayers that it is in the interests of TSMS and the American taxpayer for this program to continue.

Mr. ARRINGTON. My time has expired. I will have more questions in follow-up to your comments. I appreciate that.

And so, Mr. Ranking Member, I am going to turn it over to you for 5 minutes.

Mr. O'ROURKE. Mr. Lyons, what is the total cost of TAP, annually?

Mr. LYONS. Congressman, for fiscal year 2016, the Department executed approximately \$117 million for TAP. That includes our headquarters and the services across the spectrum. We are collating the fiscal year 2017 data from the comptroller, from OSD. So I would like to take that for the record and come back to you with that. That data is not available yet. But for fiscal year 2016, it was about \$117 million.

Mr. O'ROURKE. So for the last year, we have data. It is, you said, 2016, 117, all in?

Mr. LYONS. That includes the elements of the program execution, along with the civilian pay associated with administering and executing the program.

Mr. O'ROURKE. And to the Chairman's line of questioning, can you give me a succinct answer on how we can get better measurable outcomes, not so much who attended class and when they attended it and whether they attended it online or in person, although those could be important measures, but what the value of that attendance was, but for participating in a TAP program they would not have achieved X, Y, or Z?

Mr. LYONS. Thank you, Congressman. I would offer that our output measures for the Department of Defense center around VOW compliance, career readiness standard attainment, but we are constantly looking at data points that help us improve the program. So we have a series of assessments, participant assessments that a servicemember going through TAP takes, and that gives us some valuable feedback in terms of customer satisfaction and the impact that TAP had on the transitioning servicemember.

So, for example, in fiscal year 2017, in quarter three, the last quarter we have data for, 91 percent of our participants that went through TAP said that they gained valuable information and skills to plan their transition. An additional 91 percent said that the training they received in TAP enhanced their confidence in their transition planning, and 91 percent said that they would use what they know—

Mr. O'ROURKE. Sorry to interrupt you. Are those boxes you can check or are those things that people took the time to write out?

Mr. LYONS. So it is a combination. The participant assessment is both, you know, selections to questions as well as free data input.

Mr. O'ROURKE. Got you. Here is what I am trying to get at. It is not clear to me how seriously we take TAP, you know, all of us included. We have the oversight responsibility. You all have responsibility for execution. You are supposed to complete that program before you reach the 90-day point, before you are 90 days away from separation. Fifty-three percent of those participating are doing it with less than 90 days. We have reports in this GAO study that officers are asking that the members of their unit not have to go to class and be able to do this online. We hear anecdotally from separating servicemembers and veterans that it was just something they had to go through, get out of the way. They want to get on with their civilian life, whatever they are doing next.

I don't know that we have a compelling articulation of the value of TAP, what we can tell that separating servicemember that they are going to find in this that is going to help them in their lives, beyond the fact that they have to do this or they are supposed to do this. Same for the officer. Same for the Member of Congress. Same for the taxpayer who fronts the \$117 million annually.

Without that measure, this is not going to get better, and I agree with the Chairman on this. The fact that you all couldn't report on a majority or near majority of Guard and Reserve servicemembers because it was recorded in paper and you didn't transition ade-

quately to digital, I mean, that just to me sounds like it is not something that we take very seriously.

So maybe I am able to identify some of the symptoms of the problems. I would really like to work together with you and with the Chairman on how we get some defined measurable outcomes that demonstrate the value of this, because I think all of us get the concept. We want it to work. It is not clear that it is or that we are getting a return for the investment or that this is valuable for the participating servicemember.

And one question that I have perhaps for the next panel, and I would love either in this panel or offline with Dr. Wenstrup and Mr. Banks, I would love to know if there is some way to have the leaders of those units, the officers, have some level of accountability through separation and post separation.

I know anecdotally, there are officers who come up to me and say, hey, a guy who was in my unit, veteran now, one of your constituents, Beto, can't get a mental health care appointment, and it really bothers me and I feel accountable and responsible for that, I want you to do something about it. Is there some way to give those commanders more control or power or accountability or responsibility to help these servicemembers see through this transition in a more effective way?

Anyhow, more questions that I think are going to take a while to answer, but I appreciate it, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. ARRINGTON. Thank you, Ranking Member. A great line of questions.

I now want to recognize our colleague Mr. Banks for 5 minutes.

Mr. BANKS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Ms. Brown Barnes, during GAO's assessment of TAP, did it seem as if the servicemembers were being encouraged and allowed to attend the additional optional tracks if they wanted to?

Ms. BROWN BARNES. They were, from the people that we talked to, they were allowed to. In terms of being encouraged, sometimes the timing didn't allow for them to do it, but usually they had some opportunities to do that.

Mr. BANKS. So anecdotally, you believe that they were—

Ms. BROWN BARNES. Yes.

Mr. Banks [continued].—encouraged to if there was time to do so?

Ms. BROWN BARNES. If there was time to do so. I mean, we had also heard different things about sometimes they weren't or mission type activities took priority, so we did hear some of that as well.

Mr. BANKS. Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Lyons and General Denton, how are the Departments tracking whether a servicemember who doesn't meet the career readiness standards for employment, how do we know that they are receiving that, quote, warm handover? And is this warm handover effective and truly what the servicemember needs to be career-ready? Mr. Lyons?

Mr. LYONS. Congressman, thank you. So in 2016, the Department issued two memorandums, one that specifically focused in on an at-risk population of veterans for homelessness. And we issued guidance to the services to ensure that commanders understand

their responsibility to ensure that warm handover happens to the appropriate agency. It could be Veterans Affairs, it could be Department of Labor. It could be both, in the case of homelessness.

We did the same thing for those that separate for an Other Than Honorable Discharge, recognizing that that population could also be at risk, and the need to have a warm handover.

So we continue to engage with our interagency partners to provide input. With the deployment of our electronic form this last year, we are actually getting servicemember-level data on when they opt in to receive follow-on services from a partner agency. And we provide that data then to Department of Labor or Veterans Affairs so that we can more accurately track and deliver those services. So I defer to my colleagues for further on that.

Mr. BANKS. Colonel?

Mr. DENTON. That is a great question. Thanks, Judd.

The employment warm handoff process is working. We have a process in place. We don't nationally track it and monitor it. In the last 6 months, the Army has asked us to do that with them. So we think with BDI and the e-Form, we eventually may be able to look at that macro number on employment and be able to see if we are making a mark.

So we are definitely looking forward to working with DoD on that, especially since the Army has reached out and said, we would like your help on this.

Mr. BANKS. I am not sure why I called you a colonel, but I apologize, General, for that.

With that, I yield back.

Mr. ARRINGTON. Thank you, Mr. Banks.

And I now want to recognize Mr. Takano for 5 minutes.

Mr. TAKANO. Ms. Brown—thank you, Mr. Chairman—you know, I was a high school teacher for over two decades and a community college trustee for about the same amount of time, and I saw many students struggle with their transition into postsecondary education because they needed remedial education, developmental education. And while I know this wasn't the focus of this report, I am curious to know if we have any data on servicemembers' educational background before they entered military service.

Ms. BROWN BARNES. Yeah. That was outside of what we did for this review. We could submit that for the record, but I don't have any—

Mr. TAKANO. I don't know if you collect that data. I mean, I have always wondered whether or not we knew about our servicemembers' educational background, because that has a lot to do with whether or not they are going to be able to utilize their post-9/11 GI Bill benefits, right? I mean, we recruit them on the basis of these benefits. And I believe the military, because we do recruit them on that basis, has some responsibility to making sure that these benefits are not hollow. And they are hollow if we don't do anything to help these servicemembers attain the ability to attend the higher education during their time in the military.

So I would be curious to see that data, but you really can't tell me much about that data now.

Ms. BROWN. No.

Mr. TAKANO. I will have more questions once you do submit it.

Ms. BROWN BARNES. Okay.

Mr. TAKANO. Mr. Secretary, the GAO study found very low rates of attendance for the supplemental TAP courses on accessing higher education, career and technical training, and entrepreneurship. While, obviously, not every one of these supplemental classes will be applicable to servicemembers, chances are one of them will be relevant to whatever post-service path a servicemember has planned. And as these classes have a direct impact on how veterans use their benefits, such as the GI Bill, and have the potential to help servicemembers take their core TAP program and turn it into actual job opportunities after separation, the low participation rate seems to indicate, to me, missed opportunities to help servicemembers successfully transition.

So how has OSD thought about—well, I want to know, has OSD thought about mandating that servicemembers attend at least one of these currently supplemental programs?

Mr. LYONS. Thank you, Congressman. We have approached, with our revamped TAP enterprise, an adoption of career readiness standards. How career-ready is the transitioning servicemember to transition to a civilian career? And we have adopted, as part of that, an engagement earlier in their military life cycle on topics such as this, higher education being one.

So we deployed a higher education prep module that is a virtual module that actually explores a transitioning servicemember earlier in their career. What are their goals; what are the education requirements to help them achieve those goals; and what resources are available to them, such as tuition assistance. So we are interested in the aspirations of the servicemember and providing resources to them.

With respect to the additional tracks, one of the reasons we developed those additional 2-day tracks and designed them to be delivered both in a brick-and-mortar classroom environment and online was to make them available to whatever servicemember has that particular career goal in mind. And we think we have been successful in that. We found that servicemembers that attend a brick-and-mortar classroom may revisit a particular topic online, such as the higher education prep module.

Mr. TAKANO. Okay. But are you looking at mandating that they take one of those supplemental courses?

Mr. LYONS. I think, Congressman that adopting a one-size-fits-all approach of mandating attendance at the 2-day track may not apply to a servicemember that doesn't have that particular goal in mind. So we are going to continue. If they espouse that desire for higher education, we are going to actively and constantly promote attendance at those 2-day—

Mr. TAKANO. I am glad that you all are taking an interest in the educational and career goals of the servicemember. That is really good to hear. But are they assessed? Is there any point—when do you assess them, if they are assessed, for, you know, their educational goals? I mean, how appropriately?

Mr. LYONS. So, again, back to the military life cycle, we engage with them earlier in their career, beginning at their first duty station and at certain touch points throughout their career—pro-

motions, reenlistments—and revisit their individual development plan that they have put together.

Mr. TAKANO. But are they assessed?

Mr. LYONS. When it comes time to transition, during pre-separation counseling, they will sit down with a TAP counselor, who will review their individual development plan and change it into an individual transition plan. At that point, as they sit down and have that conversation, the counselor will encourage and promote the attendance at the appropriate 2-day track with the servicemember.

Mr. TAKANO. My point is that the military does not assess the servicemember earlier, at the point of, you know, induction or any earlier point. There is no way for you to help guide and hold accountable that servicemember for the goals they set without that assessment as a baseline.

Mr. LYONS. Yeah. I think that in a servicemember's life cycle, you know, things change over the course of their life cycle. So, again, our objective is to, in their capstone event, prior to actually separating, assess whether they are career-ready to transition.

Mr. TAKANO. You assess them at the end of when they are ready to leave, but not toward the beginning. And there is no way for you to intervene if that servicemember is really unprepared to pursue a certain educational path or career path.

Anyway, my time is up. I am sorry.

Mr. ARRINGTON. Mr. Wenstrup.

Mr. WENSTRUP. Thank you.

Thank you all for being here. I appreciate the conversation, and I think we are headed in the right direction, but I think there is a lot more we can do.

And so let me just start with you, Mr. Lyons. Per troop, what is mission complete for the DoD when it comes to the Transition Assistance Program? When do you say like we have done our job? What does that look like?

Mr. LYONS. I think, Congressman, you know, first and foremost, I don't think we are ever mission complete. I don't think we can ever rest on, you know, 100 percent of completion in terms of transition assistance. I think it is an evolving program. The nature of—

Mr. WENSTRUP. I am talking about—excuse me, I am sorry to interrupt. But I am talking about like per troop. Is it mission complete when you say, look, this troop knows where he is going? He/she is going to school. They know what they want to major in. They have got it mapped out. That to me, before they take their uniform off, if they know what they are doing, they are enrolled in school, to me that would be mission complete. That is a success. We have done our job, you know.

Because I think in the big picture, you know, the big aerial picture of what it means to join the military, we are going to do a whole lot better if the military is seen as a place where any young American can enter and it is a path to success.

And so I agree with Mr. Takano's comment like, when do we start engaging that troop? You know, from day one do you say, is military your career, is that what you have in mind, do you want to do something afterwards? Because let's face it, you start at 18, you got plenty of time for another career after that, right? So get

them thinking in that way. Are we asking those questions early on?

Because to me, for VA—and it is good that you are all here, because you all have a role to play in this. And to me, success means that before you take that uniform off, you know where you are going. You think of the college graduate that gets their diploma, and they already know where they are going to be working in 2 weeks. That is a whole lot better day than one who walks up, gets that degree, and has no idea what lies ahead. And I think we will recruit better and the military will be transformed in so many ways. You say like, that is the path to success in America, if you choose that, you serve your country, and they are going to make sure that you are on a path to success.

So to me, we have to engage early. Because for the VA, for example, the VA then is strapped with being reactive too often. Because if you think about some of the problems that we face with suicide and depression and stress, listen, when you come out and you don't feel necessary when you have felt necessary for a long time being in uniform, that is when it spirals downward.

So I am going to propose, and I think you probably all would agree, and I know that my friends here that are both on Armed Services and on this Committee, we need to come together on this. I don't think this should just be VA committee-driven. I think we need to reach back and go back a little bit further, and I think we can do a whole lot better. But let's define what success really looks like and in this program. And to me, it would be when you leave here, you know exactly where you are going. And that our success in what we do should be based on how many people actually know where they are going and what they are doing and have a plan and leave with confidence.

So anyone can engage in that conversation with me, but I hope that is where we are headed, and I think we are at the beginnings of that.

Mr. LYONS. Congressman, thank you. And just real quickly here. I would offer that, again, we are engaging with servicemembers earlier in the process to talk about those issues that you have described. So I talked about that individual development plan that begins at their first duty station, where, again, we have a discussion about their goals. What is the training and education requirements? We talk about apprenticeship information, resume prep information, financial preparedness information. This is early on. So that, again, our culture changes across the Department so that the first time they are thinking about transition is not their last action leaving the service.

And so we think that military life-cycle culture that we are undergoing through early engagement and at critical points in a servicemember's career will help us to get there, but I acknowledge your comments.

Mr. WENSTRUP. I appreciate it. We can keep talking about that. If anyone else cares to—

Mr. DENTON. Sir, we have looked at that hard at Labor. Having gone through the Employment Workshop last year, I will tell you that we have kind of taken a look at what is our end state. We think it should be meaningful career. That is in line with earlier

documents of why TAP was started. We think for a TSM to get that meaningful career, our Secretary has talked about the pathways. We really think that higher Ed, career technical training, and entrepreneur provides for those three paths. So that is why we are really looking forward to working with our interagency partners toward helping those TSMs get into that path, which now we call track. Whether we call it a track or a path that is really what we are talking about. Thank you.

Mr. BANKS. [Presiding.] Mr. Correa?

Mr. CORREA. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I just wanted to follow up with what Dr. Wenstrup said and Mr. Takano. I am looking at this data and this information and, again, issues with the supplemental TAP, 15 percent participation; those that left the military with less than an honorable discharge, 5 percent participation. And to me, it kind of signals in my mind that maybe the value given by our men and women in uniform is not that high. If you come back and your participation is 15 percent, it tells me that there is a disconnect between what they really are looking for and what they are really getting.

And I think we can mandate these men and women in uniform to do these supplemental—this TAP program, but yet when they come back and use it at such a low rate, it is telling me something about the value. And I guess if I went back and talked to those folks that are leaving the military and asked them, what do you want to do before you leave, and probably most of them would say, I just want to get home. And so you try to force feed some of these folks this information. I am not sure what the value is.

I think this is good information, but I am trying to figure out if this is more of an issue you try to catch up with these folks, not only before they leave, but after they leave. I mean, one of the issues we have been looking at is deported veterans, veterans that are residents that should have become citizens before they left the military. Those are some of the things that I think would really add value, if you, you know, you said, you know, you guys got to become U.S. citizens before you leave.

The other area, of course, is, you know, I hate to bring it up, but, you know, this tragedy in Texas. You have an individual that had serious mental issues. There were indicators there and there was no follow-up. There was no—somewhere it didn't—all the dots were not aligned, were not connected.

And, you know, again, you have an evolving program. You have investments, aspirations of service officers. I am trying to figure out in my mind where we go with this program that could be a tremendous value. But to me, in my mind, I have got to figure let's go back and ask these men and women in uniform, where is it that we can help you the most? Maybe we come back and talk to them 6 months after, a year to the discharge, and see how they are doing. How you doing? Are we having issues at home? Did you get the jobs you were looking for? Were you able to connect with that apprentice program that is paying \$60,000 a year to start, or are you not there yet?

I have a lot of questions. Open it up for statements or comments from the panel.

Mr. LYONS. Congressman, thank you. You know, I think that in terms of pulsing the needs of our members, both Active component and Reserve component, again I harken back to our participant assessments where they can give us direct feedback on these issues, and—

Mr. CORREA. Let me interrupt you. I don't have much time. I have a minute and a half. But that was the other point I had, which is having somebody fill out a questionnaire or a form saying was this good or bad versus coming back to them in a year and saying was this good or bad I think will give you a different outcome. You know, it is like when I get asked did I do a good service or not, I usually give people the five, the best, but, you know, it is just a number.

So, again, I think we have got to come back and look at that data, kick it around to try to figure out another way to look at the data.

And finally, in terms of the—you know, we are looking at academics here, other things that will make you successful in life. I would say we have to come back and look at the veterans as a holistic, you know, psychological, family, career, everything to make sure that we get these men and women that gave so much for our country, that they are actually on the right path to be successful citizens.

I would say I got 30 seconds, if you would like to comment.

Mr. LYONS. I think that assessing effectiveness after the servicemember has already left the service is a challenge. We do have existing surveys and research studies that we use. We annually survey, through a status of forces survey, both Active and Reserve component members about their perceptions of TAP, their needs within TAP. We also have recently commissioned a RAND study on the needs assessment of Reserve component member transitions. We are looking forward to the results of that to help us inform our program to deliver in the most efficient and effective manner these services to them.

So I think assessments, surveys, research studies are helpful to us. Getting to servicemembers after they have transitioned to get that feedback is perhaps a challenge.

Mr. CORREA. Mr. Chair, before I give up my time here, I just want to say it is good you are doing the RAND studies. I would rather you invest that money, not only in the RAND studies, but going out to ask the veterans directly what is it that they need.

Mr. Chair, I yield.

Mr. BANKS. [Presiding.] Mr. Rutherford.

Mr. RUTHERFORD. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you, panel.

Mr. Lyons, if you could, one of the most common complaints the Subcommittee receives from servicemembers about TAP is their local commanders and senior noncommissioned officers are somewhat less enthusiastic than they would hope in allowing them in working toward them attending the classes. If that is true, what portion of that do you think might be related to the fact that these senior members don't believe TAPs is providing what they really should provide and it is not, quote, "worth the time"?

Mr. LYONS. Thank you, Congressman. You know, I would offer that, in terms of servicemembers and their commander support for them to attend TAP, you know, I acknowledge the discussions that GAO had at the various post camps and stations that they visited where that was relayed, and we are taking that onboard. We want to explore and remove, if there are barriers to a servicemember attending TAP, we want to remove those barriers. We have very clear and effective policy to the services on implementing TAP and the importance of TAP and continuing to reinforce, as commanders go through their life cycle of professional military education, of reinforcing that message with them about the importance of TAP.

It is interesting to note, in our last participant assessment, that 88 percent of our servicemembers that participated in TAP reported that their leaders, their most immediate leaders were supportive of their transition to civilian life, and that 88 percent of them reported that the leaders provided them time to attend and participate in TAP.

Mr. RUTHERFORD. Exactly, which is why they were there.

Mr. LYONS. Correct.

Mr. RUTHERFORD. And why they were counted in your numbers.

Mr. LYONS. Right.

Mr. RUTHERFORD. But it makes me then beg the question, why do you believe that missing data shouldn't be taken into account when assessing TAP performance? Because those folks aren't there for some reason, and don't you think we should get to the bottom of that?

Mr. LYONS. Congressman, we do feel that it is important, as we assess data, that it is based on known and complete data. So we view that in the old legacy system that we had as a completed paper form for completion of TAP, and we can assess then whether that servicemember has met the requirements and is career-ready. With the deployment of our electronic form and our TAP IT Enterprise, we think that we have significantly improved our capability to collect that data and assess those data points.

We are going to continue to pursue removal of any barriers to attendance at TAP and increase the perception of the value of TAP, and we are going work with our service partners to do that.

Mr. RUTHERFORD. And, Ms. Devlin, isn't there an effort under way now to go back and talk to some of those individuals that did not attend and find out why?

Ms. DEVLIN. We are actually in the process of creating a post-transition survey that will go out to servicemembers who became veterans at the 6-month, 12-month, and 18-month point post discharge. That will give us an opportunity to ask them, did you attend TAP? If so, now that you are actually a civilian and you are a veteran, do you feel now that you know what you didn't know back then, that it met your needs? And if not, how could we improve it?

Mr. RUTHERFORD. Okay. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield back.

Mr. BANKS. Thank you, Mr. Rutherford.

At this point, we would like to thank each of you for being here today and answering our questions. You are now excused.

Mr. BANKS. Our second and final panel will include General Robert Bennett, the Adjutant General of the United States Army; Ad-

miral Karl Thomas, director of the 21st Century Sailor Office of the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations for the United States Navy; General Kathleen Cook, director of Air Force Services, Manpower, Personnel, and Services for the United States Air Force; and General Kurt Stein, director of Marine and Family Programs for the United States Marine Corps.

Thank you to each of you for being here today. We will give you a moment to get seated before we will start.

With that, General Bennett, you are now recognized for 5 minutes.

STATEMENT OF BRIGADIER GENERAL ROBERT BENNETT

General BENNETT. Thank you.

Chairman Arrington, Representative O'Rourke, Members of the Committee, I would like to thank and express my appreciation for the opportunity to appear before you to discuss the Army's Soldier for Life-Transition Assistance Program, or SFL-TAP.

SFL-TAP is, first and foremost, a commander's program. SFL-TAP mandates several courses based on the VOW Act, and also includes other required courses or career readiness standards, or CRS, that helps prepare soldiers for their transition from Active Duty.

In fall of 2017, the Government Accountability Office, or GAO, provided a draft review of the transitioning veterans: DoD needs to improve performance reporting and monitoring for the Transition Assistance Program. Army concurs with all six recommendations found in the draft report.

While the Army is proud of being a part of the myriad of major enhancements to TAP since the passing of the VOW Act, along with our DoD sister service and interagency partners, the Army believes that there is one important area in which TAP could and should continue to evolve. The Army would appreciate the ability to receive key post-transition outcome data from our interagency partners, which is vital to the future improvements.

The Army strongly feels that receiving feedback from our interagency partners on both the type of assistance provided as well as the outcome and results of such assistance is critical to our ability to accurately gauge and assess the overall long-term efficiency of our efforts. The Army will closely collaborate with our partners on developing a strategy to enable us to receive this key data in the future.

In addition to DoD TAP's reporting system, the Army uses a TAP-XXI, which is the key Army system of record, in order to provide commanders at the lowest level information and reports to fulfill their responsibilities under SFL-TAP policy and law. TAP-XXI reporting consolidates key transition data from several Army HR systems of record, which allows company commanders to correctly identify soldiers required to complete the TAP curriculum. These reports help ensure the soldier is career-ready and prepared for the civilian transition. The Army closed out fiscal year 2016 with the lowest amount of unemployment compensation for ex-servicemembers in 13 years, \$172.8 million, according to the Department of Labor.

Soldier for Life-TAP has several initiatives to further support soldiers in their transition, including a transition pilot program to evaluate tailored transition assistance for the soldiers, the career skills program, which offers soldiers the opportunity to participate in the employment skills training, and the virtual center, which is the only virtual online platform to complete transition services.

To conclude, I thank you for your continued support. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee, I thank you again for the opportunity to appear before you, and I look forward to your questions. Thank you.

[THE PREPARED STATEMENT OF GENERAL ROBERT BENNETT APPEARS IN THE APPENDIX]

Mr. BANKS. Thank you.
Admiral Thomas.

STATEMENT OF REAR ADMIRAL KARL O. THOMAS

Admiral THOMAS. Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member O'Rourke, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee. Thank you for the opportunity to appear today to update you on the Navy's Transition Assistance Program.

As the director of the Navy's 21st Century Sailor Office, I am responsible for sailor and family support and resilience programs. The Navy concurs with the recommendations of the General Accountability Office report on transitioning veterans. The Navy testified in 2015 that we were developing a transition information system to give commanders better visibility into compliance. We now have that system in place and have seen significant improvement in our metrics.

We have put many other process improvements in place, to include unit level compliance reports linking transition compliance to our prestigious Golden Anchor retention award, adding transition compliance to our Navy Inspector General's checklist, and our Chief of Naval Operations Tone of the Force Report. Our network of Navy career counselors continue to stress that transition should be planned throughout a sailor's career to ensure sailors document skills, certifications, and qualifications, and thus, commence preparation early for their eventual transition.

We remain committed to providing in-person instructor-led training as the primary means of delivery, and are working to drive earlier completion of transition requirements. We also have an ongoing Naval audit service study to assist us in our compliance efforts.

Beyond preparing our sailors for employment and advising them on the veteran benefits that they have earned, we recognize the importance of returning sailors to society so they continue to serve our country as solid productive citizens who are examples and recruiters for our all-volunteer force.

We recognize there is more to be done, and look forward to participating in further refining the transition process and cooperation with Congress and this Committee in particular, as well as our DoD and interagency partners. Our sailors deserve our steadfast commitment to provide them the most effective tools to position them for long-term success as they transition to serve our Nation as honored and distinguished veterans. It is vital to the all-volun-

teer force that our successful veterans encourage the youth use of our Nation to serve in our Nation's Armed Forces.

On behalf of the Chief of Naval Operations, I thank you for your unwavering support for the men and the women of the United States Navy, and I look forward to your questions.

[THE PREPARED STATEMENT OF GENERAL KARL THOMAS APPEARS IN THE APPENDIX]

Mr. BANKS. Thank you, Admiral.
General Cook, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

STATEMENT OF BRIGADIER GENERAL KATHLEEN A. COOK

General COOK. Chairman Arrington, Ranking Member O'Rourke, distinguished Members of this Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today regarding the transition assistance our Air Force provides to our total force airmen and their families.

Before I begin, let me state up front, I fully acknowledge our VOW compliance is not 100 percent, and there is more work to be done refining our processes to ensure not only by-law compliance, but a strong continuum of care, especially within our Guard and Reserve components.

We recognize how critically important being prepared to successfully transition out of the military is to the welfare of our airmen and their families. From senior Air Force leadership to our installation commanders, supervisors, and transition experts, we remain resolute in executing requirements of the VOW Act.

What I would like you to take away from my testimony today is twofold. First, we value our collaborative partnerships with the Departments of Defense, our sister services, Veterans Affairs, Labor and Education, and the Small Business Administration, recognizing that successfully transitioning servicemembers requires the support and information of the collective.

Second, my goal is to leave you with confidence in our commitment to generate a cultural shift to viewing transition preparation as a military life-cycle experience. It is important to note unique service characteristics that influence the development of our airmen and affect transition readiness. Based on our mission requirements, our airmen have more technical skills. Fifty-two percent of our NCOs and 92 percent of our senior NCO's have at least an associate's degree. We are the only service with a technical associate degree program, our Community College of the Air Force, which translates education, training, and experience into accredited college credits.

Since 1972, nearly 500,000 degrees have been awarded. In fiscal year 2017 alone, the Community College of the Air Force awarded over 2 million semester hours of collegiate credit to over 268,000 students. The Air Force Military Tuition Assistance program totaled \$154 million, and our Air Force certification program provided 397 unique and transferable certifications for career fields such as cyber systems operations and civil engineering.

I reference this to illustrate that our airmen, generally speaking, have the opportunity to get a jump-start on transition. That said, deliberately embracing a culture of transition readiness throughout

the military life cycle is consistent with and would strengthen our wingman culture.

As we work to implement 2017 GAO recommendations, we are currently performing comprehensive upgrades to our TAP processes based on our challenges with VOW compliance. From providing exception to policies so our Guard and Reserve members complete pre-separation counseling only once every 5 years or attend VA briefings once every 3 years, if activated under the same authority, to annual training sessions for all readiness NCOs, to working with DMDC to validate eligibility, data, and data-based accuracy, and seeking IT solutions to add a flag notification to the system, all the way to changing out processing checklists, messaging our Active Duty and Guard Reserve force support squadrons, briefing commanders for sergeants and chiefs at our professional military education leadership courses, and mandating airmen and family readiness center directors brief incoming commanders on VOW compliance within 30 days, or even adding text to airmen monthly leave and earning pay statements, to highlight TAP requirements.

Our total force commanders are inspected for compliance, and we have updated our Air Force instruction to stress commander responsibility and accountability. And specifically to the Reserve component, should all this still result in someone missing the opportunity to complete TAP, Air Force Reserve Command is tracking every member and will bring them back on active status to complete the process. Across the board, we are focused on attaining 100 percent compliance.

I just highlighted what we are doing today to fine tune the current process, but I am even more optimistic about the future. Given the synergy available to us when we proactively align our TAP military life cycle touch points with our blended retirement financial literacy training touch points, much like an individual development plan, financial planning requires continual evaluation. Merging the two programs touch point requirements over the course of one's career, however long or short, allows the member to take full advantage of the capabilities provided.

General Goldfein, our Chief of Staff, is keenly focused on revitalizing squadrons. He believes squadrons are the heartbeat of the Air Force, and we succeed or fail in our mission based on that squadron experience. Translated, the well-being, resiliency, and readiness of our airmen and their families is directly tied to the squadron and its leadership. Successfully transitioning our airmen also depends on the informed and engaged leadership.

In my opinion, there are two overarching components to improving VOW compliance. First, ensuring all airmen are fully educated on the requirement for TAP, and second, ensuring commanders understand their critical role, and that they are held accountable for their airmen being transition-ready.

Mr. Chairman, I thank you for the opportunity to testify today, and I look forward to answering your questions.

[THE PREPARED STATEMENT OF GENERAL KATHLEEN COOK APPEARS IN THE APPENDIX]

Mr. BANKS. Thank you.

And finally, General Stein, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

STATEMENT OF BRIGADIER GENERAL KURT W. STEIN

General STEIN. Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member O'Rourke, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, it is my privilege to appear before you today to discuss the transition readiness of your Marines.

Marines are the foundation of our Corps. They are the Corps' most critical resource, and they always will be. Most of your Marines, by design, are young fighters who plan to separate after one or two tours. Everything we do in the Marine Corps must contribute to their readiness, including their transition readiness.

To this end, our transition readiness program begins very early in a Marine's career. Our framework, the Marine for Life Cycle, includes several major action points beginning right after boot camp and completing within months before separation with the capstone event. In this way, our Marines are learning and thinking early and often about their eventual transition to civilian life.

Our transition readiness program has evolved significantly over time, and we continuously seek ways to improve it. We recently implemented the DoD TAP e-Form Enterprise database, and believe that it will help us better capture and manage our transition data and increase compliance. We are also incorporating transition readiness into our inspector general evaluation programs, which we believe will help increase timeliness.

The draft GAO report identified some gaps in our current program, especially in regard to VOW compliance and timeliness, and particularly within the Reserves. We appreciate their findings and recommendations and believe they will help us further improve our programs.

An overarching theme for the Marine Corps as an institution has always been that we make Marines, we win battles, and we return those Marines back to civilian capacity as better citizens.

I look forward to answering your questions. Thank you.

[THE PREPARED STATEMENT OF GENERAL KURT STEIN APPEARS IN THE APPENDIX]

Mr. BANKS. Thank you to each of you.

With that, I will reserve the 5 minutes of time, if I can, for the Chairman when he returns, and will yield to my friend and Ranking Member O'Rourke for his 5 minutes.

Mr. O'ROURKE. Thank you.

I will start with General Bennett. I am trying to figure out the best way to phrase this question, but I am trying to get from fulfilling a PE credit before you graduate or checking a box, or I have heard the phrase "compliance" come up very often, to getting to the spirit of the VOW Act and what we want to do for those transitioning servicemembers. And I wonder if the onus is not on us in Congress to improve that legislation to explicitly define success measurements that we have been looking for on this Committee.

If you are fulfilling the requirement to get that soldier in the seat and, hopefully, to do a better job of having that happen before they hit the 90-day mark, and perhaps encouraging more of them to take the 2-day supplemental course so that they are better pre-

pared for that transition, you may have fulfilled the requirements of the VOW Act and you are in compliance.

I don't know if this is for me to ask you and for you to answer, but can you suggest ways that we can improve the legislation to get at what, hopefully, we have been able to articulate in terms of measurable outcomes that show us whether or not this is a value beyond the compliance?

General BENNETT. Yes, sir. We invest the Army vast amounts of resources, \$80 million a year, to take care of our soldiers. And my personal goal is I do not want to have a battle of warm handover to a Department of Labor-VA. I want to take care of the Army family here within the Army. And I agree in the discussion earlier. We discussed about outputs as it relates to career readiness standards. We are doing pretty good in outputs and measuring did they get the job done. Yes, we need to work on timeliness, and that is the next stage of getting after ensuring the soldiers are properly taken care of at the appropriate time.

But the outcomes, did they get a job, that is where we do need some help, because I see them from the time they receive a 214, but I don't know what happens after that soldier departs my organization. And I need to know, the Army needs to know, so that then I can, if need be, with that feedback, I can adjust my program so that it is a better program for the soldiers that are following those after their departure so we can get it right.

So where I could use some help from the Army is a warm handover follow-up from the Department of Labor and VA, data from the Department of Labor and VA on success of transitioning soldiers after they leave Soldier for Life-TAP, and then the flexibility to tailor Soldier for Life-TAP to the needs of the individual soldier; i.e., a 20-year soldier who is getting ready to retire, probably you want to tailor the program differently from someone who is in the service for 4 years and getting ready to depart. It is usually an 18- to 24-year old. Some of them are probably high risk when it means to unemployment. From the Army's perspective, that was where I would ask for your help.

Mr. O'ROURKE. Yes. And I really liked the way General Denton on the previous panel put it in terms of one of the goals being to see military service as the best possible path to a high-quality career afterwards.

If that is the goal, which I can't argue with, we need to measure that. So how much are you earning? How fulfilled are you in the work or career that you have following military service? Got to be way to do that, but again, maybe that is on us to legislate that, require that, not on you to add more compliance measures that Congress hasn't mandated.

Mr. Chairman, I see some of our friends in the audience who have been here for conversations about the post-9/11 GI Bill, and I feel like we have had a very similar conversation where we are measuring seats in chairs and attendance and graduation, but not the success that those veterans have in their careers or, you know, in their life. And that really has to be, I think, the measure that we are able to describe and define, and then I think everyone is going to see more value in the program.

Those commanders right now who are grudgingly allowing their servicemembers to attend the classes are trying to get them out of it by asking for an online course. We are going to see more servicemembers availing themselves of the 2-day supplemental course. We are going to be better stewards of the taxpayer dollar. I wonder if this Committee can't work on—just a thought—what some of those additional measures are, and maybe amend the legislation to include those going forward and give these service branches something to perform to.

So that is just a suggestion to work on going forward, and I will yield back to you.

Thank you for your answers, General Bennett.

Mr. ARRINGTON. [Presiding.] Thank you, Mr. Ranking Member, and I agree with you, I think—if I may yield myself 5 minutes, and I apologize for having to step out. And I won't take all 5 minutes, Mr. Rutherford. I will option the ball to you here.

But to me, that is the heart of my concerns and the crux of the matter on programs like this and any other program that, you know, philosophically and in theory is an excellent objective. But in practice, we don't know if it is working, and we don't know how to make the changes to make it better, until we are constantly measuring not just the input or output, the outcomes. So, you know, really that is about the sum of my thoughts and comments, and I agree with the Ranking Member.

I heard a couple of the panelists prior to you guys talk about doing a survey or trying to come up with some instrument to do what we are talking about. I think—I think we need to get a group together, and it should be driven by the stakeholders. You guys ought to know what your customers need, want, and what are the right questions to get at whether this is working. And we ought to have you guys present that to us. We can be involved in some way. We ought to do it in short order, because I understood a couple of the folks—I can't remember who it was—were already working on this.

The other thing that concerns me, is when you have too many agencies, too many hands involved, I worry that it gets convoluted and more complicated. And if too many people are responsible, nobody is responsible sort of thing.

So—and I recognize you have different agency jurisdiction and all that, but, you know, if there was a way to consolidate the contract, for example, or—I don't know the answer, but I would like your feedback on having too many cooks in the kitchen on this and that making things more complicated.

And then the other piece is just making sure it is a priority at DoD, because it does not sound like it is a priority when they are not measuring. This was a point the Ranking Member made in the last panel. If you are not measuring outcomes and if you are not actually making sure that everybody is complying with that 90-day prior to the 90-day law, then that just tells me that something is broken at DoD in terms of ensuring it is being done.

And is this a priority in the Department of Defense? Do you think it is? I know you guys are responsible within the bureaucracy of the Pentagon. Tell me, do you think it is a priority? Do you think the DoD believes it is a priority?

I will just go down the line. I mean, do you really think it is a priority for them?

General BENNETT. Sir, absolutely. I wholeheartedly agree in that we teach this, we preach this at the first sergeant course, the commander's course, at the pre-command course for our battalion and brigade commanders. It is a requirement. And it is funny that you mention about consolidating contracts. We are looking at that in the Army right now. I have seven different contracts within my TAP. I am trying to have one bellybutton, that is what we are working on right now, and we are trying to get there, and we are actually on our third meeting right now.

But, sir, totally agree with you. And I know dealing with the governors committee, they are onboard as well, but this will help in getting one step further where we need to be.

Mr. ARRINGTON. Thank you.

Other comments?

Admiral THOMAS. Mr. Chairman, I would also agree that is a priority in the Navy. We have really taken onboard the military life-cycle concept where we bring in the concept of transitioning early on in the career development boards. We train up our career counselors so that they can start talking and preparing our sailors early. And we really have taken onboard the idea of getting credentialing and trying to give sailors items that will translate to the civil sector.

I like Representative Rutherford's comments that the measure of, you know, having that letter that says you are accepted to a college, that is fairly easy, and I have seen it myself when I have been in command. The job one is a little bit more challenging in ensuring that person has that job offer before they leave. But if we can get to that point, that is a great measure of success.

Mr. ARRINGTON. Let me just assume everybody thinks it is a good deal. Let's demonstrate that you believe that to the taxpayers are paying \$500 million for these programs because they love their men and women in service, and our veterans as you do, as well, and I know you do. Let's demonstrate it by coming back with a plan to consolidate things for accountability and clarity in terms of roles, and make it less complicated and convoluted. And let's come back with a plan on how to measure the outcomes. And let's apply that across the board, and let's find out if it is working and how we need to improve it. Because everybody fundamentally knows this is a good thing. And so let's put our money where our mouth is and let's go invest the time and resources to get this thing done.

You guys can tell us—and I don't want to pass a law if we don't have to pass a law. Sometimes, you know—my last—my first bill made it through the House floor, and I was honored to do this legislative reform with my colleague from Texas and friend, but I have to say, you know, moving this disabled home—I mean, home adaptation for disabled veterans from one part of the VA bureaucracy to another where they actually have the core competency, where this group didn't—I mean, it is actually called specially adapted housing over here. Over here it is about vocational rehab. And, I mean, I am having to tell my newspaper, look, I am just going to be honest with you. This should be done without Congress having to act.

Will it help the veteran? Yes. Will it help the disabled community? Yes. Will it save taxpayer money? I believe it will. But my goodness, please help us help our veterans and come up with these ideas and make presentations. And then if you need the law to change, I guarantee you, you will have the support of this Committee.

I have gone way over my time.

Mr. Takano, I yield the balance of my 10 minutes that I took. I recognize you for 5 minutes.

Mr. TAKANO. Now you are overstating things here. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Let me say that I was very pleased to hear from the Office of the Under Secretary, the director, Mr. Lyons, indicate that the military was interested in engaging with the servicemember much earlier in the servicemember's life cycle. But my sense was, was that even though the military is engaging the servicemembers in establishing career and educational goals early, and counseling, that there really wasn't assessment happening and determining whether that servicemember had all the skills and knowledge, or whether there was any need to remediate their skills so that servicemembers are ready before they leave.

So let me just state what I believe simply ought to be happening. What ought to be happening is that on day one of their induction in the military, there should be an assessment of the servicemember and a determination, initially, of what their goals are career-wise and education-wise, knowing that that 18-year-old is not necessarily going to exactly know who they are at that moment, and we can expect those goals to change. But we should at least know whether or not that servicemember needs to be doing some work to improve their math skills, their communication skills, their English skills. And I believe the military should be holding them accountable for that, because they were recruited on the basis of GI Bill benefits. And the taxpayer has an interest in making sure that those benefits aren't wasted, that they are not squandered, that they are not put into debt after they spend down those benefits and so forth and so on.

I would like to see also, is there a sense—given that context I have laid out to you, I believe it is in the best interest of our country that we see a strategic use of tuition assistance while they are in the military for those young people to be acquiring whatever remediation they need and/or gaining course credit so that they can transfer into a degree program rather seamlessly.

Can you give me some background idea of how well you think tuition assistance is being used in each branch, each of the branches of the military, how well your—you know, how well spent is that tuition assistance money, and how well do you help our servicemembers use that opportunity?

General BENNETT. Tuition assistance is one of the many areas that I do own, and it is quite popular with the senior leaders of the Army, and we are finding many different ways of getting after ensuring from a strategic message that—

Mr. TAKANO. You said the senior leaders, the senior leaders of the—

General BENNETT. Of the Army, sir.

Mr. TAKANO. Yes.

General BENNETT. Yes, sir. I mean, this has special attention of the Sergeant Major of the Army, who is getting after tuition assistance and getting after credentialing with the soldiers, the career skills program. All this is encompassing under, maybe not the tuition assistance pot of money, but we are getting after ensuring that, you are correct, sir, way before the transitioning process starts from the active Army, that they are educated and they are prepared for the civilian sector.

So it is quite popular, and I am actually going for the POM cycle requesting for additional money for next year, and it is getting bigger and better and growing steam as it relates to the soldiers acquiring tuition assistance.

Mr. TAKANO. Thank you. Thank you.

Anyone else care to comment?

Admiral THOMAS. Yes, sir. We had 46,000 sailors in 2016 use the tuition assistance program and take over 131,000 classes, and we bring instructors out to our ships so they can take them even when they are deployed. So it is a very popular program and utilized by many of our sailors.

Mr. TAKANO. And is it used by not just the senior officers?

Admiral THOMAS. It actually tends to be used more by the junior people.

Mr. TAKANO. More by junior. Yes, great. Thanks.

General COOK. Sir, thank you. I would like to also mention that as I mentioned in my opening remarks, tuition assistance for the Air Force is extremely important. In fiscal year 2017, we expended \$154 million in tuition assistance leading to the percentages of 52 percent of our NCOs and 92 percent of our senior NCOs obtaining at least a 2-year degree. So we begin to discuss this path forward with our young enlisted at about the 4- to 6- to 8-year mark after they have finished their technical skill training. So from day one, we are having a conversation with them.

And if I could, I would also like to address your earlier question about assessing individuals.

Mr. TAKANO. Oh, thank you.

General COOK. Yes, sir. So for the Air Force specifically, and I know for the other services there is an entry exam that indicates where they are successful, efficient, and then deficient as well. So the initial exam, we take a look at and then it is followed through with our basic training. We have constant assessment through basic training, followed through our technical skills, and all along the way, if there is remedial work required, we will ensure that they reach that. And then after all of the technical training, once they get to their first base location in our, what we call First-Term Airmen's program, we also have conversations about the financial, educational programs available to them. So we get them from the very beginning and consistently through.

And in my opening remarks, as I mentioned, with the military life cycle of combining the touch points for our financial literacy, as well as our TAP programs, this creates touch points consistently throughout in the high points of an airmen's career. Career change, promotion, family, childbirth, et cetera. So we absolutely believe

that education is important, and we are hitting it from beginning to end.

Mr. TAKANO. Might I continue with the question, Mr. Chairman?
Mr. ARRINGTON. Sure.

Mr. TAKANO. So you are talking about from the lowest rank of airmen all the way up, this is a—what you apply the assessments.

General COOK. Yes, sir. So for our enlisted, they will come in and they get their test at the beginning and they go to technical school, and then we push them toward our Community College of the Air Force beginning about their 4-year mark. For our officers, obviously, they come in with a degree in order to become an officer, so they are already assessed at a certain level.

And then what I would also like to offer is, even in our feedbacks, which happen when you report to a unit that first feedback, the initial, we discuss the financial and educational assessments. Then 6 months later, it is in our feedback. And in our annual assessment, we also have those conversations for both enlisted and officers.

Mr. TAKANO. Mr. Chairman, could the Marines answer the same question?

Mr. ARRINGTON. Yes.

General STEIN. Yes, Congressman, we have the same model that the Air Force has, specifically as far as assessing the individual Marine prior to assessing the tuition assistance program. Our TA program is really focused and geared towards the junior enlisted Marines with a high school diploma basically. And when they—prior to being given the tuition assistance dollars, they take an assessment, a test, to identify any deficiencies academically in any certain vertical of academia, whether it is mathematics or whatever, and then they are given remedial education in that space prior to going on and spending taxpayer dollars, Marine Corps dollars for tuition assistance for undergraduate credits under a credentialed institution.

Mr. TAKANO. Well, I certainly learned something new, and I want to know more about what you are doing.

Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Mr. ARRINGTON. Thank you, Mr. Takano.

Mr. RUTHERFORD, I recognize you for 5 minutes.

Mr. RUTHERFORD. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And thank you, panel, for your lengthy testimony and for your service to our country.

You know, there is an old adage, don't beat a dead horse, but after we say that, we always beat a dead horse, so that is what I want to do very briefly. So I will keep this short.

There was something very interesting that General Stein and General Bennett mentioned.

General Bennett, you talked about TAP-XXI and how in that follow-up, one of the matrices that you actually looked at was low unemployment payouts. I thought that is incredible. It makes me beg the question, what other matrixes do you have that you are looking at? And then General Stein mentioned that they have similar assessments with the Air Force, and makes me wonder, do you also have similar outcome matrices for all four services? General?

General BENNETT. So, yes. As I alluded to earlier, we do measure, and I know unemployment compensation will change every year, but that is one of our biggest measurement that we use right now. And again, we are below the \$200 million mark first time in 13 years, 172.8, and that you will see—

Mr. RUTHERFORD. That is excellent. Yes.

General BENNETT. Yes, sir. And you will see that, this year, once the report comes out, I think we do even better. At the end of third quarter, fiscal year 2017, we are at \$101 million. So I think we are on the mark.

What I am finding out within the Reserve component, if we want to delineate between the components, Reserve—when I say Reserve, that is National Guard and the Army Reserve that is 12 percent. Twelve percent is the unemployment compensation rate. And for regular Army Active Duty, 34 percent. So we are on the road to improvement, but again, where I could use the help, as you alluded to, sir, on measurements, that is, once a soldier departs the Active Duty, the outcome piece, did they get a job? That is what I need to know to better piece is my program doing what it is supposed to do?

Mr. RUTHERFORD. Right. And so the other—the other branches, can you comment? Do you have such a matrices as that or no?

Admiral THOMAS. Sir, the Navy does have unemployment numbers as well, and we are down at the lowest that we have been since 2011. We are at 67 million. So the right trajectory.

Mr. RUTHERFORD. Very good.

General COOK. So I am certain the Air Force does have the numbers, but I don't have them with me, so I would be happy to get those back to you.

Mr. RUTHERFORD. General?

General STEIN. Yes, sir. We know that our trend line is decreasing in the unemployment numbers. I don't have the specific data, though, before me, but I can get back to you on that.

Mr. RUTHERFORD. What other matrices do you have on the outcomes, besides unemployment? Is there actually a list? Does anybody share outcomes or—

General STEIN. Admiral Thomas and I, you know, being with the Department of the Navy, there is a lot of programs that he and I work together on, suicide prevention, sexual assault, behavioral health issues, things like that. So the being able to track them and, you know, finding metrics is kind of difficult.

So in this scenario, a measurement of performance would be how many people do we get into the classroom for the transition readiness seminar and complete the capstone event with a counselor? But the measurement of effectiveness is the second part of the story that, once they separate from the service, we really don't have situational awareness on them. Even their willingness to sign up with the VA during separation is optional. So it is a tough—it is a tough landscape to be able to actually get measurements of effectiveness on, well, how did that translate into how well you did academically, how well you did as a young entrepreneur in that space, the Boots to Business program, for example.

We do know there are certain programs that we have, like the Skill Bridge program, which is a great new story for all of the serv-

ices, where there is one partner that we work with that has a 94 percent placement after they are done with the program, and they still do that while they are on Active-duty. And that is a command—the commanders allow them to participate in that program without it negatively affecting the operational readiness of the unit.

Mr. RUTHERFORD. Right. We have a community-based program in northeast Florida, Operation New Uniform, which we are now going to try to replicate across the country, which has a tremendous placement rate after graduation from their program. And so I thank all of you.

And I think, Mr. Chairman that may be an area that we can actually assist through some of the interagency relationships to try to get some of that information available for you for those evaluations of effectiveness, which we currently lack.

Thank you. And I yield back, Mr. Chair.

Mr. ARRINGTON. Thank you, Mr. Rutherford.

And we will just conclude with one question for each service represented on the panel.

Sir, what would the one thing you would do, if you were king of this program and in control of the program from start to finish, what is the one thing you would do to make it work better for our veterans?

General BENNETT. We alluded to this many times, sir, Mr. Rutherford, you just talked about it, the outcome piece, once they depart.

Mr. ARRINGTON. Okay. Sir?

Admiral THOMAS. I would agree, and I think that we are doing a great job of bringing folks, hiring fairs, bringing those outreach. There is a sea of goodwill out there that people want to help us, and getting them to the bases to have those fairs be fruitful and getting the word out. I think the American public wants to hire veterans, which is a good thing. The landscape is rich. We just have to take advantage of it.

Mr. ARRINGTON. And I think the question is—I agree, I think people want to hire veterans. The question is, how does this program help them achieve that? Because you have got the demand side, and as we supply the material of folks transitioning from active to civilian, are we better preparing them to make that a higher achievement, a higher rate of achievement?

I will just keep going. One thing, one thing.

General COOK. I believe continued partnership with the inter-agencies as we try to more accurately define, for example, certifications. And Department of Labor is doing some excellent work in defining for us what are the key certifications that a member would need to get a job in cyber or get a job in civil engineering, because there are so many certifications out there. So we find great value in the partnerships with our inter-agencies.

Mr. ARRINGTON. Sir?

General STEIN. Yes. Mr. Chairman, I concur with my fellow panel Members here. I think it is connecting the dots and having a conduit with the audience. The demand signal is there. They want to hire veterans. A lot of times they don't know what door to open up. They don't know how to access in the process and the line

of effort, if you will, to make that happen and make it a more mature program, if you will, as connecting the dots with the interagency, with the VSOs, with all the partnerships and, for example, the Marine Corps League in my case, the VFW, the Chamber of Commerce, all those entities that are out there. The demand signal is high. They want to help. It is just a matter of us cracking the code on how to allow those conduits to open up.

Mr. ARRINGTON. Thank you guys for your time. Thank you for your service to our country and for your help in this process to improve this important program.

What I would like to do, Mr. Rutherford, is ask, in relatively short order, Ms. Devlin, are you still here?

I would like Ms. Devlin from the VA, and I know there are lots of components to this, but to get the stakeholders together from that interagency working group, that mean somebody from VA, somebody from Labor, somebody from DoD, and I want these folks here on the panel that are front line with this program and the customers of the program to be a part of that. And I would like for you guys to come back by the end of the year and define what success is. That is, what are the desired outcomes. Real clear. What are the success metrics? How do we measure that we are achieving those desired outcomes? And then lastly, any other recommendations for operational efficiency like Mr. Bennett said about taking—consolidating seven contracts into one. Other ways recommendations to make this program run more effectively, efficiently, and with greater accountability.

That is for the next close to 60 days the charge that I give you on behalf of this Committee, because I think you guys have the answers. And then if we can help through law writing, we will do that. If we don't need that, then let's just fix the problem and do right by our veterans and our taxpayers. God bless you guys.

I now ask unanimous consent that all Members have 5 legislative days to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material. Without objection, so ordered.

We are adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 3:54 p.m., the Subcommittee was adjourned.]

A P P E N D I X

Prepared Statement of Cindy S. Brown Barnes

TRANSITIONING VETERANS

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED IN DOD'S PERFORMANCE REPORTING AND MONITORING OF THE TRANSITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

Chairman Arrington, Ranking Member O'Rourke, and Members of the Subcommittee:

I am pleased to be here to discuss the report we are issuing today on the Transition Assistance Program (TAP). Over the past several years, hundreds of thousands of servicemembers have left the military with nearly as many more soon to follow. Some of these new veterans may face significant challenges as they transition to civilian life, such as finding and maintaining employment. To help them, the VOW to Hire Heroes Act of 2011 (VOW Act) mandates the Department of Defense (DOD) to require that all eligible separating servicemembers participate in TAP to receive counseling, employment assistance, and information on federal veteran benefits, among other supports.¹ Concurrently with implementing the VOW Act, an interagency task force led a redesign of TAP which, among other things, (1) developed a new, standardized TAP curriculum, (2) established an interagency governance structure, and (3) established Career Readiness Standards (CRS) and associated tasks to demonstrate servicemembers' readiness for civilian life.

My statement summarizes the findings from the report we issued today, which addresses: (1) the extent to which DOD is transparent in its public performance reporting, (2) how many servicemembers participated in TAP and what factors affected participation, (3) how many servicemembers met CRS or received referrals to partner agencies for additional services, and (4) the extent to which DOD monitors key areas of TAP implementation and how well TAP's performance measures inform these monitoring efforts.² In summary, we found:

- DOD lacked data on nearly half of National Guard and Reserve Members and its public reporting may have misstated TAP performance;
- At least 85 percent of servicemembers participated in required courses but not always on time, and several factors were reported to affect participation;
- While most servicemembers were deemed career ready or referred for additional services, just over half may not have completed this process on time; and
- While DOD monitors many areas of TAP implementation, it does not monitor several important requirements.

We made six recommendations. DOD agreed with three of our recommendations, partially agreed to two others, and did not agree with our recommendation on access to additional 2-day classes. GAO believes this recommendation is still valid as discussed in the report.

For our report, we surveyed 181 DOD installations that conduct TAP full time and achieved a 100 percent response rate; analyzed DOD participation data for fis-

¹VOW to Hire Heroes Act of 2011, Pub. L. No. 112-56, Title II, 125 Stat. 711, 713-733.

²GAO, Transitioning Veterans: DOD Needs to Improve Performance Reporting and Monitoring for the Transition Assistance Program.GAO 18 23 (Washington, D.C.: Nov. 8, 2017). With respect to DOD's public reporting on TAP performance, DOD is required by federal law to prepare (1) strategic plans with long-term, outcome-oriented agency priority goals and objectives, (2) annual performance plans with goals linked to achieving the long-term priority goals in the strategic plan and indicators to measure performance against the goals, and (3) annual reports on the results achieved toward the goals in the performance plan. In fiscal year 2014, DOD named one of its six agency priority goals the Transition to Veterans. Since that time, DOD has monitored TAP performance indicators and reported them in each of its annual performance plans. These requirements stem from the Government Performance and Results Act of 1993 (GPRA) which was significantly enhanced by the GPRA Modernization Act of 2010 (GPRAMA).

cal year 2016; reviewed TAP data reports and performance measures; interviewed officials from DOD and its partner agencies; and reviewed relevant federal laws, regulations, and policies. We also visited 7 installations (2 each for the Army, Navy, Air Force, and 1 for the Marine Corps) from July through December, 2016. We found DOD data on TAP participation and CRS attainment to be reliable for regular active duty servicemembers, but not for National Guard and Reserve members due to the high percentage of missing data.³ A more detailed explanation of our methodology is available in our November 2017 report. The work upon which this statement is based was conducted in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

DOD Lacked Data on Nearly Half of National Guard and Reserve Members and Its Public Reporting May Have Misstated TAP Performance, Particularly for the National Guard and Reserve

DOD lacked TAP data for 48 percent of eligible National Guard and Reserve members and 12 percent of servicemembers who were not members of the National Guard and Reserve, based upon our analysis of DOD data for fiscal year 2016. According to DOD officials, DOD launched the TAP-IT Enterprise System in November 2016 to standardize data collection across the Services and improve data completeness and accuracy. DOD officials anticipate the system's reporting capabilities will be fully operational by October 2018.

In fiscal year 2016, DOD's public reporting on the four performance measures under its Transition to Veterans agency priority goal may have misstated the extent to which underlying TAP requirements were met for National Guard and Reserve members and all other TAP-eligible servicemembers.⁴ According to federal internal control standards, management should use quality information to achieve the entity's objectives and to communicate quality information to external parties.⁵ However, DOD's public reporting of TAP's performance did not disclose that the method it used to calculate the measures excluded the percent of TAP-eligible servicemembers for whom it was missing data. For example, DOD publicly reported that 94 percent of National Guard and Reserve members attended pre-separation counseling and the three required courses of TAP's core curriculum (mandatory elements). Had the reported measure included all TAP-eligible members of the National Guard and Reserve for whom data were missing, the percentage might have been substantially lower—possibly as low as 47 percent—and DOD might not have met its performance goal of 85 percent.⁶ Similarly, DOD publicly reported that nearly 97 percent of active duty servicemembers attended the mandatory elements of TAP. However, had that measure included all TAP-eligible active duty servicemembers, the percentage may have been as low as about 87 percent.⁷ In contrast, DOD's internal reports to monitor TAP performance are more complete and transparent than its public reports since the internal reports include data for the entire TAP-eligible population and also quantify the extent of missing data (see fig. 1).

³In GAO 18 23 and the referenced analysis, we included the number and percentage of National Guard and Reserve members DOD reported to have participated in TAP to illustrate the extent to which DOD is missing data for this population, but we excluded these populations from our participant-level analyses. Consequently, the scope of this testimony is generally relevant to active-duty servicemembers who are not members of the National Guard and Reserve, unless otherwise noted.

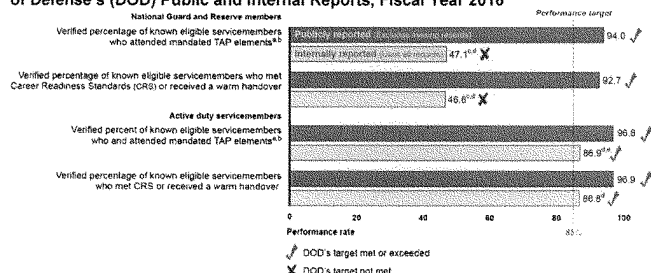
⁴Though federal law mandates that DOD require eligible servicemembers to participate in TAP, with some exceptions, DOD set performance goals below 100 percent participation among the population of servicemembers required to participate. 10 U.S.C. § 1144(c). DOD officials told us they assess performance goals each year and establish attainable but challenging performance goals.

⁵GAO, Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government, GAO 14 704G (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 2014).

⁶The exact participation rate cannot be determined due to missing data. If none of the members of the National Guard and Reserve for whom data were missing completed TAP, the participation rate would be 47 percent. If the participation of members of the National Guard and Reserve with missing data mirrored the rate for members with available data, the rate would be 94 percent. If every member of the National Guard and Reserve with missing data completed TAP, the actual rate would be even higher—97 percent.

⁷The exact rate cannot be determined due to missing data.

Figure 1: Comparison of Transition Assistance Program (TAP) Performance Outcomes between Department of Defense's (DOD) Public and Internal Reports, Fiscal Year 2016



Source: GAO analysis of Department of Defense (DOD) fiscal year 2016 data. | GAO-18-225

(b) DOD's definition notes that the calculation is in accordance with statutory requirements that allowed exemptions determined by the Secretary of Defense in consultation with Department of Homeland Security, Department of Veterans' Affairs, and Department of Labor.

(c) DOD's internal reports present rates of VOW compliance and CRS attainment separately for members of the National Guard and Reserve. To make it easier to compare DOD's two methods for calculating performance outcomes, GAO used DOD's reported numbers and methodology to calculate a combined measure that includes members of both the National Guard and Reserve.

(d) Actual participation rates may have differed from what available records show because DOD lacked participation data for 12 percent of eligible servicemembers and 48 percent of eligible members of the National Guard and Reserve. If the proportion of servicemembers or members of the National Guard or Reserve for whom data were missing completed TAP at the same rate as those for whom data were available, the percentage reported internally would likely parallel the percentage publicly reported. DOD officials said it is not accurate to calculate participation rates for servicemembers for whom data were missing because it is unknown whether those servicemembers met the performance criteria. However, we report this number to illustrate the discrepancy between what is known about performance for the entire TAP-eligible population and what DOD publicly reported.

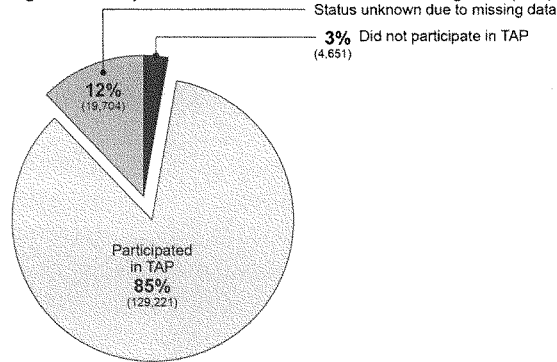
(e) This rate differs slightly from the rate GAO calculated using the participant level data provided by DOD, as shown in figure 1. DOD officials explained that GAO's calculation differs from the published rates because additional data were entered after the official performance measure calculation was completed.

We recommended that the Secretary of Defense publicly report DOD's performance regarding participation and CRS attainment for all TAP-eligible servicemembers and members of the National Guard and Reserve rather than exclude those for whom data are missing, or DOD should clarify the extent of missing data. DOD partially concurred with this recommendation, saying that compliance should be computed based only on known data, but said that in fiscal year 2018 all reports will describe the extent of missing data and DOD will continue working to reduce the extent of missing data.

At Least 85 Percent of Servicemembers Participated in Required Courses but Not Always on Time, and Several Factors Were Reported to Affect Participation

At least 85 percent of servicemembers participated in TAP's required courses—the Employment Workshop and VA Benefits I and II—according to our analysis of DOD data for fiscal year 2016 (see fig. 2).

Figure 2: Participation Rates in Transition Assistance Program's (TAP) Required Courses, Fiscal Year 2016



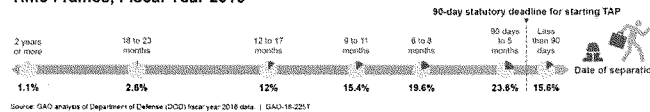
Source: GAO analysis of Department of Defense (DOD) data. | GAO-18-225T

Note: The participation rate is a measure of all servicemembers who met the following requirements: 1) either completed the employment workshop or were exempt from the requirement to participate in that course, and 2) completed VA Benefits I and II courses. Thus, our participation rate differs slightly from DOD's VOW compliance rate, which also included mandatory pre-separation counseling. Because GAO determined participation data were reliable for servicemembers but not for National Guard and Reserve members, this figure does not include the latter. Actual participation rates may have differed from what available records show because DOD lacked participation data for 12 percent of eligible servicemembers. Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number.

Therefore, DOD achieved its 85 percent performance goal for servicemember participation in mandatory portions of TAP.⁸ However, fewer than 15 percent of servicemembers participated in one or more of TAP's additional 2-day classes, which DOD does not consider mandatory unless the servicemember needs to attend to meet CRS. Those who participated in these additional 2-day classes primarily participated in the one on Accessing Higher Education.

Our analysis found that most servicemembers started TAP on time-90 days or more before their date of separation (see fig. 3).⁹ Specifically, we found that in fiscal year 2016, 74 percent of servicemembers started TAP on time. However, according to TAP staff at five of the seven installations we visited, servicemembers who start TAP less than 90 days before separating may face challenges completing TAP requirements or accessing additional transition resources.

Figure 3: Percent of Servicemembers Who Started the Transition Assistance Program (TAP) within Selected Time Frames, Fiscal Year 2016



Source: GAO analysis of Department of Defense (DOD) fiscal year 2016 data. | GAO-18-225T

⁸More specifically, this performance goal's underlying performance indicator measures all servicemembers who met all three of the following requirements: 1) participated in pre-separation counseling, 2) either completed the employment workshop or were exempt from the requirement to participate in that course, and 3) completed VA Benefits I and II courses. Our analysis of DOD data also showed that 85 percent of eligible servicemembers met all three of these requirements. Actual participation rates may have differed from what available records showed because DOD lacked participation data for 12 percent of eligible servicemembers. Federal law requires the Secretary of Defense and the Secretary of Homeland Security to require participation in TAP for members eligible for assistance, with some exceptions. 10 U.S.C. § 1144. DOD's GPRAMA priority goal performance goal for fiscal years 2016 and 2017 is set at 85 percent. The goal includes both servicemembers and members of the National Guard and Reserve. This performance goal is not a statutory requirement.

⁹See 10 U.S.C. § 1142(a)(3). In cases of unanticipated separations or retirements when there are 90 days or fewer before discharge or release from active duty, servicemembers are required to begin as soon as possible within the remaining period of service.

Notes: Because GAO determined timeliness data were reliable for servicemembers but not National Guard and Reserve members, this figure does not include members of the National Guard or Reserve. Actual timeliness rates may have differed from what available records show because DOD lacked data on the timeliness of beginning TAP for 10.1 percent of eligible servicemembers. Percentages do not add to 100 due to the missing data. The 90-day statutory timeliness threshold does not apply when servicemembers undergo unanticipated, rapid separations. Therefore, in some cases timeliness standards may have been met although the servicemember started TAP less than 90 days before separating.

Several factors affected servicemember participation in TAP, according to our survey. The two most frequently cited factors were servicemembers going through rapid separations or starting the transition process too late to attend TAP. Other often-cited factors were servicemembers believing they could not leave their duties to attend training, or not being released from duties due to mission critical skills. To a lesser degree, lack of support from direct supervisors and unit commanders was a factor that reportedly affected participation.

Despite such challenges, we generally heard positive feedback. TAP staff at all of the installations we visited said the redesigned program offered critical information and guidance and mandating participation had improved the program, such as by expanding awareness about the importance of transition preparation. Servicemembers also praised course facilitators and TAP staff, noting they were knowledgeable, dedicated, and supportive. Nonetheless, many servicemembers said attending TAP was like “trying to drink from a firehose” because of the volume of information presented in a short period of time.¹⁰

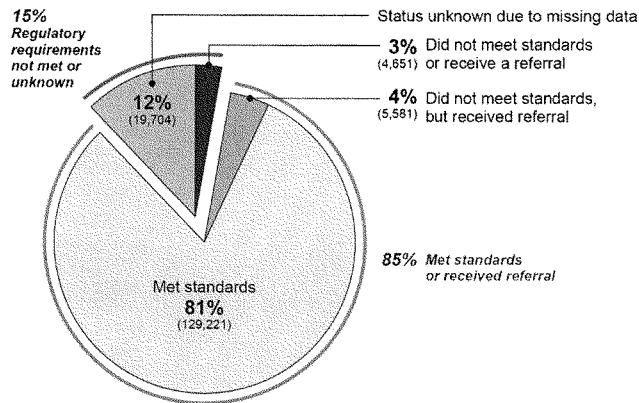
While Most Servicemembers Were Deemed Career Ready or Referred for Additional Services, Just over Half May Not Have Completed This Process on Time

DOD met its career readiness performance goal in fiscal year 2016 by ensuring at least 85 percent of servicemembers met their Career Readiness Standards (CRS) or were referred for services to an appropriate interagency partner or another appropriate resource—a process known as the “warm handover.”¹¹ In particular, about 81 percent of all active duty servicemembers met their CRS according to our analysis of DOD data. DOD ensured that another 4 percent of servicemembers received a warm handover because their CRS had not been met. Relatively few servicemembers—another 3 percent—did not meet CRS or receive a warm handover as required by regulations. Due to missing data, it is unknown whether DOD ensured the remaining 12 percent of servicemembers met CRS (see fig. 4).

¹⁰ DOD officials noted that an ongoing DOD initiative to incorporate transition preparation throughout servicemembers careers—called the Military Lifecycle Transition Model—should help address this concern.

¹¹ For fiscal years 2016 and 2017, DOD set an 85 percent target for this agency priority goal.

Figure 4: Number and Percent of Servicemembers Who Met Career Readiness Standards or Received a Warm Handover Referral, Fiscal Year 2016

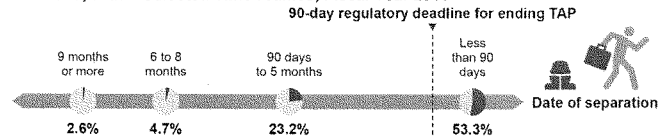


Source: GAO analysis of Department of Defense (DOD) data | GAO-18-225T

Note: Commanders or their designees are required to ensure that servicemembers who do not meet one or more Career Readiness Standards or who need further assistance are referred to an appropriate interagency partner or another appropriate resource—a process known as a “warm handover.” Because GAO determined participation data were reliable for servicemembers but not for National Guard and Reserve members, this figure does not include members of the National Guard or Reserves. Actual participation rates may have differed from what available records show because DOD lacked participation data for 12 percent of eligible servicemembers. Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number.

However, our analysis of DOD data showed more than 53 percent of servicemembers completed Capstone—the event that finalizes TAP completion by verifying attainment of CRS providing a referral—fewer than 90 days before their scheduled separation date. DOD regulations state that, preceding an anticipated separation, servicemembers must complete Capstone no later than 90 days before their date of anticipated separation, with some exceptions (see fig. 5).¹²

Figure 5: Percent of Servicemembers Who Completed Required Transition Assistance Program (TAP) Activities, within Selected Time Frames, Fiscal Year 2016



Source: GAO analysis of Department of Defense (DOD) fiscal year 2016 data | GAO-18-23

Note: Because GAO determined career readiness standard data were reliable for servicemembers but not National Guard and Reserve members, this figure does not include members of the National Guard or Reserve. Actual Career Readiness Standards attainment rates may have differed from what available records show because DOD lacked career readiness data for 16 percent of eligible servicemembers. Percentages do not add to 100 due to the missing data. The 90-day timeliness threshold does not apply when servicemembers undergo unanticipated, rapid separations. Therefore, in some cases timeliness standards may have been met although the servicemember started TAP less than 90 days before separating.

While DOD Monitors Many Areas of TAP Implementation, It Does Not Monitor Several Important Requirements

¹²The 90-day regulatory timeliness threshold does not apply when servicemembers undergo unanticipated, rapid separations. Therefore, in some cases timeliness standards may have been met although the servicemember completed TAP less than 90 days before separating.

DOD does not currently monitor the timeliness of TAP participation, although DOD regulations establish a time frame for completing TAP requirements. We recommended that the Secretary of Defense monitor and report on the extent to which servicemembers participate in TAP within prescribed time frames. DOD concurred with this recommendation and said it will begin implementing it once DOD establishes system requirements and identifies associated costs of data collection; DOD anticipates starting data collection in fiscal year 2019 at the earliest.

DOD also does not monitor and report on the extent to which servicemembers wanted to attend one of the additional 2-day classes, but were not able to participate, although federal law requires that DOD ensure that servicemembers who elect to participate in these classes are able to receive the training. We recommended that the Secretary of Defense monitor and report on the extent to which servicemembers who elect to take additional 2-day classes are able to do so. DOD disagreed with our recommendation saying that it ensures access by offering 2-day classes both in classrooms and online. Moreover, it stated that the purpose of 2-day classes is to help servicemembers achieve Career Readiness standards. However, GAO does not believe this is sufficient for DOD to know whether it is ensuring compliance with this particular law. We continue to believe that DOD needs to track whether those who elect to take these classes are able to receive the training.

In addition, agency officials told us that DOD does not systematically monitor and report on the prevalence of online TAP participation, although DOD regulations state that DOD and the military services must generally ensure servicemembers participate in TAP in a classroom setting, with some exceptions.¹³ We recommended that the Secretary of Defense monitor and report on the extent to which servicemembers attend TAP in a classroom setting unless allowed by regulation to participate online. DOD agreed to address this recommendation once it has identified system requirements and associated costs for collecting the data. DOD anticipates the earliest it will be able to monitor and report such data will be fiscal year 2019.

Moreover, DOD currently lacks a mechanism to generate performance data at the installation and unit command level related to the timeliness of TAP participation, access to additional 2-day classes, and method of course delivery. We recommended that once DOD monitors and reports data in these three areas, the Secretary of Defense should enable unit and higher-level commanders to access this information to help ensure their specific units are TAP compliant. DOD partially concurred with our recommendation in that it agreed to make data available to commanders with regard to timeliness and online participation-but not access to the 2-day classes-once it had the data collection and reporting capability.

Finally, we found that DOD's performance measures related to CRS attainment lack objectivity.¹⁴ GAO criteria state that subjective considerations or judgments should not greatly affect a measure's outcome. However, we found that assessing some of the CRS-the individual transition plan and resume portion of the job application package-requires professional judgment in determining whether a servicemember has met the particular standard, and DOD has not developed guidance or quality standards that could minimize the subjectivity of such ¹⁵decisions¹⁶. We recommended that the Secretary of Defense seek ways to minimize the subjectivity involved in making career readiness determinations. DOD concurred with this recommendation and said that by the end of fiscal year 2018, it will collaborate with the military departments and the Department Labor (DOL) to examine and implement ways, as appropriate, to minimize the subjectivity in assessing individual CRS. DOD noted that installations have personnel trained in resume writing and

¹³ According to DOD regulations, those eligible servicemembers who can use the virtual curricula include (1) those whose duty locations are in remote or isolated geographic areas, and (2) those undergoing short-notice separation who cannot access brick-and-mortar curricula in a timely manner. 32 C.F.R. pt. 88 app. G. Isolated geographic areas are defined as being 50 or more miles away from the installation to which the servicemember is assigned.

¹⁴ Previous GAO reports provide established criteria for assessing performance measurement systems. (For example, see GAO, Tax Administration: IRS Needs to Further Refine its Tax Filing Season Performance Measures, GAO 03 143, (Washington D.C. November 2002.) Specifically, for that report, GAO has identified nine key attributes of successful performance measures: measurable target, linkage, clarity, objectivity, reliability, limited overlap, balance, government-wide priorities, and core program activities. For more information, see GAO 18 23.

¹⁵ Other Career Readiness Standards-such as whether servicemembers documented requirements and eligibility for licensure, certification, and apprenticeship-do not require subjective judgments.

¹⁶ To meet Career Readiness Standards, servicemembers must demonstrate they have a viable individual transition plan and have completed a job application package, which include a resume.

career planning, who can assist servicemembers, and that installations can also call upon their local DOL partners for further support.

Chairman Arrington, Ranking Member O'Rourke, and Members of the Subcommittee, this concludes my prepared statement. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

GAO Contact and Staff Acknowledgments

If you or your staff have any questions about this testimony, please contact me at (202) 512-7215 or brownbarnesc@gao.gov. Contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page of this statement. GAO staff who made key contributions to this testimony include Meeta Engle, Amy MacDonald, and David Forgosh. Additional assistance was provided by James Bennett, Holly Dye, Ted Leslie, Shelia McCoy, Jean McSween, Benjamin Sinoff and Almata Spencer.

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Prepared Statement of Margarita Devlin

Introduction

Chairman Arrington, Ranking Member O'Rourke, and other members of this Subcommittee - thank you for the opportunity to discuss the Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) contribution to the Transition Assistance Program (TAP). With Veterans Day rapidly approaching, this hearing is a timely opportunity to take stock of our efforts to support transitioning Servicemembers, Veterans, and their families and caregivers, as well as explore how VA can continue to improve and evolve transition services.

VA is proud of the successes we have achieved in collaboration with our Federal agency partners. We are excited to tell you about our ongoing efforts to make TAP more holistic, relevant, and beneficial.

Background

In 2011, faced with increasing Veteran unemployment rates and a nationwide need for more skilled workers and entrepreneurs, the President signed the Veterans Opportunity to Work (VOW) to Hire Heroes Act of 2011 (VOW Act), which mandated that the Department of Labor (DOL) assess the skills that Servicemembers acquire in the military and improve the translation of those skills into civilian-sector certifications. The act also authorized VA to extend eligibility for the Montgomery GI Bill and Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment benefits for one year, and expand the Special Incentive Program to encourage employers to hire and provide on-the-job training to eligible Veterans. By the same token, in November 2011, Congress passed, and the President signed, the VOW Act, which included steps to improve TAP for Servicemembers. Representing a major shift from prior TAP execution, the VOW Act mandated participation in TAP by all transitioning Servicemembers, with a few limited exceptions, and focused training on employment and education. As a result of the VOW Act, TAP was redesigned as a cohesive, modular, outcomes-based program that standardized transition opportunities, services, and training to better prepare our Servicemembers to achieve their post-military career goals.

Achieving a successful transition from military to civilian life is a collaborative effort between Federal entities and external stakeholders. Under the auspices of a memorandum of understanding (MOU) executed in 2014, and updated in 2016, the Department of Defense (DoD), DOL, VA, Department of Education, Department of Homeland Security, Office of Personnel Management, and the Small Business Administration are coordinating the execution of the redesigned TAP to provide comprehensive transition benefits and services counseling, help strengthen and expand information, and facilitate support for transitioning Servicemembers. The MOU stipulates each agency's roles and responsibilities, puts forth the criteria for a comprehensive Transition Assistance Program to be implemented throughout the Military Life Cycle (MLC), and outlines collaboration expectations, including governance and continuous improvement of the program.

Overview of VA's Portion of TAP

VA strongly believes that Congress and the responsible executive branch agencies, through the passage of the VOW Act and TAP execution, have dramatically improved Servicemembers' preparation for their military to civilian transition. We continue to see improvements in employment opportunities for Veterans. The Veteran unemployment rate, which reached a high of 9.9 percent in 2011, has been reduced to 3.0 percent as of September 2017. That said, we recognize that there is much more to be done to facilitate transitioning Servicemembers' access to available VA benefits and health care.

VA's portion of TAP is delivered at over 300 military installations (including United States Coast Guard) worldwide through the support of approximately 300 trained VA Benefits Advisors (BA). Approximately 75 percent are in the contiguous United States (CONUS). TAP courses are also available online via Joint Knowledge Online, an online portal maintained by DoD. BA responsibilities include delivering the mandatory VA Benefits Briefings, Capstone and MLC events and briefings, and providing individual assistance to transitioning Servicemembers upon request. The VA Benefits I and II briefings educate transitioning Servicemembers on the wide array of VA benefits including (but not limited to) health care, education, Vocational Rehabilitation & Employment, compensation, life insurance, home loans, as well as an orientation to online benefits portals such as eBenefits and MyHealthVet. In Fiscal year 2017, BAs also conducted over 50,000 military installation engagements in support of Servicemembers and their families. In fiscal year (FY) 2017, approximately 95 percent of BAs were either Veterans themselves or Veteran/Servicemember spouses.

To continue improving the support VA offers to transitioning Servicemembers throughout their transition journey, we have regularly updated the TAP curriculum to ensure it aligns with current laws on VA eligibility, entitlement, and available benefits and services. The curriculum also takes evolving preferences for delivery of information into account. We are collaborating with DoD to align TAP offerings with the current MLC framework, which embeds transition planning and preparation for meeting career-readiness standards throughout a Servicemember's military career. For example, as part of accession and onboarding, Servicemembers are required to establish a DoD self-service (DS) logon and create an eBenefits account. The joint VA/DoD eBenefits web portal provides resources and self-service capabilities to Servicemembers, Veterans, their families, and caregivers to apply, research, access, and manage their VA and military benefits. This provides an early connection to VA at a key MLC touchpoint.

Success to Date Since VOW Act

VA BAs began conducting VA Benefits I and II Briefings, VA's core component of TAP, in FY 2013. In FY 2014, VA TAP modules became fully operational at all installations, alongside implementation of the Career Technical Training Track (CTTT), Capstone events, and one-on-one assistance.

From FY 2013 to FY 2016, VA conducted more than 172,000 events (including Benefits Briefings I and II, CTTT, one-on-one assistance, and Capstone sessions), serving more than 1.8 million Servicemembers and family members as part of TAP. Outcomes from the increased focus on education and career development by both VA and DOL TAP content can be seen reflected in the dramatic reductions in Veteran unemployment, which has steadily decreased to a low of 3.0 percent in September 2017.

During FY 2016, VA also designed a new curriculum specific to members of the National Guard and Reserve. The National Guard and Reserve components have unique needs due to their missions and mobilizations, and eligibility for VA programs is often more complex to adjudicate. The new curriculum module contains information and resources tailored to the specific needs and special circumstances of National Guard and Reserve members.

In FY 2017 (through August 2017), VA provided more than 63,000 events (including Benefits Briefings I and II, CTTT, Individual Assistance, and Capstone sessions) to more than 500,000 transitioning Servicemembers and family members as a part of TAP. VA conducted over 400 CTTT sessions in FY 2017 before moving the execution responsibility to DOL in March 2017.

DoD collects feedback from transitioning Servicemembers through the interagency Transition Goals, Plans, Success (GPS) participant assessment and shares this data with VA quarterly. This assessment collects demographic data and includes questions to assess the quality of the course curriculum, course materials, facilitators, and facilities. Participants also answer questions for VA to gauge their intent to use the information learned, confidence derived from the modules/tracks, and self-as-

sessed knowledge gain. As of third quarter of FY 2017, VA received 95,000 responses to the Transition GPS assessment for Benefits Briefings I and II. VA consistently receives high evaluations from Servicemembers who attend Benefits Briefings I and II, averaging 96-percent satisfaction on information learned, 96 percent on effectiveness of the facilitators, and 94 percent on confidence gained from the material.

VA Curriculum Redesign - Goals and Schedule

VA's curriculum seeks to frame transition information that reflects the overarching nature of the transition experience. Interagency TAP partners collaborate on a 2-year continuous review cycle, which includes a content deep dive followed by technical reviews.

As VA approached the scheduled FY 2017 deep dive (an extensive analysis of the existing curriculum), VA made a strategic decision to do a complete redesign of our curriculum, exceeding the standard review requirement. Despite the high satisfaction ratings received by Servicemembers who participated in Benefits Briefings I and II, anecdotal information received from stakeholders and Veterans suggested that a more holistic view, including the psychosocial aspects of the transition to civilian life, would enable the VA's TAP program to have more real-life relevance and increase the quality of the overall experience. For example, instead of simply providing information on the suite of benefits and services offered for eligible veterans, VA is considering ways to facilitate a more interactive course that addresses the overall transition journey. VA is leveraging instructional design based on adult learning principles to focus the curriculum on transition decisions and actions that transitioning Servicemembers need to consider with respect to available VA services and benefits, such as health care, housing, education, and career preparation. Additionally, VA plans to include classroom time for Servicemembers to complete applications for health care and other benefits.

To successfully execute this innovative change in approach, Benefits Assistance Service (BAS) - the executive agent for TAP within VA - conducted a comprehensive review with business lines throughout the Department to ensure the VA TAP Benefits I and II curriculum was inclusive of all relevant programs and services. Program-level subject matter experts from across VA were integrated into planning and development efforts to ensure optimal curriculum content and key messages would be delivered to TAP participants. In addition, VA engaged Veteran Service Organizations (VSO) and other Veteran-facing organizations to incorporate their input into the curriculum redesign.

Through this process, VA identified targeted areas of focus that have a particular importance to the transitioning Servicemember population, including (but not limited to) whole health, gender-specific health, mental health, suicide prevention, trauma/crisis support, career preparation, education, vocational rehabilitation, housing, homeless support, and disability benefits.

By understanding the scope of services most important to transitioning Servicemembers and their families, VA can build a more holistic and targeted approach to curriculum offerings. In consultation with the interagency partners, the revised VA curriculum will be piloted in January 2018, with planned deployment in late spring 2018 across installations worldwide. Subsequent to brick and mortar deployment, VA will develop an online module that aligns with the revised curriculum.

VA continues to integrate VA TAP content into the MLC. A module explaining how to access education benefits is in development, and we plan to deploy in FY 2018. VA continues to work with the interagency partners on the development of additional modules to incorporate into the MLC.

VA is excited to see how integration into the existing MLC model will serve as a positive introduction to VA benefits and services to strengthen the connection between VA and transitioning Servicemembers.

Vision for Future TAP Involvement

VA has a clear vision for our future involvement in the military to civilian transition, which begins upon accession and continues throughout a Servicemember's military career. We are currently transitioning to a new contract vehicle, which will build on earlier successes and support development of a more robust, data-driven TAP with a holistic approach to meeting current and future needs of transitioning Servicemembers.

During the initial phase of piloting the redesigned curriculum in January 2018, VA will deliver the revised curriculum to groups of transitioning Servicemembers at multiple military installations to gather specific participant feedback. VA, in collaboration with our interagency partners, will collect necessary feedback from this

pilot to make any additional enhancements to improve the curriculum. More broadly, VA will continue to look for opportunities to further strengthen TAP for transitioning Servicemembers, their families, and caregivers to ensure VA is adequately meeting their needs.

VA will continue to strengthen the connection with transitioning Servicemembers through our integration into the MLC model. VA will inform, equip, and provide support at critical touchpoints throughout their careers, from first duty assignment, during major life events throughout transition (retirement/separation), and post-transition as transitioning Servicemembers integrate into their communities as civilians. The TAP-MLC integration will serve as a positive introduction to VA benefits and services.

To further understand the needs of transitioning Servicemembers and to strengthen TAP, VA and our interagency partners will implement a post-separation assessment in order to collect reliable and valid feedback on post-separation outcomes. In FY 2017, VA awarded a contract to design, develop, and test the post-separation assessment protocol. Final submission of the survey to the Office of Management and Budget is expected to occur in FY 2018. Additionally, VA will continue work with our TAP interagency partners to identify and develop data collection approaches for long-term outcome measures that build on current indicators. The goal is to be able to share data that provides evidence of the effectiveness of TAP and help with evaluating the overall long-term impact of interagency transition services.

VA is working closely with DoD to enhance our joint efforts to prevent suicide among Servicemembers. Each instance of suicide is a tragedy, and VA is hopeful that this increased collaboration will help us identify new policy solutions that may give added relief to those who are struggling.

VA knows that we cannot solve every problem and that solutions should be inclusive of both Federal resources and the immense network of support available in local communities across our country. VA is eager to collaborate, and we are vested in connecting with community organizations that can effectively support the transition experience. To ensure VA has a full picture of the experiences and goals of those in transition, VA is working with our VSO partners, Veterans peer groups, and other thought leaders to obtain outside input based on the feedback they hear from transitioning Servicemembers.

Government Accountability Office (GAO) Report

GAO recently assessed TAP data and surveyed DoD installations and has developed a final report summarizing their findings. VA is strongly committed to working with DoD and other Federal agencies to improve TAP by strengthening the curriculum, fully integrating TAP objectives into the MLC, and analyzing post-transition survey data.

Conclusion

VA is pleased to work alongside the Federal agency TAP partners to support transitioning Servicemembers, Veterans, their families, and caregivers throughout their transition journey. The partners are proud of the progress made in recent years and are excited to continue improving TAP in the years ahead.

Through our curriculum redesign and the expansion of our reach to transitioning Servicemembers through MLC, VA is poised to have greater access to all those in uniform - both Active Duty and National Guard/Reserve - and dramatically reduce the stress of transition and being overwhelmed with information about benefits and services that many transitioning Servicemembers have experienced. VA is focused on working more closely with VSOs and other stakeholders to improve the transitioning Servicemember experience throughout their transition journey. The concept is to build a more tailored experience that results in greater awareness of and ability to support the unique needs of those in transition and improve the health, employment, and education outcomes for our Servicemembers returning to civilian life.

Thank you for allowing me to address the Committee today. Mr. Chairman, this concludes my statement. I would be pleased to answer any questions you or other Members of the Committee may have.

Prepared Statement of Ivan Denton

Introduction

Good Afternoon Chairman Arrington, Ranking Member O'Rourke, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to participate

in today's hearing. Although the Department of Labor (DOL or Department) was not a focus of the most recent Government Accountability Office engagement on transitioning service members and the Transition Assistance Program (TAP), we appreciate the opportunity to discuss the Department's work with the Departments of Defense (DoD), Veterans Affairs (VA), and other agency partners, to administer and improve TAP. As the Director of the Office of National Programs in the Veterans' Employment and Training Service (VETS) at DOL, my office is responsible for managing DOL's Employment Workshop (EW or Workshop) and Career Technical Training Track courses. As a recently retired (December 2016) soldier with a 35 year military career, I personally understand the importance of the transition process and TAP. Career transition is an important and stressful time for the transitioning service member, as well as the entire family. More broadly speaking, successful career transition is important to attracting an All-Volunteer Force, and to building the American economy. I appreciate the opportunity to discuss DOL's efforts to work with DoD and VA to administer TAP to transitioning service members and improvements that can be made to assist service members with their employment preparation as they transition to civilian life.

Secretary Acosta stands firmly behind our country's service members and veterans. He has set several clear goals that will assist our veterans in finding and retaining good jobs: (1) creating clear career pathways; (2) eliminating barriers to employment; (3) enabling and promoting apprenticeship opportunities that lead to meaningful careers; and (4) increasing the portability of licensing and credentials for military service members and their spouses.

Before the passage of the VOW to Hire Heroes Act in 2011, the veteran unemployment rate reached a high of 9.9 percent in January 2011, and Unemployment Compensation for Ex-service members (UCX) payments for the year totaled over \$728 million to nearly 90,000 individuals; with an average duration of UCX benefits payments of over 21 weeks. So far in 2017, veteran unemployment has averaged 3.7 percent, including a low of 3.0 percent in September 2017. Additionally, UCX payments and participants for the 12 months ending in August 2017 have dropped to approximately one-third of what they were in 2011, and the average number of weeks that transitioning service members receive UCX benefits has also decreased to 18.9 weeks for the 29,000 recipients who received benefits from September through August. That is good news for all transitioning service members.

While there are still approximately 300,000 veterans who are unemployed, there are 6.1 million job openings. Transitioning service members and veterans can help to fill these jobs, and employers are eager to hire them. DOL will soon publish final regulations to implement the HIRE Vets Medallion program. This program will recognize companies that are successful in hiring and retaining our nation's veterans.

DOL helps employers build effective hiring and apprenticeship programs by overseeing a workforce system that connects transitioning service members and veterans to job opportunities and training, and we assist by providing the DOL Workshops to approximately 200,000 transitioning service members each year. The Workshops provide attendees with the information, knowledge, and tools needed to bridge the divide between a military and a civilian career.

Transition Assistance Program Employment Workshops

TAP, as codified under 10 U.S.C. 1144, is a collaborative effort of the Departments of Labor, Veterans Affairs, Defense, Education, and Homeland Security (DHS), the Office of Personnel Management, and the Small Business Administration. TAP provides separating service members and their spouses with the training and support they need to transition successfully to the civilian workforce. Through TAP, DOL uses its extensive expertise in employment services to provide a comprehensive three-day Workshop at U.S. military installations around the world.

Since the Department began providing the Workshop over 25 years ago, the number of workshops, participants, and locations has grown considerably. In 2003, TAP was expanded to overseas military installations, and, in 2005, courses were offered to returning members of the Reserve and National Guard via the 30, 60, and 90-day Yellow Ribbon Reintegration programs. In 2011, the VOW Act was passed, which among other things, made participation in the DOL EW mandatory for most transitioning service members, including those demobilizing from the National Guard and Reserve Components.

Last year, DOL conducted more than 6,400 Workshops for over 180,000 participants at 187 sites worldwide. Of the over 180,000 participants, more than 7,000 were National Guard and Reserve. The 3-day DOL EW is standardized so that all attending service members and their spouses receive the same high level of instruc-

tion. The course consists of three days of classroom instruction that is tightly focused on four core competencies:

- Developing and executing a job search plan that's career focused;
- Planning for success in the civilian work environment;
- Creating resumes, cover letters, and other self-marketing materials; and
- Engaging in successful interviews and networking conversations.

In compliance with the VOW Act, the Department initiated a significant redesign of the DOL EW to make it more engaging and relevant in light of the unique challenges facing transitioning service members. This was an extensive process that involved numerous pilots, evaluations, and feedback from reviewers and agency partners. In addition, the VOW Act required that DOL use contract facilitators to ensure a standardized, high-quality professional cadre of facilitators. DOL monitors the performance of the facilitators through the review of Transition GPS Participant Assessment results, regular site assessments by DOL federal field staff, and input from DoD and military services stakeholders.

In FY 2017, the interagency partners collected and analyzed assessment results regarding participants' satisfaction with the TAP curriculum and delivery methods. Assessment results indicated that 96 percent of participants reported that they would use what they had learned in their own transition planning. The data suggests that the DOL EW is meeting the expectations of its participants. But we recognize that isn't enough, so we work with our partners, and with industry experts, to continually refine the curriculum, the methods of delivery, and the electronic resources available to give transitioning service members the best opportunity for a successful career transition.

VETS completed the implementation of the revised DOL EW curriculum in Fiscal Year (FY) 2016. This revision incorporated extensive input from TAP stakeholders, including military transition services personnel, transitioning service members, private sector employers, and Veterans Service Organizations (VSOs). The result is an employment workshop focused on the four competencies noted above. Additionally, in FY 2016, VETS conducted a technical review of the curriculum in accordance with the TAP Curriculum Working Group's two-year review cycle. The purpose of the technical review was to ensure that the content, data, and web sites used in the curriculum were accurate and up-to-date.

DOL has awarded a contract for an independent evaluation of the TAP program. The evaluation will include a quasi-experimental design to analyze the impacts of the TAP DOL EW on employment-related outcomes for separating military service members. It will also involve a small pilot to evaluate differential impacts of behavioral intervention approaches for connecting separating service members to American Job Centers (AJCs).

The interagency performance management working group is also reviewing long-term outcome measures that may be used to assess the impact of TAP. These include a variety of unemployment and labor force statistics. Many of these measures will require data sharing efforts, or possibly legislative changes, to allow access to information across agencies.

Based on a data agreement between Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC) and DOL, at this time last year, we began to receive E-form (i.e., DD Form 2648) data from DMDC on transitioning service members. Transitioning service members are given the opportunity to opt into receiving information from DOL. Since that time DOL has sent approximately 150,000 emails to transitioning service members to connect them with employment and training resources. DOL will continue to analyze the data and to work with stakeholders to leverage Veterans' Data Exchange Initiative in a manner that can positively impact employment outcomes.

Veterans Employment Initiative Task Force for a Career-Ready Military

In 2011, the Veterans Employment Initiative (VEI) Task Force was established to ensure the career readiness of transitioning service members. The Task Force consists of joint representation from DOL, DoD, VA, DHS (U.S. Coast Guard), the Department of Education, the Small Business Administration, and the Office of Personnel Management. The Task Force designed a plan to strengthen and build upon the existing TAP curriculum, which is now known as Transition GPS (Goals, Plans, Success). To continue this important collaboration, the TAP Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) provides an interagency governance framework. There are five interagency working groups (transition assistance, curriculum, IT/data sharing, performance management, and strategic communications) that report to the Senior Steering Group (SSG). The SSG meets monthly to ensure the program is operating as intended by statute. The SSG reports to the Executive Council (EC), which meets

quarterly. The EC, SSG, and all of the working groups are represented by each interagency partner. The Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD), DOL, and VA serve as co-chairs of each of the groups-with the lead chair rotating annually. In FY 2018, DOL is the host.

Transition GPS: Under the current interagency MOU, the supporting agencies have a greater sense of their roles and responsibilities in support of Transition GPS, which now includes four basic components to help service members prepare for separation and meet their career readiness standards: (1) Pre-Separation/ Transition Counseling; (2) Transition GPS Core Curriculum; (3) additional Career Specific training tracks; and (4) Capstone.

Pre-Separation/ Transition Counseling: Through the current transition program, transitioning service members receive individual counseling to discuss their career goals and start their transition process. Each service member is introduced to the programs and services available to them during their transition and begins to develop an Individual Transition Plan (ITP) that documents his or her personal transition, as well as the deliverables he or she must attain to meet the new transition program's Career Readiness Standards.

Transition GPS Core Curriculum: The Transition GPS Core Curriculum includes a financial planning seminar, VA Benefits Briefings, the DOL Employment Workshop, and other modules. Transitioning service members also use a Military Occupational Code Crosswalk to translate their military skills, training, and experience into civilian occupations, credentials, and employment.

Additional Career-Specific Training Tracks: Service members also have the opportunity to participate in a series of two-day tailored tracks within the Transition GPS curriculum: (1) an Accessing High Education Track (provided by DoD), for those pursuing a higher education degree; (2) a Career Technical Training Track (CTTT) (provided by DOL), for those interested in obtaining job-ready skills through apprenticeship or other industry-recognized credentials; and (3) the "Boots to Business" Entrepreneurship Track (provided by SBA), for those wanting to start a business.

In April 2017, the Department assumed responsibility for the TAP CTTT. This is aligned with the Secretary's emphasis on apprenticeship, and the President's recent Executive Order 13801, Expanding Apprenticeships in America. CTTT is an additional two-day workshop focused on apprenticeships and industry-recognized credentials for transitioning service members and their spouses. The CTTT provides these service members with an opportunity to identify their relevant skills, increase their awareness of training and apprenticeship programs that can lead to industry-recognized credentials and meaningful careers, and develop an action plan to achieve their career goals. The Department is also undertaking a comprehensive review of the CTTT curriculum, and has reached out to employers, industry associations, and other stakeholders, asking for participation in the examination of both the DOL EW and the CTTT offerings. Their valuable input will help to ensure the curricula are up-to-date and relevant to the dynamic employer and industry standards. As with the TAP EW, DOL has sought input from a range of industry experts and expects to implement a revised CTTT curriculum in early 2018.

Capstone: Before their separation from the military, service members participate in a Capstone event, which requires that the transitioning service member's chain-of-command verify that he or she has completed the VOW Act requirements and achieved Career Readiness Standards. Service members who require additional assistance will be referred to supplemental training opportunities. In addition, through the Capstone event, service members will be offered, as needed, a "warm handover" to appropriate federal, state, and local government agencies, such as the AJCs.

SkillBridge: The Department also works with our partners at DoD to support their SkillBridge initiative, which works to offer civilian job training to transitioning service members. Service members who meet certain qualifications can participate in civilian job and employment training, including pre-apprenticeships, on-the-job training, and internships in their last 180 days of active duty. Secretary Acosta is interested in increasing employer access to transitioning service members through SkillBridge and other employer sponsored programs. We will work with DoD and employers to increase these opportunities. Tremendous potential exists for service members, companies, trade unions, and others to leverage this DoD authority and facilitate a smooth transition from active duty to civilian employment.

DOL Support for Non-Optimal Transition

When a service member is assessed as not meeting Career Readiness Standards during their Capstone event, their commander facilitates a "warm handover" of the service member to the public workforce system for a review of the employment serv-

ices available through AJCs and to facilitate access to individualized career services. This warm handover can be accomplished by introducing the service member to a local AJC staff member (on or near the military base), connecting them to the AJC nearest their eventual destination, or through a facilitated call from the service member to the DOL Toll-Free Help Line (1-877-US2-JOBS or 1-877-872-5627). Service members that do not meet career readiness standards are allowed to receive services from a Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program (DVOP) specialists at the AJCs, regardless of disability status or other significant barriers to employment. DVOP specialists, authorized under 38 U.S.C. 4103A, are funded throughout 54 states and territories through DOL's Jobs for Veterans State Grant (JVSG) program and provide intensive services to eligible veterans and eligible spouses. JVSG also provides funding for Local Veterans' Employment Representatives staff members who provide a wide range of services on behalf of our veterans specifically related to outreach to the employer community and facilitation within the state's employment service delivery system.

American Job Centers: Most of the Department's employment programs and services are available through the nationwide network of nearly 2,400 AJCs. The AJCs serve as the cornerstone for the Nation's workforce investment system and provide a range of services locally, including counseling, resume writing workshops, job skills assessments, occupational training, on-the-job training, apprenticeships, and job placement services. Last year, more than 13 million Americans, including almost one million veterans (including National Guard and Reserve), received employment assistance through AJCs. Additionally, Section 2 of the Jobs for Veterans Act of 2002, as codified at 38 U.S.C. 4215, established "Priority of Service" for veterans, which allows veterans and their eligible spouses to receive priority access to workforce training programs directly funded, in whole or in part, by DOL. The Department is committed to providing Priority of Service for veterans and eligible spouses.

Unemployment Compensation for Ex-service Members: The Department also oversees the UCX program, which provides benefits for eligible ex-military personnel. The program is administered by the States as agents of the Federal government. To qualify for UCX, an individual must have been on active duty with a branch of the U.S. military and discharged under honorable conditions. There is no payroll deduction from service members' wages for unemployment insurance protection. Benefits are paid for by the various branches of the military, or the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. The law of the State (under which the claim is filed) determines benefit amounts, number of weeks benefits can be paid, and other eligibility conditions. Transitioning service members that receive UCX are eligible to be enrolled in state Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessment (RESEA) programs to assist them in gaining employment.

To further support UCX beneficiaries during their transition to civilian employment, the Department has leveraged the RESEA grant program. RESEA grants provide states with additional funding for in-person reemployment services at AJCs, such as career and labor market information, development or update of an individual reemployment plan, orientation to AJC services, referrals to additional resources, and a review of each participant's continued UCX or Unemployment Insurance (UI) eligibility. RESEA is an evidenced-based strategy targeted to individuals identified as likely to exhaust UI benefits. Since 2015, the Department has directed participating states to provide RESEA services to UCX beneficiaries to the greatest extent feasible. The 2018 Budget includes a proposal that would expand RESEA to serve 50 percent of all UI beneficiaries most likely to exhaust benefits, as well as all UCX beneficiaries.

Priorities Moving Forward:

DOL EW Participation Timeline and Curriculum Update: VETS has been working with our partners on the TAP SSG to better address transitioning service members' needs. For the past several years, the focus of the TAP SSG has been the requirements of the VOW Act. The TAP SSG has also begun focusing on the timing of the delivery of TAP. Although many transitioning service members are attending TAP within 90 days of separation, and as early as two years out for retirees, we believe, in line with DoD's policy, that to the greatest extent possible, transitioning service members should attend TAP much earlier. In our view, TAP should be delivered as much as one year prior to scheduled separation for transitioning service members, and as early as two years prior to separations for retirees to allow for participation in supplemental courses, financial planning, resume development, networking, career research and access to other opportunities like DoD's SkillBridge.

During FY 2017, the TAP Interagency Curriculum Working Group conducted an in-depth review of all the curricula modules, including the DOL EW and CTTT. As

part of the in-depth review process, DOL distributed the DOL EW and CTTT curricula materials to over 40 internal and external stakeholders providing them an opportunity to review the material and respond with input. The stakeholder group included the TAP Interagency partners, employers, VSOs, the US Chamber of Commerce, Society of Human Resource Managers, and the National Association of State Workforce Agencies. Based on feedback received, DOL is updating the DOL EW curriculum to improve organization, remove some outdated practices, improve the LinkedIn Profile section, and to emphasize the importance of taking advantage of the additional Transition GPS tracks - Accessing Higher Education, Entrepreneurship track, and CTTT. The Department's intent is to highlight how it is in the interest of the transitioning service member to take a career approach by obtaining a degree, industry recognized credential(s), or an apprenticeship.

CTTT Participation Increase and Curriculum Update: As the responsible agency for CTTT, the Department will work with interagency partners to increase CTTT participation. In addition, VETS, with the assistance of the Department's Employment and Training Administration's Office of Apprenticeship, is significantly revising the CTTT curriculum. The new curriculum will place increased emphasis on apprenticeships as a path to sustainable, high paying careers. The revised CTTT curriculum will cover four themes: (1) Personal Assessment using three assessment tools; (2) Research into specific career fields of interest; (3) Understanding training requirements and identifying training opportunities; and (4) Establishing goals and develop a detailed plan to achieve those goals.

Veterans' Data Exchange Initiative, the TAP Mobile Application, and Evaluations: In November 2016, VETS began the data transfer process from the Defense Manpower Data Center for the Veterans' Data Exchange Initiative (VDEI). The overall intent of this initiative is to allow the Department to gain a better understanding of transitioning service members, which will allow VETS to better prepare the Department's services for individuals transitioning out of the military. VETS is tracking data elements such as race/ ethnicity, gender, military occupation, and other demographic information for approximately 200,000 transitioning service members each year. Partnering with DOL's Chief Evaluation Office, VETS is examining the VDEI data to determine how the data can be used to analyze employment outcomes for transitioning service members and improve our service delivery. Currently, based on E-form data sent to DOL from DMDC, VETS sends emails to transitioning service members to highlight the importance of participating in the DOL EW as early as possible to provide employment tools that support the transition process.

The Department has initiated development of a TAP mobile application (app). The purpose of this app is to provide online tools for transitioning service members in a format that is accessible from a smartphone. The app will provide access to a full suite of the CareerOneStop mobile tools, and will include DOL TAP course materials. Additionally, the app will provide transition checklists and automated notifications.

Conclusion

In conclusion, our long-term goal continues to be for the nation as a whole to recognize military service as a path to high-quality civilian careers. The future of the country's All-Volunteer Force depends upon this recognition, as does our economy. The Department recognizes employment as possibly the most important element of a successful transition to civilian life. The Department thanks the Congress for addressing TAP participation through the VOW Act, and for your continued partnership in removing barriers to employment.

Today, the Department remains committed to working with our interagency partners to continuously review and improve TAP curricula, including the DOL EW and CTTT, through our regular review cycle that incorporates input from employers and best practices across the nation.

Moving ahead, we look forward to preparing transitioning service members and their spouses even more effectively by improving the timeliness of DOL EW participation and increasing participation rates in the supplementary career-related tracks.

The Department looks forward to working with the Subcommittee to ensure that our separating service members have the resources and training they need to successfully transition to the civilian workforce. The improving employment situation for veterans is a resounding testament to the nationwide response from stakeholders, both public and private, at the national level and even within the local communities. Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, this concludes my written statement. Thank you for the opportunity to be a part of this hearing. I welcome your questions.

Prepared Statement of Judd H. Lyons

Chairman Arrington, Ranking Member O'Rourke, distinguished members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you this afternoon to discuss the Transition Assistance Program (TAP) and the findings and recommendations of the U.S. Government Accountability Office's (GAO) recent report entitled, "Transitioning Veterans - DoD Needs to Improve Performance Reporting and Monitoring for the Transition Assistance Program."

On December 15, 2015, the Department testified before the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee on the TAP in response to the question "Is transition assistance on track?" Our response, then and now, is yes. In addition, TAP is an adaptive, evidence-based program. Accordingly, the Department is continuously improving the program to meet the needs our transitioning Service members.

The Department reported, in our December 2015 witness statement, we have achieved the four core TAP redesign objectives identified in 2012. These four core objectives are: (1) Adopting "career readiness" standards (CRS) for transitioning Service members; (2) Implementing a revamped TAP curriculum with learning outcomes; (3) Implementing a Capstone event; and (4) Implementing a "Military Life Cycle" (MLC) transition model. In the 23 months since then, the TAP has continued to mature and align with a changing military environment and population. I will highlight some of the improvements we have made to the TAP since 2015, building upon the original four core objectives, as well as additional efforts currently underway. Specifically, I will address improvements and work underway to program evaluation, curriculum revisions and other enhancements across the MLC, the Capstone event and assisting at-risk Service members, and private and public engagement to enhance Service members' military-to-civilian transition. I will also specifically address the recommendations made by the GAO for TAP improvements.

PROGRAM EVALUATION

TAP Interagency Evaluation Plan

The first core objective achieved of the original TAP redesign was to adopt CRS for transitioning Service members for successful transition preparation. Building on the CRS as a key underlying foundation, the TAP interagency governance has been focused on TAP as a data-driven program. This is shaped by the interagency TAP Evaluation Plan, which presents a systematic and singular interagency approach to evaluating the performance of Service member transition assistance services. Both the FY2015–2016 and FY2017–2018 TAP Evaluation Plans were reviewed and approved by Office of Management and Budget. The interagency TAP Evaluation Plan supports three overarching goals: 1) provide accountability to ensure the program is effectively and efficiently executed in accordance with law, policy, and leadership intent; 2) measure and improve customer satisfaction; and 3) measure and improve program effectiveness. As part of this plan, methods and tools were developed to assess the processes for TAP delivery, immediate results of program delivery (e.g., whether separations comply with statute and policy), and the desired systemic impacts of the program (e.g., veterans successfully obtain employment, start new businesses, and/or seek additional education).

Site Visits and Transition GPS Participant Assessment

The Service Inspectors General provide accountability that the program is delivered on military installations in accordance with law, policy, and leadership intent. We developed the web-based Transition GPS Participant Assessment to assess and improve customer satisfaction with the Transition GPS (Goals, Plans, Success) curriculum and the TAP. This assessment is used to gather voluntary feedback from transitioning Service members who participated in the TAP. Questions are designed to assess the quality of the course content and materials, facilitators, and facilities. Participants are asked about each module or track individually, as well as the overall TAP. Results consistently demonstrate that Service members perceive the TAP as valuable and high quality. For example, during Quarter 3 of FY2017: 91 percent of respondents said they gained valuable information and skills to plan their transition, 91 percent said the training enhanced their confidence in transition planning, 91 percent indicated that they intended to use what they learned, and 93 percent knew how to access appropriate resources to answer questions about transition. The TAP interagency governance consistently uses feedback from this assessment to inform future changes to policy, curriculum, facilitator training, and other program elements.

Veterans Opportunity to Work (VOW) Act and CRS Attainment

The TAP governance monitors and examines a host of output measures and outcome indicators to gauge the effectiveness of the program, such as CRS compliance, veteran unemployment rate, new business formation rate, and education persistence/graduation rate for those using their GI Bill benefits. To measure initial TAP effectiveness, we rely on VOW Act and CRS compliance. The Department made the VOW Act and CRS compliance of Service members transitioning to civilian life an Agency Priority Goal (APG) in FY2014. The Department took this charge seriously and has refined the ways in which data is collected, examined, and reported. For example, at the beginning of FY2014, VOW Act compliance was tracked using only attendance data, and our APG combined the Active and Reserve Component into a single performance measure. In FY2015, DoD began relying on the DD Form 2958 to track both VOW Act and CRS compliance. The DD Form 2958 verified from the Service member's commander (or designee) that all VOW Act and CRS requirements were met prior to the Service member's separation, retirement, or release from active duty. At that time, the compliance rates also reflected only the known eligible Service members (i.e., those for whom a complete (or partially completed) DD Form 2958 was received by the Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC)). In FY2015, separate performance measures were also created for the Active and the Reserve Component for both VOW Act and CRS compliance to allow more accurate and transparent tracking of the APG. The Department continues to work towards improving the quality of data on VOW Act and CRS compliance. On November 7, 2016, the Department deployed a new TAP-IT Enterprise System and electronic form (DD Form 2648), which further streamlined the data collection processes and precluded commanders (or their designees) from signing partially completed forms, increasing the completeness of information documented on each Service member.

With more involved command and senior leadership support, improved data tracking, and accountability using known verified DD Form data received by DMDC, VOW Act and CRS compliance was more than 85% for both known eligible Active and Reserve Component Service members by the end of FY2015 and more than 90% by the end of FY2016. Even as data tracking methods have become more precise and sophisticated with the electronic form (i.e., the DD Form 2648), the verified DD Form data received by DMDC shows more than 90 percent for both known eligible Active and Reserve Component Service members continued VOW Act and CRS compliance for FY 2017. That is good news, but we have much work to do to improve our data capture of the electronic form, particularly for our Reserve Component Service members. As of August FY 2017 data indicates, 12.8% of Active Component Service members and 54.1% of Reserve Component service members have compliance information that remains unknown - that is, these Service members do not have a completed DD Form 2648 documented in the TAP-IT Enterprise System. The Department continues collaboration with the Services and DMDC to identify and resolve any gaps in data collection and transmission to reduce the number of separations with 'unknown' compliance and ensure data completeness and accuracy regarding compliance reporting. This is a key area of focus in FY2018.

The TAP interagency governance is also better able to support Service members with the new TAP-IT Enterprise System and electronic form. With the launch of this new electronic form in November 2016, the TAP interagency partners are able to receive individual-level data on transitioning Service members who have 'opted in' to be contacted for follow-on transition support. The Department of Labor (DOL) and Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) currently receive this 'opt in' data from the DoD and are exploring ways to best utilize this data to enhance support. Additionally, data sharing among the Department and the TAP interagency partners will address the question of what additional services our transitioning Service members receive if they are provided a warm handover (e.g., due to failing to meet CRS), as well as the outcomes of these services.

Enhanced Long-Term Outcomes of TAP

The TAP interagency governance is currently discussing planned enhancements to the TAP Evaluation Plan to capture the systemic, long-term impacts of the program. Identifying new data collection mechanisms for these outcomes is challenging. For example, not all desired outcome data is owned by the TAP partner agencies (e.g., earnings data), and data must be shared or combined with other data which requires cross-agency agreements. The TAP interagency governance is committed to developing a roadmap to enhance the TAP long-term outcomes by the end of FY2018 to ultimately improve our understanding of the efficacy of the TAP and where we need to improve.

CURRICULUM AND OTHER ENHANCEMENTS ACROSS THE MLC

The second and fourth core objectives of the original TAP redesign were to implement a revamped TAP curriculum and implement a MLC transition model. While both original objectives were achieved, the Department has continued to make advancements.

The Department and our partners continuously update and improve the TAP curriculum across the MLC. The TAP interagency governance has established a regular 2-year battle rhythm for reviewing, assessing, and updating the curriculum, alternating between an in-depth and technical review. Both reviews use feedback provided by Service members through the Transition GPS Participant Assessment, facilitators, subject matter experts, and other key stakeholders. This systematic review process is critical to stay ahead of the changing needs of our transitioning Service members, as well as the evolving global economic needs to provide qualified skilled talent to the industry and public sector pipeline.

The TAP interagency governance is currently conducting an in-depth curriculum review, with revised curriculum to be implemented in CY 2018. The Department identified improvements in all four DoD modules: Resilient Transitions, Financial Planning for Transition, Military Occupation Code (MOC) Crosswalk, and the Accessing Higher Education (AHE) track. Based on Service member feedback, recent legislative changes, and recent research on challenges transitioning Service members face in their first 12 months post-separation, more substantial revisions are planned for the Resilient Transitions and Financial Planning modules this year. The MOC Crosswalk and AHE curriculum were substantially revised during the last in-depth review in 2015.

In terms of this year's in-depth review, the improved Resilient Transitions module will include a new interactive activity to promote participant discussion on transition challenges and available post-transition resources, as well as a discussion on key differences between military and civilian workplace culture. In terms of the Financial Planning module, this module will be further tailored to transition in accordance with new financial literacy requirements specified in the FY2016 National Defense Authorization Act. With financial readiness training occurring across the MLC, Service members demonstrate a higher level of knowledge regarding financial readiness when they attend the TAP. As such, this TAP module can spend less time on basic financial information and more time on transition-specific information, such as civilian salary equivalency to military compensation, expectation of changes in tax burden, and understanding the basics of health insurance.

These proposed DoD revisions were piloted at two military installations with participants from all Military Services in October 2017, with planned deployment in January 2018 along with the revised U.S. Small Business Administration Entrepreneurship Track. Likewise, the DOL and VA planned improvements will be piloted early CY 2018, with planned deployment in April 2018.

While the TAP interagency governance continues to improve the curriculum at the final touchpoint - Transition - within a Service member's MLC, we are also making advances across the MLC as well. Through implementation of the MLC transition model, Service members are engaging in career preparation and transition assistance planning much earlier in their careers - starting at their first permanent duty station, or home station for the National Guard and Reserves. This represents a significant, yet critical cultural shift for the Department. For example, at the first permanent duty station, Service members develop an Individual Development Plan (IDP) which documents professional and personal goals, as well as the training, certifications, and higher education needed to achieve those goals. Service members are also provided information on apprenticeships, instruction on resumes and financial preparedness, and they register for eBenefits. As their career progresses, their IDP is continuously updated with current certifications, technical training and documentation of higher education. At significant life events, such as promotion, military occupational change and/or marriage, Service members are provided updated information on impacts to financial readiness and career opportunities, among other key touchpoint activities. As another example, in October 2015, the Department began providing a new virtual curriculum earlier in the MLC - the Higher Education Preparation module. This module is designed to assist Service members in identifying their career goal, the educational path to achieve that goal, and utilizing tuition assistance (during military service) to fund their education. The Department is also currently collaborating with our TAP interagency partners to identify additional curriculum and/or other resources to provide Service members at earlier touchpoints across the MLC. The intent is to ensure thoughtful career planning and preparation across one's military career.

CAPSTONE EVENT AND ASSISTING AT-RISK SERVICE MEMBERS

The third core objective of the original TAP redesign was to implement a Capstone event to ensure: Service members complete the VOW Act requirements; meet the CRS; and have a viable Individual Transition Plan (ITP), including a post-transition housing and transportation plan. For Service members who fail to meet one or more of these criteria, the Military Services provide a warm handover to appropriate partner agencies and other relevant resources. This core objective was achieved.

However, while the warm handover process was robust for those failing to meet VOW/CRS, DoD and our interagency partners identified areas within the warm handover process in need of improvement. For example, since 2013, the Services identified transitioning Service members without a viable post-transition housing plan who are at an increased risk for homelessness. It was evident after reviewing warm handover data in late 2015, that more needed to be done to improve the execution and monitoring of the warm handover. The Department also recognized Service members separating without an honorable discharge face increased risks (e.g., for suicide). The Department sought to strengthen our support to these two vulnerable populations. Specifically, in April 2016, DoD issued two Memoranda to the Services to address these concerns. The first Memorandum, entitled “Warm Handover Guidance for Transitioning Service Members Without a Post-Military Housing Plan,” requested the Services issue immediate guidance requiring commanders and their designees to ensure a warm handover to the VA and/or the DOL for those transitioning Service members without a viable post-military housing plan. The second Memorandum, entitled “Warm Handover Guidance for Transitioning Service Members Who Do Not Separate with an Honorable Discharge,” requested the Military Services issue guidance immediately to commanders or their designees directing them to execute a warm handover to the DOL for those transitioning Service members that do not separate with an honorable discharge. The Department continues to place emphasis on these at-risk populations to ensure they are receiving the additional support needed. For example, DoD, VA, and DOL are working in collaboration with the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) to further prevent homelessness among our veterans.

DoD and VA have also been recently collaborating to begin examining other ‘at risk’ populations that may be better served during their military-to-civilian transition in FY 2018. This may have implications for future changes to the TAP curriculum and/or warm handover processes. For example, one of our more recent joint efforts is geared toward suicide prevention of Service members and veterans. Within this broader joint effort is the establishment of a DoD/VA Transition Working Group focused on identifying the population at risk for suicide following a military-to-civilian transition, and ways in which to better support this high risk population prior to separation. Another population at higher risk for suicide is women veterans. The Department and the VA are initiating a new “Women’s Health Initiative” pilot study, to be implemented at several Air Force and Army installations. The pilot focusing on women veterans separating within 12 months, will provide supplementary information on VA services specifically available to women and track associated outcomes (e.g., enrollment in VA health care). Based on the pilot findings this supplementary curriculum may be implemented more broadly in the future to address needs of transitioning women Service members and veterans.

Finally, while not an ‘at risk’ population per se, the Department continues to review whether we are providing the National Guard (Air and Army National Guard) and the Reserves (Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marine Corps Reserve) the time, resources, and support unique to those populations. Specifically, the Department is leveraging the Status of Forces Survey (SOFS) to pulse Reserve Component (RC) members’ perceptions of the TAP, and how perceptions are changing over time. The Department also recently commissioned a research study, entitled “Needs Assessment of Reserve Component Member Transitions,” to more comprehensively investigate the needs of transitioning RC members and provide recommendations regarding updates needed to the TAP. Study findings are expected in FY 2019. The Department continues to conduct research, gather feedback from RC members, and consider potential changes to policy within current law to address unique needs of RC members.

PRIVATE AND PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

Another area Department has made improvements and continues to break new ground is through implementation of collaborative and informative private and public engagements between the Department, federal interagency partners, the Military Services, transitioning Service members, employers, and other stakeholders. First, the Department maintains robust private and public engagement operations to raise awareness of the value transitioning Service members and veterans bring to the ci-

vilian workforce. In fact, we disseminate to employers the findings from a recent RAND Corporation study, which enumerates the non-technical “essential” skills (e.g., leadership, decision-making, team building) our Service members obtain while in uniform. These essential skills represent the 21st century workforce skills that are highly sought after by civilian and public-sector employers.

Second, the Department connects with, informs, and strengthens private and public efforts to better prepare transitioning Service members to become career-ready as they transition to civilian life. Since August 2016, the Department completed over 200 private and public engagements with Federal, State, industry, education, and community stakeholders. The Department established collaborative relationships and partnerships through participation in the DOL’s Advisory Committee on Veterans’ Employment, Training, and Employer Outreach and through interactions with over 25 federal Departments/Agencies. Best practices have been garnered and shared through engagements across the country with over 30 industries/corporations (e.g., Microsoft, Walmart, Amazon, J.P. Morgan Chase), over 20 two-year and four-year colleges and universities (e.g., Columbia University, Carnegie Mellon University, Duke, University of Houston, University of Washington-Tacoma), and numerous Service member/veteran-focused institution and coalitions (e.g., the Bush Institute, the Institute for Veterans and Military Families, the Veterans Jobs Mission Coalition).

Two examples of key private and public engagements include collaboration with the U.S. Customs and Border Patrol and our partnership with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation’s Hiring Our Heroes Program. The U.S. Customs and Border Patrol staff are now co-located on several military installations to connect with interested and qualified transitioning Service members. In close collaboration with DoD and the Services, CBP has made significant changes to their recruitment requirements and business processes to streamline and reduce the amount of time it takes to process applications for employment. Another key engagement that has paid great dividends is our collaboration with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation’s Hiring Our Heroes Transition Summits. Over the past two years, our partnership has grown from 17 annual transition summits at military installations around the world to over 40 transition summits scheduled for CY 2018, including Germany, Japan, and Korea. Each summit connects employers of every size and industry with, on average, more than 1,000 talented transitioning Service members, veterans, and military spouses on military installations in the U.S. and overseas. Attendees are invited to participate in a series of town hall-style panel discussions, networking receptions, employment workshops, and a job fair. Over 90% of Service member attendees who responded to a post-event survey identified they felt better prepared for transition after attending these events.

The Department remains fully committed to collaboration with Federal, State, industry, education, and community stakeholders to ensure continuous coordination and information sharing. This ensures Service members receive access to education, training, and opportunities that best prepare them for their military-to-civilian transition. Private and public engagements directly support and enhance stakeholder commitments that support successful transition of our Service members.

These are several improvements to the TAP since 2015. The Department, the Services, our interagency partners, transitioning Service members and their families recognize the tremendous enhancements to the TAP over the past two years. In addition, the Department appreciates the importance placed on the TAP by Congress and the GAO. We view the recent GAO study on the TAP as an opportunity to receive external feedback to further advance this important program.

GAO REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS

Before addressing the recommendations from the GAO Report on “Transitioning Veterans - DoD Needs to Improve Performance Reporting and Monitoring for the Transition Assistance Program,” DoD would like to acknowledge GAO’s tremendous work in conducting this review of the TAP. The GAO team leading this effort was professional, thorough, and supportive of the unique needs of DoD, the Military Services and the installations they visited. There was a collaborative and cordial spirit among the GAO team and the various DoD stakeholders that allowed GAO to conduct their business in a timely and effective manner.

In light of the redesigned TAP, Congress asked GAO to examine various aspects of the program implementation. This GAO report addresses four overarching questions: 1) To what extent does DoD publicly report TAP performance transparency; 2) How many Service members participated in TAP and what factors affected participation; 3) How many service members met CRS or received referrals to partner agencies for additional services; and 4) To what extent does DoD monitor key areas

of the TAP implementation and how well do the TAP performance measures inform these monitoring efforts?

In order to address these questions, GAO surveyed 181 Military installations; analyzed DoD participation data for FY 2016; reviewed and analyzed TAP data reports and performance measures; and interviewed officials at DoD, the Services, Service members, and our interagency partners. GAO also visited seven installations (two each from Army, Navy, and Air Force, and one Marine Corps). The audit was conducted from February 2016 to September 2017. As a result, GAO states in their report, “GAO is making six recommendations, including that DoD improve transparency in reporting TAP participation and career readiness rates and monitor certain key areas of TAP implementation, including timeliness of participation and access to supplemental 2-day classes.”

The Department acknowledges at the outset that, overall, we concur with GAO recommendations for the TAP. However, there is one recommendation, and sections of a few other recommendations, that the Department does not fully support. The Department’s position on each GAO recommendation is as follows:

RECOMMENDATION 1: GAO recommends the Secretary of Defense publicly report DoD’s performance and career readiness attainment for all TAP-eligible Service members and members of the National Guard and Reserve rather than exclude those for whom data are missing or clarify the extent of missing data. (DoD Partially Concur)

DoD acknowledges the FY 2016 Agency Priority Goals (APG) performance measures provided to the public via performance.gov did not provide a clear explanation regarding missing data. However, in FY 2017 DoD provided language in reporting the APG performance measures data that clearly addressed the extent of the missing data for the public. The following is an extract of DoD’s Transition to Veterans Program Office FY 2017 third quarter “Separation VOW Compliance Reserve Component” performance measure language, as reported through DoD channels for publication to the public via performance.gov: “Compliance rate reflects only the known eligible Service members, that is - those for whom a completed DD Form 2648 (or legacy DD Form 2958) was received by the Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC). Through May FYTD 2017, DMDC received completed DD Forms for 41.0% (8,953) of the 21,861 Reserve Component VOW Act eligible separations.” Similar language was used in reporting VOW Compliance for active duty service members.

In addition to the currently reported VOW Act compliance and career readiness standards attainment for VOW Act eligible Service members, DoD will provide a more transparent description of the extent of the missing data along with the currently reported compliance rates to offer important insight as to the number of Service members for whom data is unknown. The Department feels strongly that compliance should only be computed based on data known and should include a description of the extent of the missing data to offer insight as to the number of Service members for who compliance data is unknown. This information will be included in the FY 2018 Q1 reporting and beyond. As stated above, an explanation of the extent of missing, unknown data has been included in the DoD Agency Priority Goal: Transition to Veterans reporting for FY 2017, which was outside the scope of GAO’s analysis for this report. DoD will also continue working to reduce the extent of missing data, as it is critical to be able to track VOW Act compliance and CRS attainment of all of our transitioning Service members.

RECOMMENDATION 2: GAO recommends the Secretary of Defense monitor and report on the extent to which Service members participate in TAP within prescribed timeframes. (DoD Concur)

The Department acknowledges tracking when Service members participate in TAP is valuable for effective transition preparation. DoD currently has the capability to retrieve data documenting when a Service member begins the TAP process (i.e., with the Pre-Separation/Transition Counseling signature date) and his/her separation date. Comparing these dates can determine the extent to which Service members participate in TAP within prescribed timeframes. Likewise, DoD can compare the Capstone event completion date to the Service member’s separation date. However, the currently collected data will not allow for parsing out Service members who are short-notice separations; and, therefore, could not adhere to the prescribed timeframes. The capability to parse out such transition cases is critical for proper interpretation of the data and use of this data for future program improvements. In order to implement this recommendation, DoD will first need to identify the IT requirement and associated cost (for example, what new field(s) may need to be added to the electronic form (DD Form 2648)), as well as any needed TAP staff training, to collect data denoting short-notice separations. Based on availability of

funds for FY 2019, DoD anticipates the earliest this data can be collected will be FY 2019, and the earliest for monitoring and accurate reporting of the data will be FY 2020.

RECOMMENDATION 3: GAO recommends that the Secretary of Defense monitor and report on the extent to which Service members who elect to receive supplementary 2-day classes are able to receive training. (DoD Non-concur)

The Department does not concur with this recommendation. The focus of the current TAP is for transitioning Service members to meet CRS. Nine CRS are deemed common and applicable to all Service members. Moreover, for Service members interested in pursuing higher education and/or career technical training as part of their ITP, they must also meet four additional educational-oriented CRS. The 2-day tracks were developed and made available to help those who need assistance in meeting these additional CRS. While the additional 2-day tracks are voluntary, Service members are encouraged to take advantage of these tracks. All Service members are able to participate in the additional 2-day tracks, as these tracks are available both via classroom setting and online through Joint Knowledge Online. While DoD does track the extent to which Service members attend the 2-day tracks, it is important to note that CRS attainment, not simply course participation, is the critical variable to monitor and report. DoD will research barriers to Service members accessing the additional 2-day tracks.

RECOMMENDATION 4: GAO recommends that the Secretary of Defense monitor and report on the extent to which service members attend TAP in a classroom settings unless allowed by regulation to participate online. (DoD Concur)

The Department acknowledges tracking whether Service members participated in TAP in a classroom setting or online is important. This is feasible with existing data. However, it is not uncommon for Service members to take TAP courses both in a classroom and online. DoD only tracks Service member participation for their most recent TAP courses. For example, if a Service member completed the Accessing Higher Education Track in the classroom first and then completed it again online for a refresher, this would be tracked as online participation. DoD anticipates the monitoring and reporting of the extent to which Service members participate in TAP via a classroom setting or online (using their most recently completed TAP course) will be by FY 2019. Currently, data collected by DoD does not capture the reason a Service member completes TAP online. The Department will need to identify whether this particular data point could be captured (and how). Upon completion of this research, DoD anticipates having the ability to determine whether this action will be feasible and its associated estimated funding requirements in FY 2019.

RECOMMENDATION 5: GAO recommends that once DoD monitors and reports data on timeliness, 2-day classes, and the use of online TAP, DoD enable unit commanders and high-level commanders to access this information to help ensure the specific units they oversee are compliant with all TAP requirements. (DoD Partially Concur)

The Department concurs once the capability to collect, track, and report data on TAP participation timeliness and the extent of online and classroom TAP participation has been accomplished, within 12 months the data will be provided to commanders when feasible. The intent of this recommendation should be met at the Service level. Each Service has transition staff who can make this information available to commanders. For example, the Air Force Airman and Family Readiness Centers are responsible for reporting/advising commanders on unit participation. Army Soldier-For-Life installation staff have the same capability, as do the other Services' transition staffs.

RECOMMENDATION 6: GAO recommends that the Secretary of Defense seek ways to minimize the subjectivity involved in career readiness determinations, particularly when judgements are involved, such as the quality of the individual transition plan and the resume. This could include developing guidance on training that provides quality standards for assessing career readiness materials. (DoD Concur)

The Department will work with the Services and DOL to minimize the subjectivity in judgments involving determining Service member attainment of particular CRS, such as the quality of the resume or job application package. This may include developing guidance on quality standards for assessing particular career readiness materials. The Services have personnel at the installation level who are trained in resume writing/review and career planning, and provide quality of life guidance to transitioning Service members and families. Installations may also call upon their local DOL partners for further support. If questions do arise, for example from a

Commander about whether the quality of the resume is suitable for CRS attainment, Service members should be referred to their local transition personnel at the Fleet and Family Support Center, Airman and Family Readiness Center, Soldier-For-Life Transition Assistance Center, or the Marine Corps Community Service Center, as well as DOL, for additional evaluation and support. Finally, Commanders must be allowed the ability to exercise their best judgement on CRS attainment for their Service members, with the full knowledge that they have experts available to assist them housed within their respective centers that provide transition assistance at their installation. DoD will work with the Services and DOL to examine and implement ways to minimize subjectivity in judgments involving determining Service member attainment of particular CRS, by the end of FY 2018.

CONCLUSION

Career readiness and transition assistance preparation is paramount if Service members are going to successfully transition to civilian life. We recognize preparing Service members throughout their MLC to be career-ready upon transition is essential to sustaining the All-Volunteer Force. In order for us to continue to attract dedicated, high quality volunteers to serve in our Armed Forces, the DoD must return this generation of Service members to the Nation with the ability to positively contribute to the national workforce and thrive within their civilian communities.

The Department cannot successfully transition Service members to civilian careers alone. It must have continued strong collaboration with our interagency partners, the support and hard work of our Military Services, especially at the installation level, and collaboration with other external stakeholders. The TAP interagency governance is vibrant, effective, responsive, and committed, as evidenced by the 2016 signing of our updated national Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) regarding the "Transition Assistance Program for Service Members Transitioning from Active Duty." As stated in the MOU, "The parties will support and advance the ongoing implementation, assessment, and enhancement of TAP. This collaboration will serve to support Service members in pursuing employment, higher education, skills and career training, credentialing, and entrepreneurship."

Again, let me thank the GAO for their comprehensive and insightful report and recommendations to further advance the TAP for the Nation. In closing, Mr. Chairman, I thank you, the Ranking Member, and the members of this Subcommittee for your outstanding and continued support of the men and women who proudly wear the uniform in defense of our great Nation.

Prepared Statement of Brigadier General Robert Bennett

Chairman Arrington, Ranking Member O'Rourke, members of the subcommittee, I would like to express my appreciation for the opportunity to appear before you to discuss the Army's Soldier for Life - Transition Assistance Program, or SFL-TAP. SFL-TAP is first and foremost a Commander's Program. SFL-TAP mandates several courses, based on the Veterans Opportunity to Work (VOW) Act, and also includes other required courses, or Career Readiness Standards (CRS), that help prepare Soldiers for their transition from active duty.

Soldier for Life - Transition Assistance Program VOW Requirements

SFL-TAP requires all eligible transitioning Soldiers to complete the VOW to Hire Heroes Act requirements, which include Pre-separation Counseling, Department of Labor Employment Workshop, and VA Benefits Briefings I and II.

In fall 2017, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) provided a draft review of Transitioning Veterans: DoD Needs to Improve Performance Reporting and Monitoring for the Transition Assistance Program. Army concurs with all six recommendations found in the draft report. Army's SFL-TAP XXI system currently captures most required data elements needed to implement report recommendation numbers 1 through 5. We will continue to work very closely with OSD Transition to Veterans Program Office (TVPO) in order to identify an optimal way ahead for synergistically leveraging and interfacing the data capturing and reporting capabilities of the DoD TAP Enterprise System with our own SFL-TAP XXI system.

While the Army is very proud of the significant role it has played, along with our DoD, Sister Services, and Interagency Partners, in developing and implementing the myriad of major enhancements that have been made to TAP since the passage of the VOW Act (thereby benefiting hundreds of thousands of transitioning service members), Army believes that there is one important area in which TAP could and should continue to evolve, that is, with respect to the timely receipt of key "post transition from active duty" outcome data from our interagency partners. For exam-

ple, Soldiers who are deemed by their Commander to have not met their CRS prior to transition from active duty are given a “Warm Handover” to the VA or Department of Labor (DOL) for follow-on post transition assistance.

Army strongly believes that receiving feedback from our interagency partners on both the type of assistance provided as well as the outcome (result) of such assistance is critical to our ability to accurately gauge and assess the overall long-term efficacy of our efforts. Such feedback, when timely, would greatly assist us in identifying what is working effectively as well as any TAP elements or processes in need of revision or improvement. Army currently does not receive any specific feedback (data) from our interagency partners on the results of warm handovers. We continue to closely collaborate with them (both at the TAP Governance Senior Leader level as well as at the action officer subject matter expert working group level) on developing a strategy to facilitate the flow of this key data.

Army utilizes a multifaceted approach in disseminating the importance of TAP and additional resources throughout a Service member’s military career. Under current Army policy, Soldiers are required to be counseled by their unit leadership within six months of arrival at their first permanent duty. This counseling on Army responsibilities and opportunities includes the requirement to create an Individual Development Plan. Newly arrived Soldiers are also referred to installation Army Education Centers where they meet with counselors and receive information on educational and credentialing opportunities available to them (e.g., Army COOL).

Soldiers continue to receive other timely transition/career/opportunity related information at key touchpoints (e.g., promotion) throughout their military career. The Soldier for Life - Transition Assistance Program makes both traditional and emerging strategic communication efforts a priority to communicate efforts to leaders, Soldiers, Family members, and stakeholders. The program continues to actively engage media, including frequent articles in Army magazines, installation papers, and national media outlets. SFL-TAP engages in other traditional marketing through posters, banners, flyers, Fact Sheets, Information Papers, briefings to commanders (such as the Company Commander/First Sergeant Course and the Pre-Command Course), and promotion of the program throughout the Soldier Life Cycle. Through a robust social media strategy, which includes Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, LinkedIn Groups, and YouTube, SFL-TAP reaches thousands of veterans, employers, and transitioning Soldiers every day. SFL-TAP Centers at the installation level often have active Facebook pages and other social media platforms as well.

With respect to recommendation number 6, which focuses on seeking ways to minimize the subjectivity involved in making career readiness determinations, Army believes it will be essential to implement this recommendation in such a way so as to preserve the flexibility of TAP. The career readiness determination needs to be equipped with more objective standards, yet avoid establishing a “one size fits all” solution that is incapable of tailoring to the individual Service member.

In addition to DoD’s TAP reporting systems, the Army utilizes TAP-XXI, which is the Army’s “system of record,” in order to provide commanders at the lowest level, key information and reports to fulfil their responsibilities under SFL-TAP policy and law. TAP-XXI has two primary functions, client management and reporting. TAP-XXI reporting consolidates key transition data from several Army HR systems of record which allows company commanders to correctly identify Soldiers required to complete the TAP curriculum. The client management portal of TAP-XXI allows counselors and Soldiers to schedule attendance and track completion during the distributed timeline (i.e. over an extended period). Army strongly encourages Transitioning Soldiers to utilize the SFL-TAP resources early and often.

These reports help ensure the Soldier is career ready and prepared for their civilian transition. Those that are successful in transition become advocates for recruiting future Soldiers. Fine-tuning TAP-XXI into the most comprehensive TAP management system has allowed Army civilian counselors to better track individual compliance and satisfaction with the program.

The first full year of tracking compliance for the VOW Act was in fiscal year 2013. During that time, the Army received a compliance rate of 4.5 percent. However, SFL-TAP has seen improvement since then, reaching an 85 percent compliance rate in fiscal year 2016 (DoDTAP reported 76% for Army) and an 88 percent compliance rate in fiscal year 2017 (DoDTAP reported 84% for Army). Those who do not meet VOW requirements are given a warm-handover to the Department of Labor and/or Veterans Affairs, as appropriate.

As our compliance rate and commander involvement have increased, the Army has seen a vast reduction in unemployment compensation expenses.

Army Improves Unemployment Compensation for Ex-Service Members (UCX)

The Army closed out fiscal year 2016 with the lowest amount of Unemployment Compensation for Ex-Service members (UCX) in 13 years at \$172.8 million, according to the Department of Labor.

Fiscal year 2016 is the first time UCX has dipped below the \$200 million mark since 2003, where it closed out at \$152 million. Army UCX expenditures peaked in 2011 at \$515 million and have been decreasing since that time due to a combination of economic factors and Army efforts to better prepare Soldiers for the civilian sector.

Integrating Soldiers back into the civilian world successfully depends on a number of determinants, including civilian industry knowledge of valuable Veteran skill sets, dispelling myths about Veterans, as well as local economic conditions.

Army UCX numbers are on-track to break another all-time low in fiscal year 2017. We expect to receive final Fiscal Year 17 data by mid-November.

Program Funding

All validated requirements are provided for and funded across the Future Years Defense Program (FYDP).

In fiscal year 2017, the Army requested \$87.7 million for Active Army, Army National Guard, and Army Reserve for the transition program. In fiscal year 2018, the Army has requested \$86.3 million. The Army has received this funding and is using it to provide transition services at the validated requirements level.

Transition Pilot Program

The SFL-TAP Transition Pilot started in November 2016 at six Army installations. The pilot is designed to evaluate tailored transition assistance for Soldiers, based on their assessed “risk level” for drawing unemployment. The objective is to better allocate resources to those that need additional support during the transition process. The pilot focuses primarily on transition requirements for eligible non-retiring enlisted Soldiers.

The goal of the pilot is to correlate the type and amount of mandated transition assistance services for a Soldier, with their likelihood of applying for unemployment compensation. Soldiers deemed to be at greater risk for being unemployed are required to participate in more mandated services than Soldiers less likely to apply for unemployment compensation. The ultimate objective of the pilot is to learn how to better tailor SFL-TAP requirements for all transitioning Soldiers, based on individual needs. The Army’s Transition Pilot will last approximately two years from the start date and initial data from the pilot is expected in the spring of 2018. To date, approximately 21,000 Soldiers are involved.

Army Career Skills Program

The Department of Defense Skill Bridge program is implemented by the Army through the Career Skills Program, or CSP. CSPs include pre-apprenticeships, on-the-job training, job-shadowing, employment skills training, and internships that transitioning Soldiers can attend during their last 180 days prior to transition from active duty. These first-class programs afford Soldiers the opportunity to obtain industry-recognized skills and move into high-demand and high-skilled jobs. In fiscal year 2016, 2,625 Soldiers enrolled in CSPs, with a 95 percent completion rate, which resulted in the job placement of approximately 2,150 Soldiers. Fiscal year 2017 programs are on-target to exceed these milestones.

The first Army CSP was established in April 2013 at Joint Base Lewis-McChord with United Association Veterans in Piping (UAVIP). UAVIP hosted 22 participants and since that time, the Army has approved over 116 CSPs, hosted at 25 Army installations. The Army’s CSP has resulted in over 4,600 employment opportunities for transitioning Soldiers. The program continues to grow each year.

The Army works with the Office of the Secretary of Defense, as well as federal and non-federal entities, to determine potential programs to add to the Career Skills Program in order to increase civilian employment opportunities for transitioning Soldiers. The focus of CSP program offerings include “no-cost” opportunities with at least an 85 percent graduation rate and of those graduates, an employment rate of at least 90 percent.

SFL-TAP Virtual Center

The Army is the only Service that provides a virtual platform with transition services for Soldiers and other Service members. In addition to round-the-clock telephonic counseling, a virtual software interface provides a live forum for synchronous counselor-led transition services to clients all over the world all day, every day, with the exception of three holidays a year.

The SFL-TAP Virtual Center is manned and trained to provide a full-range of transition services. The Virtual Center provides transition services to deployed Soldiers and Service Members of all branches, as well as those that are remotely located stateside and unable to attend classes and counseling at a brick-and-mortar location. Though the Virtual Center is available to all Service Members, the preferred and recommended option for Service Members to receive transition services is through brick-and-mortar locations.

The system provides clients and staff the ability to interact online through live classes and counseling sessions. The program allows clients to ask questions via a microphone or typed comments. Counselors and Soldiers have a full-range of communication and computer capabilities, including desktop sharing, document uploads/downloads, videos, webcams, and website links. Additionally, internal SFL-TAP program needs, such as meetings and training events, can be conducted inside the Virtual Center, saving both time and money.

In fiscal year 2017, the SFL-TAP Virtual Center telephonically assisted over 43,000 Soldiers and provided transition counseling to over 15,000 Soldiers through the Virtual Center software. This is a 38% increase in the amount of calls received in fiscal year 2016. SFL-TAP has seen growth each year since the inception of the Virtual Center in October 2011. A service that originally received only 34 total calls in its first month, the Virtual Center in fiscal year 2018 is on track to set records for calls received, as the SFL-TAP Virtual Center has become a trusted resource for transitioning Soldiers.

Army Hosts Hire a Soldier Campaign

The Army has increased our marketing efforts over the past fiscal year to include innovative online techniques. In the summer of 2017, SFL-TAP hosted their first social media campaign to encourage the hiring of transitioning Soldiers. The five-week campaign was supported by the Sergeant Major of the Army Daniel Dailey and featured a variety of events on Facebook and Twitter. The campaign brought together civilian employers and transitioning Soldiers, giving them the platform to discuss resume advice, job seeking tips, and transition opportunities.

The main event of the campaign was a Twitter Chat on resume writing and job seeking skills. SFL-TAP partnered with Partnership for Youth Success (PaYS), Veterans Affairs (VA) Benefits Administration, Army Warrior Care and Transition (WCT), National Guard Citizen Soldier for Life (CSFL), Army Reserve Private Public Partnership (P3), and the Department of Labor Veterans Employment and Training Services (DOL VETS) for the Twitter Chat.

The Twitter Chat used a hashtag (keyword categorization on Twitter) that the SFL-TAP Program Office created called #HireaSoldier. The hashtag gained so much interest and use that Twitter made it "trending" on the platform, which lists the hashtag on the side of a user's home page as a popular topic. On the day of the Twitter Chat, the hashtag reached almost 4 million Twitter users, further spreading awareness of SFL-TAP and hiring Soldiers.

The Twitter event and Facebook events provided the platform and conversation for companies to collect resumes from Soldiers that participated and initial reports showed that the interview process had started for Soldiers who had networked during the event. SFL-TAP plans to hold future events like this.

Conclusion

The Army's SFL-TAP is committed to serve transitioning Soldiers throughout their transition process and help them become better prepared for the challenges and successes they will face in the civilian sector. To conclude, I thank you for your continued support. The Army is dedicated to being the leader of Department of Defense transition efforts by finding better ways to help our Soldiers and Veterans. Chairman Arrington, and members of the sub-committee, I thank you again for the opportunity to appear before you, and I look forward to your questions.

Prepared Statement of Rear Admiral Karl O. Thomas

Introduction

Chairman Arrington, Ranking Member O'Rourke, and distinguished members of this subcommittee, thank you for this opportunity to testify about the Navy Transition Assistance Program (TAP), and our efforts to seamlessly transition Sailors to civilian life, employment, further education, or entrepreneurship.

In fiscal year 2017, approximately 32,000 Sailors transitioned out of the Navy, and these numbers are likely to be comparable over the next several years. Navy is an expeditionary force that routinely deploys. Our Sailors serve in diverse career

fields, among them, Navy Special Warfare, air traffic control, health care, advanced electronics, and nuclear power. Civilian employers routinely pursue Sailors as potential employees because of the world-class training and skills they obtain in the Navy, even as we offer incentives to retain these Sailors who possess critical skills needed to ensure fleet readiness. For both active and reserve component Sailors who separate, demobilize, or retire from the Navy, we offer a robust TAP to help them make a seamless transition to life beyond the Navy.

Transition Assistance Program

Navy delivers TAP in collaboration with the Office of the Secretary of Defense; the Departments of Labor, Education, Veterans Affairs, Homeland Security; the Small Business Administration and the Office of Personnel Management. TAP includes the following elements:

1) Career Readiness Standards (CRS) - A set of common, discreet, and measurable, transition "readiness" standards for Sailors to meet prior to separation. The desired end-state is for each Sailor to meet CRS for his/her chosen civilian career path and to complete a viable Individual Transition Plan (ITP) prior to departure from active duty. These standards are designed to increase each Sailor's abilities to successfully overcome any challenges they may face in pursuit of choosing a career path.

2) Transition GPS (Goals, Plans, Success) Core Workshop Curriculum - A series of training that includes the Department of Labor (DoL) Employment Workshop (DoLEW), Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Benefits Briefings, Financial Education, Military Occupational Code Crosswalk, Family/Special Issues, and an ITP review. Additionally, participants may select to attend two-day training tracks in Accessing Higher Education, Entrepreneurship, or Technical Training.

3) Military Life Cycle - Incorporates preparation for Sailors' career transition throughout their military service - from accession through transition from the Navy and reintegration into civilian life. Today's transitioning Sailors are better prepared to transition to civilian life because of the continuing integration of this model.

4) Capstone Event - A forum provided for Service members to validate CRS are met, and to refer members, as needed, for additional training or assistance prior to separation or retirement.

Navy officials continue to work with representatives from the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD), the other Uniformed Services, and interagency partners, to evaluate and improve TAP. Sailors are encouraged to begin the transition process approximately 24-months, but no later than, 12-months prior to separation. During this period, each transitioning Sailor participates in mandatory pre-separation counseling (10 U.S. Code §1142) that introduces them to the various programs and services available to assist them.

Navy provides the five-day Transition GPS Workshop at installations world-wide via our Fleet and Family Support Centers. Transition GPS Workshops may be tailored to the installation population or demographics of the class (e.g., retirees, seniority). Additionally, Fleet and Family Support Centers provide both individual and group transition counseling, career planning, resume-writing and other transition-related workshops.

Navy Fleet and Family Support Centers also conduct first-term and mid-career workshops through the Career Options and Navy Skills Evaluation Program (CONSEP). This modular two-day course is designed to assist active duty service members in achieving Navy, and future civilian, career goals. Training topics provide vital information across the Military Life Cycle on career-making decisions, upward mobility, Veterans benefits while on active duty, college and certification opportunities, apprenticeships, and financial management and investment strategies, which enhance the Sailor's ability to achieve personal and professional success.

Navy Transition Assistance Core Workshop Curriculum

The mandatory Navy Transition GPS Core Workshop is a five-day curriculum. For the typical workshop, on day one, Navy transition staff covers the following topics:

1) Transition Assistance Overview: Includes a Welcome Address / Workshop Schedule-of-Activities, Topics for Family Considerations/Special Issues, the Value of a Mentor, and a review of available Fleet and Family Support Services.

2) Military Occupational Code (MOC) Crosswalk: Upon completing the MOC Crosswalk module, Sailors are provided documentation of their military career experience and skills; translation of their military occupation experience to civilian sec-

tor skills; and identification of gaps in their training and/or experience that need to be filled to meet their personal career goals. The MOC Crosswalk enables Sailors to develop a clear line-of-sight between their military skills and training and career fields of their choice.

3) Financial Planning: The financial planning module prepares Sailors to build an integrated 12-month budget that reflects post-military employment, education, or training goals. Financial planning counselors are available for follow-up counseling, if requested by the Sailor.

Typically, on days two through four, the Department of Labor (DoL) delivers the approved Employment Workshop, while, on day five, the Department of Veterans of Affairs (VA) conducts VA Benefits I and II briefings. Each installation has the discretion to present TAP briefings in a sequence that best suits transitioning Sailors on their installation. During the workshop, Sailors also review progress on their Individual Transition Plans. Navy continues to improve our classroom delivery experience. We provide Transition GPS computer software and enhanced WiFi capability, greatly improving the classroom experience. In fiscal year 2017, Navy began replacing all 2,493 Transition GPS computers with updated models, which run faster and have extended battery life. Along with the computer refresh, all information-technology equipment is being updated as needed including WiFi capacity, routers, scanners, printers, and associated equipment. This upgrade, which is 90 percent complete, will ensure Sailors have a real-time resource in the classroom to research job, education, and other transition-related opportunities.

We continue to expand and adjust our delivery approach to accommodate Sailors in isolated locations by providing, in collaboration with VA and DoL, in-person Transition GPS classes at Naval Support Activity, Souda Bay, Crete; and Naval Fleet Activities, Chinhae, Korea. For deployed units with limited bandwidth, we recently received approval to have the Joint Knowledge Online virtual curriculum available on the Navy eLearning shipboard servers.

Education, Technical Training, and Entrepreneur Workshops

In addition to completing the Transition GPS Core Curriculum, transitioning Sailors may also participate in a series of two-day tailored workshops which address three alternative tracks available within the Transition GPS curriculum:

- (1) Accessing Higher Education track, for those pursuing an advanced education degree;
- (2) Technical Training track, for those seeking job-ready skills and industry-recognized credentials in shorter-term training programs; and
- (3) Entrepreneurship track, for those planning to start a business.

Navy Capstone Event

At least 90 days before separating from the Navy, Sailors are required to participate in a Navy-hosted Capstone Event, to validate the process, and verify that they have completed the Transition GPS curriculum and achieved Career Readiness Standards (CRS). Staff also reviews potential challenges Sailors may face as veterans, and available tools and resources transitioning Sailors learned about in Transition GPS workshops. Sailors requiring additional assistance are referred to supplemental training opportunities.

Additionally, through the Capstone Event, all Sailors are referred to appropriate government agencies and organizations that will provide them with continued benefits, services, and support in their new capacity as Navy veterans, including completion of CRS, if they are not fully accomplished prior to separation. While beneficial for all transitioning Sailors, this is particularly instrumental in supporting at-risk Sailors, such as those subject to rapid or involuntarily separation.

Commander Support and Accountability

Using the Navy Retention Monitoring System (NRMS) Analytics, and the current Career Information Management System (CIMS), commanders can track and monitor their own transition assistance program compliance. These systems provide commanders the capability to report and analyze active and reserve, officer and enlisted, Transition GPS data via ad hoc and standardized reports down to the unit level. Most importantly, the fleet has included TAP compliance as a criterion for the annual "Golden Anchor" retention award, which recognizes commands with exceptional Sailor retention programs.

Guidance and Training

Navy leverages an extensive professional network to keep the fleet informed about new policy changes and Transition GPS implementation challenges. TAP staff work with fleet engagement teams to coordinate with, and provide training to, Command Career Counselors worldwide on procedures, policies, new aspects of Transition GPS, and TAP reporting requirements, to ensure Sailors are afforded a viable plan for transition to civilian life. Coordinating efforts with Fleet and Force Career Counselors, Navy also provides pertinent information to the fleet through a series of messages and emails, a transition webpage, and Plain Talk for Sailors bulletins.

Military Life Cycle Transition Model

TAP incorporates career readiness and transition preparation into the entire continuum of a Sailor's career. In the past, transition and preparation for the civilian workforce occurred late in a Sailor's military service - just prior to separation. Under this enhanced program, these concepts are incorporated earlier to ensure that counseling, assessments, and access to resources that build skills or establish credentials, occur earlier in a Sailor's military career.

Navy leverages the Navy Retention and Career Development program, designed to improve Sailors' ability to achieve their professional goals, to facilitate the military life cycle. Individual Career Development Plans are created, based upon Career Roadmaps for each enlisted rating, with assistance from Navy Command Career Counselors. Rating Roadmaps include information on skill training, job description, personal and professional development, Career Development Boards, Navy qualifications and certifications, civilian occupations, Navy Credentialing Opportunities Online (Navy COOL), United Services Military Apprenticeship Program (USMAP), Professional Military Education (PME), and Voluntary Education.

Navy incorporates aspects of the Transition GPS curriculum into our Career Development Boards, which are routinely held during key points in a Sailor's career. Aligning these key activities with pre-determined "touch points" facilitates individualized attention, together with instruction, resources, and services to build the skills necessary for each Sailor to meet their professional goals throughout their military career and beyond. Additionally, embedding touch points across the military lifecycle is particularly helpful in addressing at-risk Sailors who may require a higher level of support in meeting their goals. For example, we ensure that Sailors:

- (1) are registered for, and know about, eBenefits, a joint VA/Department of Defense (DoD) web portal that provides resources and self-service capabilities to veterans, Service members, and their families; to research, access, and manage their VA military benefits and personal information;
- (2) are informed about VA benefits for which they are eligible while serving on active duty, as well as after they depart the service as Navy veterans; and
- (3) understand the importance of maintaining their personnel records, and obtaining credentials and certifications they have earned for skills obtained while serving in the Navy.

The Career Development Program is a key component of transition. Essentially, a Sailor's Individual Career Development plan becomes their Individual Career Transition Plan.

Education and Credentialing Opportunities

While serving on active duty, Sailors are encouraged to take advantage of programs that acknowledge military training and experience. Navy COOL supports Navy's career development and transition programs by helping Sailors gain civilian certifications and licenses for skills or academic degrees acquired during their service. This helps translate each Sailor's military training and experience into concrete documentation that prospective employers can easily recognize, and which demonstrates that a Sailor's skills are commensurate with, or exceed, those of their civilian counterparts. At least one certification is currently available in each of the 81 Navy enlisted ratings, as well as collateral duty and leadership occupations, with over 1,900 credentialing opportunities. Since program inception in October 2007, Navy COOL has provided support on over 165,000 certifications and licenses for over 55,000 Sailors in every enlisted rating and pay grade. Navy also participates in the USMAP, which is a formal military training program that provides Sailors the opportunity to improve their job skills and complete civilian apprenticeship requirements while on active duty.

In addition to the aforementioned programs, Navy funds educational opportunities that enhance post-military job-ready skills, and encourages transitioning Sailors to take full advantage of their GI Bill, and other education benefits, while serving on

active duty. Many Sailors are enrolled in college, and some have already earned college degrees. Those interested in pursuing their education goals are strongly encouraged to attend the specialized Accessing Higher Education or Career and Technical Training track. Specifically, Sailors are briefed on these tracks during Transition GPS workshop, and required Pre-separation Counseling.

Employment Skills Training

Navy encourages commanders, commanding officers and officers-in-charge, when operational commitments permit, to authorize eligible Sailors to pursue employment skills training during their final 180 days of active duty service using the DoD SkillBridge initiative. Navy has 16 programs with eight additional programs in the planning stages for fiscal year 2018. As of June 2017, 158 Navy personnel have completed SkillBridge programs with a job placement rate of 65 percent.

Programs such as Onward-to-Opportunity (O2O) provide up to eight weeks of training for in-demand fields such as cybersecurity and software engineering. The O2O program is hosted at three Navy locations (Norfolk, VA; Jacksonville, FL; and San Diego, CA) with plans to expand. Navy is partnering with Microsoft and Amazon to provide employment skills training programs for fiscal year 2018, at various locations throughout the Navy enterprise, such as Gulfport, MS; Pensacola, FL; and Ventura County, CA.

Veterans-in-piping (VIP) Pre-Apprenticeship at Naval Station, Norfolk, is considered a best practice program for DoD SkillBridge. The VIP is designed to fill a critical workforce need for welders in the Norfolk and Hampton Roads, VA, area and involves 18 continuous weeks of full-time classroom and on-the-job training sessions.

Government Accountability Office (GAO) Report

Navy largely concurs with recommendations included in the draft GAO Report: "Transitioning Veterans - DoD Needs to Improve Performance Reporting and Monitoring for the Transition Assistance Program," and already has several programs in place to support them, such as TAP requirements compliance-reporting at the unit level. With regard to the specific GAO recommendations:

GAO Recommendation 1: We recommend that the Secretary of Defense publicly report DoD's performance and career readiness attainment for all TAP-eligible service members and members of the National Guard and Reserve rather than exclude those for whom data are missing or clarify the extent of missing data.

Navy monitors compliance for Sailors with complete transition data and those with missing data, and continues to work to reduce the prevalence of missing data. We continue to see improvement in our Sailors meeting Veterans Opportunity to Work to Hire Heroes (VOW) Act requirements compliance. In fiscal year 2017, from October to August, total VOW Act compliance for Navy active and reserve Sailors was 84 percent. Naval Audit Service is conducting an audit of TAP reporting to assist us in our compliance efforts.

GAO Recommendation 2: We recommend that the Secretary of Defense monitor and report on the extent to which service members participate in TAP within prescribed timeframes.

Navy will work with OSD to monitor and report Sailor completion of TAP requirements with the goal of driving earlier completion of TAP requirements and capturing short-notice separation data. Additionally, with the electronic Pre-Separation Counseling Checklist (DD Form 2648) and the TAP tracking system that we recently introduced, commanders have new tools to ensure compliance.

GAO Recommendation 3: We recommend that the Secretary of Defense monitor and report on the extent to which service members who elect to receive supplementary 2-day classes are able to receive training.

Navy policy mandates Sailor participation in these 2-day classes if required for a Sailor to meet his or her specific career readiness standards.

GAO Recommendation 4: We recommend that the Secretary of Defense monitor and report on the extent which service members attend TAP in a classroom setting unless allowed by regulation to participate online.

Navy is committed to providing in-person, instructor-led, training as the primary means of delivery, as evidenced by the 1,300 classes attended by over 42,000 Sailors this fiscal year.

GAO Recommendation 5: We recommend that once DoD monitors and reports data timeliness, 2-day classes, and the use of online TAP, enable unit commander and high-level commanders to access this information to help ensure the specific units they oversee and are compliant with all TAP requirements.

Navy has an information system in place to allow commanders to monitor TAP requirements compliance, and will continue to enhance this capability as the means to collect and track any new requirements.

GAO Recommendation 6: We recommend that the Secretary of Defense seek ways to minimize the subjectivity involved in career readiness determinations, particularly when judgements are involved, such as the quality of the individual transition plan and the resume. This could include developing guidance on training that provides quality standards for assessing readiness materials.

Navy will work with partner agencies to minimize subjectivity, for instance, by developing guidance on quality standards. Our Fleet and Family Support Center staff is trained in career readiness standard items, such as resume-writing, and hosts the Capstone event to review career readiness standards. Agency partners also are available to assist Sailors and commanders.

We recognize that there is more to be done, and look forward to working with the Office of the Secretary of Defense, the other Uniformed Services, and partner agencies, to refine and improve the DoD transition process.

Conclusion

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss Navy TAP and our continuous efforts to improve support for transitioning Navy veterans, in close cooperation with inter-agency partners. Each Sailor who selflessly serves our Nation in the all-volunteer force has earned our unwavering commitment to ensuring they possess the tools that position them for success as they transition, and as they continue serving our Nation as honored and distinguished veterans.

We appreciate your steadfast support for all Navy men and women - active, reserve and veteran - and for the programs you authorize that sustain them, and their families, during and following their distinguished careers of voluntary service to the Navy and our Nation.

Prepared Statement of Brigadier General Kathleen A. Cook

For the past 70 years, the Total Force Airmen of America's Air Force have been breaking barriers as members of the finest joint warfighting team in the world. America's Airmen are highly trained and ready to fly, fight and win our nation's wars; however, these remarkable warriors and their families are feeling the strain associated with 26 years of ongoing overseas contingency operations, disaster relief missions, and funding constraints. As we look to the future, we continue to focus on our primary goal of supporting Air Force and Joint missions, as well as preparing our Airmen for a successful civilian life after transitioning from military service. Air Force leadership remain fully engaged and firmly committed to accomplishing these aims.

Since the Air Force last appeared before Congress to discuss the Program in 2015, we have steadfastly focused on continuously improving support to our transitioning Airmen and their families in accordance with the Veterans Opportunity to Work to Hire Heroes Act of 2011. Our redesigned curriculum directs completion of mandated TAP activities for all eligible service members. Compliance requires completion of a pre-separation counseling that for retiring members can be scheduled 24 months before retiring, and for separating Airmen can attend up to 12 months beforehand. Additional mandated activities include the Department of Labor Employment Workshop, Veterans Administration Benefits Briefings I and II, and the commander or designee approved Capstone review that verifies Career Readiness Standards have been met.

Furthermore, we instituted a waiver for National Guard and Reserve Airmen to relieve repeated Program attendance requirements following each 180-day tour of active duty if they are immediately returning to active duty (i.e. subsequent 180-day tour) or are guaranteed follow-on civilian employment. These actions illustrate our commitment to the readiness of our Airmen, as well as to continuously improving and refining our Transition Assistance Program.

The 2017 Government Accountability Office study identified six recommendations to improve transparency in reporting Program participation rates and monitoring participation timeliness and access to supplemental 2-day tracks, among other items. We concur or partially concur with five of the six recommendations.

Specifically, we did not concur with the recommendation for the Department to monitor and report on the extent to which Service Members who elect to participate in supplementary 2-day tracks are able to receive training. The Air Force focuses on ensuring transitioning Airmen meet Career Readiness Standards, and the addi-

tive 2-day tracks were developed and made available on a voluntary basis to assist Airmen and supplement the Standards. The additional 2-day tracks are electives available for all Airmen via a classroom setting and online through Joint Knowledge Online. While the Department does track the 2-day class attendance, we would like to highlight that Standards attainment is the overarching goal. That said, we will work with our partners to identify whether access or availability barriers exist to Airmen who desire to attend the optional 2-day tracks.

Additionally, we partially-concurred with the study's recommendation that the Department publicly report performance and career readiness attainment for all Program-eligible Total Force Airmen rather than exclude those for whom data are missing, or clarify the extent of the missing data. We acknowledge our participation rate information collection system lacked the fidelity to account for all Program-related data, resulting in missing data on some Airmen who may or may not have completed requirements. Specifically, our FY16 Agency Priority Goals performance measures provided to the public did not provide a clear explanation regarding the exclusion of the missing separation data from the reported performance totals. It was never our intent to misrepresent the Act's reported performance measures. Therefore, in FY17, we addressed the missing and unknown information concern by submitting language with the Office of Secretary of Defense's Agency Priority Goals performance measures data. Our intent is to ensure a clear description of the extent of the missing and unknown data is included along with the reported compliance rates for appropriate context. We are also working to reduce the occurrence of missing and unknown information and to improve our ability to track critical data required to validate the Act's compliance for all transitioning Airmen.

Lastly, we partially concurred with Government Accountability Office's recommendation that the Department provide commanders access to timeliness, 2-day tracks, and the use of online Transition Assistance Program data. We partially concurred because we agree this is useful information for installation command leadership; however, it is already provided to commanders regularly through our Airman and Family Readiness Centers.

As we continue to look for every opportunity to improve transition assistance for our Total Force Airmen and their families, we acknowledge tracking participation in the Program is valuable for ensuring Airmen receive effective transition assistance. The Air Force currently has the ability to retrieve data documenting when an Airman begins the Program process (via the Pre-Separation/Transition Counseling signature date) and his or her separation date to validate timeframe compliance. However, currently collected information will not allow for parsing out Airmen with short-notice separations (i.e., medical evaluation board decisions, disciplinary reasons, etc.) who could not adhere to the prescribed timeframes. The capability to extract such information is critical for proper interpretation of the data and use of this data for future Program improvements. We will research the information technology requirements and associated costs to procure this capability as we continue to work to improve our Program compliance.

In addition to improved data reporting, the Air Force continues to change its Transition Assistance Program culture by embracing a "begin with the end in mind" framework. We recognize some Airmen will transition to civilian life before retirement eligibility and we prepare our Airmen for civilian life from the start of their military careers. We do this by leveraging our existing professional development programs as touchpoints in the Military Life Cycle Transition model along with encouraging greater cooperation between the various offices collaborating on transition initiatives. For example, for years, enlisted Airmen have been required to attend the First Term Airmen's Center program at their first permanent duty station. During this multi-day program, Airmen are introduced to many topics—including professional development opportunities and a four-hour financial readiness lesson, which includes developing a personal budget to help foster financial success, and ultimately mission readiness. Airmen are also introduced to the Military Life Cycle, which showcases how transition assistance information will be addressed throughout their career. Our Transition Assistance Program's Military Life Cycle touchpoints also include reenlistment, deployment, and permanent change of station counselings as well as off-duty education briefings and professional development information sessions. All aspects are designed to help prepare Airmen for success in the civilian sector after transitioning from military service.

CONCLUSION

Airmen and their families serve, dedicated to answering our nation's call, making sacrifices for the good of the mission. We do everything we can to foster their success while in uniform, as well as during their transition from the military. Investments in them are inextricably linked to the Air Force's ability to recruit, train, de-

velop, support and retain a world-class, all-volunteer Force. The Air Force remains committed to ensuring Airmen are ready for the challenges and opportunities of civilian life and we extend a great deal of gratitude to our private sector partners in supporting the ease of transition. With continued Congressional backing and the collective commitment of our interagency partners and Air Force leadership, we will ensure America's Total Force Airmen are ready when they transition to the private sector.

Prepared Statement of Brigadier General Kurt W. Stein

INTRODUCTION

Chairman Arrington, Ranking Member O'Rourke, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, it is my privilege to appear before you today to provide an update on the Marine Corps' Transition Readiness efforts. Your Marine Corps is by far the smallest military service in the Department of Defense, yet, by design, separates a much higher percentage of its force each year. Therefore, it is imperative that we ensure our Marines have the right preparation to reach personal goals and effectively translate their military experiences to a successful civilian life.

BACKGROUND

The Marine Corps' Transition Readiness Program is a comprehensive transition and employment assistance program for Marines and their families, emphasizing a proactive approach that enables Marines to formulate effective post-transition entrepreneurship, employment, and educational goals. It provides Marines and their families with the tools and resources needed to complete Department of Defense (DoD) directed Career Readiness Standards (CRS). Overall, our efforts help ensure that Marines are prepared for their transition from military to civilian life.

The Marine Corps' Transition Readiness Program incorporates a life cycle approach, called the Marine For Life Cycle (M4LC). The M4LC allows Marines to proactively gain awareness of career readiness preparations through nine defined action points throughout their military career. These action points are: (1) First Permanent Duty Station, (2) Re-enlistment (3) Promotion, (4) Deployment/Redeployment, (5) Permanent Change of Station, (6) Mobilization/Demobilization, (7) Major Life Events, (8) Separation/Retirement/Deactivation, and (9) Veteran. In further support of the M4LC, there is a dedicated website featuring the M4LC infographic, with action point checklists containing "Things to Do" and "Things to Know" to assist Marines in being proactive throughout their military career.

In three of the nine action points, we ask Marines to devote significant time and energy to their transition readiness:

- Personal Readiness Seminar (PRS). Four-hour seminar for Marines upon arrival at their first permanent duty station. The curriculum provides an overview of Personal & Professional Development services, as well as financial topics such as banking and financial services, saving and investing, the Blended Retirement System (BRS), living expenses, understanding debt, and service members' rights.
- "Your Readiness" Training. Online training hosted through our MarineNet portal that provides an overview of Personal & Professional Development services, reenlistment process, transition process, and the Individual Transition Plan. As an element of "Leading Marines," this training is required for promotion to Corporal. In FY17, 32,188 Marines completed this training.
- Transition Readiness Seminar (TRS). A week-long program consisting of a standardized core curriculum to include Resilient Transitions, Military Occupation Specialty Crosswalk, Department of Labor Employment Workshop, Department of Veterans Affairs Benefits I and II Briefs, and Financial Planning.

Additionally, the Marine Corps provides Skillbridge programs to provide career skills that connect military talent to in-demand careers in fields such as Trade Skills, Information Technology, Project Management, and Commercial Driver's licensing opportunities. Service members may participate in these programs within 180 days of their transition.

Lastly, Marines are introduced to the Marine For Life Network, which facilitates the reach back and support to Marines and Marine veterans by identifying opportunities and exposure through our virtual LinkedIn and Facebook online community. Overall, the Marine For Life Network's online presence has experienced a 70 percent increase in social media subscribers since April 2016.

VOW ACT COMPLIANCE AND IMPROVEMENTS

The Marine Corps carefully monitors our “VOW to Hire Heroes Act (VOW Act)” compliance rate. In FY17, total VOW Act compliance from October 2016 to August 2017 for all Marines was 73 percent for Active Component and Reserve Component. The percentages are based on the number of Marines who completed Pre-separation Counseling, VA Benefits, and the Department of Labor Workshop. Missing information for all eligible separating Marines remains a concern, and the Marine Corps will continue to seek answers to the causes and develop solutions for the Total Force that will increase VOW Act compliance.

- DoDTAP eForm. Effective 7 November 2016, the Transition Assistance Program (TAP) Electronic (eForm) and Enterprise Database was deployed DoD-wide. This combined the DD Form 2648/-1 and DD Form 2958 into a single electronic DD Form 2648 to ease the transition process and improve data collections efforts. This database currently serves as the single authoritative source for all transition data, streamlining the data collection process for measuring VOW Act and CRS compliance, while creating efficiencies throughout the transition process. This has contributed to the steady increase in compliance for the Marine Corps as a fully functioning electronic process versus the previous paper-based system.
- Personal Readiness Seminar (PRS). Having conducted this course for the past two years, we are starting to get feedback on the efficacy of this program. We reach back to participants annually and have found that our Marines are using principles taught in PRS to take advantage of opportunities aboard installations (i.e. financial and education counseling, credentialing, tuition assistance, etc.) and maintain their personal financial wellness.
- Virtual Training Tools. The Marine Corps has established an online tool kit through the Transition Readiness Program Sharepoint portal to support Commander’s, Unit Transition Coordinators, and installation service providers. Materials in this portal include training materials, policies, inspections guides, checklists, and links to other resources in order to aid Commanders efforts in supporting their Marines successful transition.
- Command Profile. Currently there are tracking mechanisms in place to identify completion and timeliness of PRS, TRS and Capstone for Marines. In addition to this capability, the Marine Corps is integrating a dashboard in the Command Profile system that will provide current VOW Act compliance rate to all commands.

GAO TAP RECOMMENDATIONS

The Marine Corps currently provides DoD with all prescribed data and will continue to collaborate on the respective DoD working groups to improve metric performance and provide any additional metrics required. With the advent of the eForm, we expect to be able reduce our gap with regard to missing data, therefore increasing compliance rates.

Tracking Marines participation in TAP is valuable for ensuring Marines are prepared for their transition. In order to improve the timeliness of Marines participation in TAP, the Marine Corps has made the Transition Readiness Program part of the Inspector General of the Marine Corps’ 37 Critical or Requiring Evaluation programs. This process includes a checklist identifying key items as part of the formal inspection, to include timeliness for the achievement of TRS and Capstone. Additionally, a separate tracking system within the Marine Corps has been implemented to track these two milestones.

Current Marine Corps policy directs Commanding Officers to allow Marines the opportunity to attend the voluntary 2-day track programs in addition to the TRS. Along with TRS, and programs like Skillbridge, the 2-day track programs offer Marines the option to increase their knowledge in desired post transition subjects. For FY17, these post transition subjects included the Career Technical Training Track (158 sessions with 334 participants), Boots to Business (130 sessions with 642 participants), and Accessing Higher Education (248 sessions with 1,354 participants).

The Marine Corps requires Marines to attend TAP in a classroom setting unless the Marine’s duty station is more than 100 miles away from a transition service provider’s installation or if he or she is incarcerated. Commanders are authorized to utilize Operations and Maintenance funds to support travel to a transition service provider. In all cases, authorization of an alternative virtual curriculum has to be approved by local supporting transition staff prior to completion.

In the Marine Corps the first stage of Capstone review is conducted by trained and credentialed civilian transition staff who use the electronic DD Form 2648 as

the guide to conduct important transition conversations with transitioning Marines, as well as to capture the outcome of those conversations for use by Commanders during the final stage of the Capstone process. Upon completion of Capstone review, the Commander (or designee) conducts the final interview and, if necessary, handover to inter-agency partners or back to the transition readiness staff for further support. Additionally, for new staff, we provide a Capstone quality review guide to assist and supplement the review of CRS. For Marines who are in geographically isolated locations, virtual Capstone review is provided by Marine Corps transition readiness staff to complete the process.

CONCLUSION

Overall, the Marine Corps is proud of our Transition Readiness Programs. Our efforts result in an innovative program that meets the needs of our Marines and their families as they progress through their military life cycle and helps them transition successfully to civilian life. By providing these tangible learning or experienced based opportunities throughout the Marine for Life Cycle, we enable Marines and their families to be more effective and more ready for a successful transition from the Marine Corps. Nevertheless, we are always working with DoD and our Sister Services to assess our programs and make improvements, including leveraging new IT systems to improve participation and compliance with the VOW Act.

Marines are the foundation of our Corps and are our most precious asset. They are proud of what they do. They are proud of the “Eagle, Globe, and Anchor” and carry this ethos with them as they transition from the Corps. By ensuring that we take care of all Marines and their families, we fulfill our responsibility to keep faith with the honor, courage, and commitment they have so freely given.

Thank you for the opportunity to present this testimony.

Statements For The Record

ACCELERON LEARNING ON DoD TAP

To the Honorable Members of the Economic Opportunity Sub-Committee:

We’ve been invited by Chairman Arrington and Ranking Member O’Rourke to provide feedback on potential improvements to DoD TAP.

Our organization, Acceleron Learning, teaches life skills - career, financial, legal, and personal wellness - in over 350 organizations around the U.S. Our products are used by K-12, higher education, correctional institutions, and business organizations - and we specialize in helping people manage life transitions.

Of particular note, we offer highly effective transition assistance curricula to around 50,000 offenders in state prisons annually (www.acceleronlearning.com/conduits/). While situational factors differ, the needs of offenders re-entering civilian life are quite like the needs of servicemembers in transition.

After conversations with Rep. Arrington’s and Rep. O’Rourke’s staffs, we were encouraged to offer feedback on DoD TAP, given our particular expertise.

The feedback points below make reference to our Re-Entry Roadmap product, which is used by offenders. Attached to this letter is a supporting slide presentation about the Re-Entry Roadmap. This product is very user friendly, portable, and consumable. We believe it serves as a helpful illustration.

Our feedback is based upon review of publicly available information about DoD TAP. We see opportunities for improvement in three distinct areas:

1. Specificity of Guidance - While the Individual Transition Plan provides reasonably good detail on the “whats” of transition (family needs, benefits, financial needs etc.) it does not provide specificity of guidance on the “hows”. For example, a prompt in Section I A reads “Assess impact of individual/family requirements on relocation options (e.g. quality of schools, availability of medical care, spouse employment etc.).” To this end:

- How does one assess the quality of schools? Or availability of medical care? Or the sufficiency of spouse employment?
- What is a step-by-step process to remediate these kinds of issues?
- What specific personal information will be required to bring closure to these issues?
- Finally, what resources are available (likely web-based) to aid in research?

Across a wide variety of audiences (college students, offenders etc.) we have found that most people fail in transition because they lack very specific guidance on the “hows.” Oftentimes, far too many assumptions are made about a person’s critical thinking skills, ability to parse issues, ability to understand process/sequencing, and ability to conduct research.

The DoD TAP would benefit greatly from a significant investment in unpacking the “hows” for the various ITP elements, especially those not directly related to one’s career. It would also benefit from a systematic inventory of the “whats” to ensure the right items are included at the proper level of detail.

The format of our Re-Entry Roadmap activity cards and timeline offers a concise, yet thorough inventory of the “whats” and the “hows” for offenders. Further, our reentryhelp.com resource portal offers an example of topically organized research tools.

2. Whole-Family Adjustment - While the DoD TAP references spousal participation in its career path programming, it does not seem to address the highly likely shift in roles between the spouses when the servicemember begins a civilian job. In fact, the entire family - spouse, children, extended family/supporters - may take on new roles and responsibilities following the transition.

Educating the whole family on the dynamics of the transition, as well as equipping them with specific skills related to the transition, will help them to better support and encourage one another. A servicemember is likely to feel overwhelmed by the (seemingly) individual burden of managing the many moving pieces, but it doesn’t have to be this way.

For example, we offer video lectures on over 120 topics in career, financial, legal, and personal wellness education which are relevant to enabling success of the whole family. The DoD TAP would benefit from similar content, or at least, from content that speaks directly to the needs of the spouse and family.

Servicemember Workforce Integration - The March 28, 2017 Wall Street Journal included an article titled: “Hiring Veterans Is Easy, Keeping Them Is Hard,” which unpacked the need for cultural acclimation to civilian work environments.

This kind of cultural literacy is akin to our work with postdoctoral students who have spent years in the lab, away from the day-to-day of workplace environments. Key to their success is simulating the kinds of teamwork, personality, leadership, and work styles that they will eventually encounter in a professional setting. The WSJ article reports that private industry is designing specific training to address this issue for veterans, and DoD TAP would do well to incorporate more of the same.

If we can be of any assistance in the future development of DoD TAP, please let us know.

We commend the good work of DoD TAP to date, and thank you for reviewing this statement.

Best,

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CEO - Acceleron Learning
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VETERANS EDUCATION SUCCESS (VES)

Chairman Arrington, Ranking Member O’Rourke, and Members of the Subcommittee:

Veterans Education Success (VES) appreciates the opportunity to share its perspective on the Review of the Interagency Transition Assistance Program and the Need for Enhanced Outcome Measurements.

VES is a non-profit organization focused on protecting the integrity and promise of the GI Bill and other federal educational programs for veterans and servicemembers.

We appreciate the committee’s desire to look at the Transition Assistance Program (TAP) and the need for outcome measures. Ensuring a seamless transition from military service into the civilian workforce is paramount to the long-term success of the veteran. While much has been accomplished in this area, much is still left to be done. We believe the TAP program should be viewed as a way to improve veteran outcomes by enhancing its ability to help transitioning service members

make the best use of their GI Bill benefits. With that goal in mind, we recommend the following five improvements:

1. Start the Transition Assistance Program earlier on in the military lifecycle. As service members prepare to transition out of the military, their focus is on their basic necessities, such as identifying a place of residence and addressing the reality of a significant change in their day-to-day living. The current timing of TAP classes, as servicemembers are trying to walk out the door, is not scheduled well to capture their attention. In addition, because many servicemembers start to use their benefits while still in the service (such as using GI Bill “top up” or selecting a college for Defense Department Tuition Assistance and then staying with that college for the GI Bill), VES believes that starting the discussion earlier in the military life cycle will help the service member better retain the information and provides opportunity for them to take the time needed to identify institutions and degree programs that will help them make best use of their benefits. As one former officer told the previous Education Secretary, much of the content in the TAP curriculum should really start during boot camp.

2. Improve Consumer Fraud Warnings.

The TAP curriculum needs stronger consumer fraud warnings. Servicemembers and veterans are frequently targets of consumer fraud, from pay day lenders and used car dealers located outside military bases, to financial companies that violate military families’ legal rights, to bad actor colleges that prey on veterans for their GI Bill.

3. Ensure Those Providing Academic Advisement are from Neutral Parties.

It is imperative that the trainers and instructors leading TAP classes provide transitioning veterans with neutral, objective information, and with no vested interest in where the service members choose to pursue higher education. For example, some non-profit organizations sponsored by or representing for-profit college are reportedly trying to secure roles leading TAP classes with the goal of pushing veterans to use their benefits at these schools. Having neutral advisors ensures the advisement is focused on what is in the best interest of the student. Only government representatives or veterans service organizations taking no funding from colleges should lead these classes.

4. Remove Pay-to-Play Lists from TAP.

Currently, pay-to-play lists such as the “Military Friendly Schools” list and GI Jobs magazine from Victory Media Corporation are being distributed in TAP classes. FTC recently settled a lawsuit with Victory Media over their deceptive promotion of schools that made the list because they paid to be on it. Distribution of these lists in TAP classes instills a false sense of endorsement by the federal government and consequently can cause a transitioning service member to choose a school that leaves them with a useless degree that wasted their GI Bill benefits.

5. Align TAP Curriculum to the Real-Life Experiences of Service Members

The current TAP curriculum gives service members a laundry list of available resources, but those “death by power point” presentations do not always resonate with real life experiences. For example, VA briefings focus on health care, then benefits, and then cemeteries but don’t answer why these benefits are important to the service member. Courses should incorporate questions service members are asking themselves, such as “how will I support myself” or “what do I do if I get sick” or “how do I choose a school and degree program that will best meet my needs?” VES believes TAP should be more “servicemember-focused” and less about the organizational hierarchy of each agency giving the briefings.

Questions For The Record

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR VETERANS’ EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING
SERVICE

1. What does DOL consider a successful transition for a service member leaving the Department of Defense (DoD)?

Response: DOL agrees with the DoD perspective that attainment of the Career Readiness Standards (CRS) is one of the key objectives of TAP. Additionally, in line with the TAP Evaluation Framework DOL considers the transition a success if the veteran obtains employment, starts a business, or is pursuing education/training to

secure a credential. As part of the 60-day task from the HVAC EO Subcommittee, the interagency partners are working collaboratively to refine the definition of success.

1a. What metrics does DOL use to measure this success?

Response: As part of the OMB approved Interagency TAP Evaluation Plan, DOL tracks the following outcome measures/indicators: amount of Unemployment Compensation or Ex-service members' (UCX) benefit payments by service branch; percentage of unemployed post-9/11 veterans ages 18–24; and percentage of unemployed post-9/11 veterans ages 25–34. DOL collects data on three additional performance metrics gathered at the 2,400 American Job Centers nationwide. These three measures align with the performance indicators prescribed in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and are: the employment rate in the second quarter after program exit; employment rate in the fourth quarter after program exit; and median earnings in the second quarter after program exit. In partnership with the Employment and Training Administration, DOL VETS collects data on all WIOA-funded activities and can filter out results for those veterans or transitioning service members who have gone through TAP. The performance measures above will be calculated for only those WIOA participants who have gone through TAP.

2. Has DOL identified certain groups that are at higher risk for homelessness, unemployment, or mental health issues during or after transition?

Response: In 2014, VETS defined Significant Barriers to Employment (SBE) as an eligible veteran or eligible spouse who meets at least one of the following criteria: disabled or special disabled; homeless; long-term unemployed (at least 27 weeks in the past year); ex-offender released in the past 12 months; lacking a high school diploma or equivalent; or considered to be low-income. These categories were established based on evidence-driven decisions sourced from Workforce Investment Act data. The criterion of having at least one SBE is what allows a veteran to be served by a Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program (DVOP) specialist under the Jobs for Veterans State Grants program.

Additionally, VETS funds roughly 150 Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Program (HVRP) grantees per year. From the SBE definition, all of the participants served under the HVRP are considered to have a significant barrier to employment.

2a. If so, is DOL tracking any specific statistics or metrics for those at risk groups, and what are those statistics?

Response: The metrics collected for these at risk populations are the same as the ones VETS collects for all veterans receiving services: employment in the second quarter after exit; employment in the fourth quarter after exit; and median earnings in the second quarter after exit. Collecting uniform performance metrics allows for standardized comparisons across different programs. These performance metrics are publicly reported via the VETS Annual Report to Congress; the latest version of the report (FY 2016) can be found here: https://www.dol.gov/vets/media/VETS_FY16_Annual_Report_to_Congress.pdf

2b. Does DOL consider service members receiving a discharge other than "Honorable" to be at higher risk for homelessness, unemployment, or mental health issue when compared to the general transitioning population?

Response: DOL provides the DOL Employment Workshop for all transitioning service members regardless of type of discharge. DOL regularly provides the DOL Employment Workshop to transitioning service members in military correctional facilities. Additionally, those transitioning service members are referred to the American Job Center (AJC) system for further assistance. This referral, or warm handover, can be person-to-person if the local AJC has a presence on or near the installation, or by connecting the service members with the AJC nearest their eventual transition destination. All transitioning service members who separated under "honorable," or other than "honorable," conditions also receive Priority of Service in all DOL-funded or partially-funded programs at American Job Centers.

3. In her testimony, Ms. Margarita Devlin, Executive Director of Benefits Assistance Service, Veterans Benefits Administration, the Department of Veterans Affairs, spoke about collecting information on post-separation outcomes. Does DOL plan to participate in crafting this survey?

Response: As a member of the interagency TAP Performance Management Working Group, DOL provided input to the VA on the post-separation TAP assessment survey, and looks forward to seeing the results.

3a. What outcomes and metrics will DOL be focusing on and measuring in this survey?

Response: DOL will focus on the survey results associated with the veterans' employment status, nature of their employment, and the value/quality of assistance received from DOL resources.

4. How does DOL evaluate the programs taught at TAP?

Response: DOL uses the results from the Transition GPS Participant Assessment provided by DoD. The assessment collects demographic data and includes questions to assess the quality of the course curriculum, course materials, facilitators, and facilities. The DOL Employment Workshop consistently receives high evaluation scores from participants, averaging 96 percent satisfaction on information learned, 98 percent on effectiveness of the facilitators, and 95 percent on confidence gained from the workshop. DOL uses the participant narrative comments to resolve issues encountered at specific installations, and as input for the regular review and revision of the workshop curriculum.

DOL VETS Federal field staff conducts regular site visits to the military installations in their respective states to evaluate the workshop facilitators and meet with the installation transition services personnel to address any site specific issues.

From Full Committee Ranking Member Tim Walz to U.S. Department of Defense

Questions

Department of Defense (DoD)

1. With the increase utilization of the National Guard and Reserve forces, which seems to be only increasing going forward, has DoD spent any time looking beyond TAP and looking at the larger picture of employment for these soldiers, sailors, marines, and airmen when they return?

a. The Army is talking about 60+ days a year of collective training for some units, with service members being required to do additional days for military schools necessary for career advancement. That's approaching a quarter of the year that these service members will be in uniform. How is that affecting their employers and how can the TAP program help with efforts to keep these service members employed?

b. We are hearing anecdotal evidence, as well as articles in the press, that employers are avoiding hiring Guardsmen and Reservists, or deciding against retaining them. Does DoD see addressing this issue as an extension of DoD's commitment to help service members successfully transition off of active duty? If so, has DoD done any data collection in this area?

c. Does DoD view unemployment of National Guardsmen and Reservists as a readiness issue?

d. Has the Secretary taken any steps to mitigate the decrease in hiring and retention rates of National Guardsmen and Reservists in their civilian employment due to the increased utilization of the Guard and Reserves - especially for those units that will be doing 60+ unit collective training days a year?

e. Has the Secretary tailored transition policies specifically for National Guardsmen and Reservists? For instance, as any thought been given to allowing Guardsmen and Reservists to return home, get their feet under them and assess their situation during their terminal leave, and then take the TAPS classes during their yellow ribbon events?

2. Does DoD collect data on service member's educational backgrounds before they enter military service?

a. If so, how is that data used?

b. Does the DoD use data on service member's educational background to identify shortcomings that could hinder their transition to the private sector or to higher education? If these shortcomings are identified, how are they remedied?

3. How is Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) addressing the varied rates of compliance among the services? In other words, is there a larger effort within OSD to address the lower rates of compliance among the Navy and Marine Corps

to bring them up to the 85% goal or is it left up to the individual services to deal with?

4. Does the Secretary see it as a future recruitment issue if service members are not successfully transitioned into civilian life?

5. The Government Accountability Office (GAO) study found very low rates of attendance for the supplemental TAP courses on accessing higher education, career and technical training, and entrepreneurship. There is concern that because these courses are seen as optional, unit commanders are not allowing attendance of interested service members. Has OSD thought about mandating that service members attend at least one of these currently supplemental programs to ensure their ability to attend if they are interested?

a. From visits to military bases and asking service members about their transition process, the Committee has heard that commanders are often unwilling to let service members attend additional supplemental classes or repeat classes that service members might feel like they need to repeat. Often the reason given is that the unit is short-staffed and that the commander is unable to get a replacement for that service member until they are out-processed from the military, so they need them to continue training to hit readiness numbers. Have the services considered changing policy to allow the unit to request a fill for a service member they know is or will be transitioning out?

b. Have the services considered manning units to be over 100% strength?

c. We have also heard troubling anecdotes of commanders telling their units to sign in to their TAP classes so that their attendance is recorded but then to leave and return to work without actually sitting through the class. And GAO reported that unit commanders sometimes require their service members to work a full shift after attending TAP class to make up for having attended TAP class. Have the services looked at how DoD can better monitor and address deliberate subversion of the rules?

d. How are commanders at the lower echelons being educated about the importance of preparation and TAP courses for a successful transition?

e. Have the services considered including transition numbers and metrics in commanders' evaluations, similar to how they are evaluated on readiness?

6. The Army has focused on building Career Skills Programs (CSP) for transitioning service members. Are similar programs being implemented in other services through the SkillBridge program?

a. What is the current participation rate in CSPs (or CSP like programs) across the services?

b. How is DoD measuring success in CSPs?

7. Has DoD identified certain groups that are at higher risk for homelessness, unemployment, or mental health issues during or after transition?

a. If so, is DoD tracking any specific statistics or metrics for those at risk groups, and what are those statistics?

b. Does DoD consider service members receiving a discharge other than "Honorable" to be at higher risk for homelessness, unemployment, or mental health issue when compared to the general transitioning population?

8. Has DoD considered moving TAPs classes from the final year (or 18 months in the case of a retiring service member) to a model that focuses on continual learning within a service member's military career?

9. From DoD's perspective, what does a successful transition look like and what metrics should be used to evaluate for that?

a. What follow-up does DoD conduct with service members after their transition?

b. What data does DoD need from Department of Labor and VA to improve transition programs?

10. When flag officers testify to Congressional Committees or conduct office calls, are they encouraged or directed to attend with their senior enlisted advisor?

a. Would it be beneficial for Congressional Committees to hear testimony directly from senior enlisted advisors?

Requestors Rep Timothy J. Walz

QFR Title: Supplemental TAP Courses and Backfilling Transitioning Service Members

Requestors: Rep Timothy J. Walz
Witness: Cook, Kathleen A
QFR ID: HVAC-01-005 QFR

Question Number: 5

Question: The Government Accountability Office (GAO) study found very low rates of attendance for the supplemental TAP courses on accessing higher education, career and technical training, and entrepreneurship. There is concern that because these courses are seen as optional, unit commanders are not allowing attendance of interested service members. Has OSD thought about mandating that service members attend at least one of these currently supplemental programs to ensure their ability to attend if they are interested? a. From visits to military bases and asking service members about their transition process, the Committee has heard that commanders are often unwilling to let service members attend additional supplemental classes or repeat classes that service members might feel they need to repeat. Often the reason given is that the unit is short-staffed and that the commander is unable to get a replacement for that service member until they are out-processed from the military, so they need them to continue training to hit readiness numbers. Have the services considered changing policy to allow the unit to request a fill for a service member they know is or will be transitioning out? b. Have the services considered manning units to be over 100% strength? c. We have also heard troubling anecdotes of commanders telling their units to sign in to their TAP classes so that their attendance is recorded but the to leave and return to work without actually sitting through the class. And GAO reported that after attending TAP class to make up for having attended TAP class. Have the services looked at how DoD can better monitor and address deliberate subversion of the rules? d. How are commanders at the lower echelons being educated about the importance of preparation and TAP courses for a successful transition? e. Have the services considered including transition numbers and metrics in commanders' evaluations, similar to how they are evaluated on readiness?

Answer: a. Members are assigned to their unit until they separate or retire. The AF Personnel Center fills positions once the member is no longer assigned to the unit. Commanders may authorize permissive temporary duty up to 20 days for CONUS based members and 30 days for members stationed overseas within 180 days of separation/retirement for job or residence search. Additionally, members may request terminal leave, so determining when a member will have their final day at work is not trackable across the enterprise. Finally, for officers, Services must manage to the Congressionally-mandated grade ceilings. b. The AF is unable to man units over 100% and maintain Congressionally-mandated end-strength. Students and transients are counted against Congressionally-mandated end strength so we could not overman. Therefore, most Air Force Specialty Codes do not have the inventory to support 100% manning across the enterprise. c. Air Force installation level Transition Assistance Program Counselors monitor workshop participation to ensure service members' full attendance through initial attendance sign-in and course completion by signing sections III and IV of eForm DD 2486 certifying compliance. For Service member who do not return to complete all elements of the program, counselors inform the unit commander or his/her representative for action and rescheduling as required. d. Understanding the Air Force will implement 2017 GAO recommendations as directed by the Department of Defense, we're currently performing comprehensive upgrades to our TAP processes based on the challenges with VOW compliance. Commanders at all levels are being educated about the importance of preparation and TAP courses for a successful transition through a variety of efforts. From providing annual training sessions for all readiness NCOs, to working with the Defense Manpower Data Center to validate eligibility data and database accuracy, and seeking IT solutions to add a "flag notification" to the system; all the way to changing out processing checklists, messaging our AD and Guard/Reserve Force Support Squadrons, briefing commanders, first sergeants and chiefs at our professional military education

and leadership courses and mandating Airman and Family Readiness Center Directors brief incoming commanders on VOW compliance within 30 days. We are also adding text to Airmen monthly leave and earning pay statements to highlight TAP requirements. Our commanders are being inspected in both the AD and Guard/Reserve for compliance, and we've updated our AF instruction to stress commander responsibility and accountability. And specifically to the Reserve component, should all this still result in someone missing the opportunity to complete TAP, AF Reserve Command is tracking every member and will bring members back on active status to complete the training as needed. Across the board, we're focused on attaining 100% compliance and ensuring commanders at all levels are being educated on the importance of service members full participation in transition assistance program. e. Air Force commanders are evaluated annually on the performance of their day-to-day operations, readiness, compliance requirements (to include TAP), exercises and audits. With this evaluation capability in place, the Air Force does not see a need to specifically identify TAP compliance in commanders' annual evaluations.

QFR Title: Career Skills Programs

Requestors: Rep Timothy J. Walz

Witness: Cook, Kathleen A

QFR ID: HVAC-01-006 QFR

Question Number: 6

Question: The Army has focused on building Career Skills Programs (CSP) for transitioning service members. Are similar programs being implemented in other services through the Skillbridge program? a. What is the current participation rate in CSPs (or CSP like programs) across the services? b. How is DoD measuring success in CSPs?

Answer: a. The Air Force developed policy and implemented a number of unified outreach initiatives to create a streamlined program process, and ensure Airmen are informed of SkillBridge programs. These outreach efforts include:

- An automated application to expedite and streamline the process.
- A marketing strategy to ensure program awareness among installations and Service members.
- Targeted messages to Airmen within one year of separation and outreach to commanders via e-mail messages and briefings.
- A standardized Vetting Checklist for Airmen, to ensure all training providers and the program align with SkillBridge training policies.
- Partnerships at the local level, between installations and training providers.
- A comprehensive training program explaining SkillBridge policy and programs for installation education counselors. Since the inception of the program in August 2016, over 240 Airmen from 39 installations have enrolled in 43 different Career Skills Programs.

The Air Force has three job skills training initiatives and is committed to expanding these programs over the next year:

- Solar Ready Vets, conducted in partnership with Department of Energy, which prepares Airmen for positions in the growing solar power industry;
- Hiring Our Heroes Corporate Fellowship Program, which provides transitioning Service members with management training and hands-on experience in the civilian workforce; and,
- South Seattle College apprenticeship program, which combines on-the-job training with classroom work in skills supporting aircraft and construction industries. b. The Air Force measures success by the number of programs, the number of installations participating, the number of Airmen receiving and completing training. The Air Force also tracks placements when reported.

QFR Title: Flag and General Officers and Senior Enlisted Advisors

Requestors: Rep Timothy J. Walz

Witness: Cook, Kathleen A

QFR ID: HVAC-01-010 QFR

Question Number: 10

Question: When flag officers testify to congressional committees or conduct office calls, are they encourage or directed to attend with their senior enlisted advisor? a. Would be beneficial for congressional committees to hear testimony directly from senior enlisted advisors?

Answer: General Goldfein, our Chief of Staff, and Chief Master Sergeant Wright our Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force are keenly focused on revitalizing squadrons. Gen Goldfein believes squadrons are the heartbeat of our Air Force and we succeed or fail in our mission based on that squadron experience. And as you know, at the center of that squadron experience is the commander. Translated, the well-being, resiliency and effectiveness of our Airmen and their families is directly tied to the squadron and its leadership team. Successfully transitioning our Airmen also depends on informed and engaged leadership. In my opinion, the primary solution to improving VOW compliance is two-fold; first, it requires fully educating our Total Force members on the requirement for TAP and second, Commanders and their Senior Enlisted leaders who support them are held accountable for compliance as they are the critical links to ensure Airmen complete TAP. The Air Force is always open to Senior Enlisted leaders' participation in congressional testimony and will take advantage of opportunities to include them in the future.

QFR Title: TAP for National Guard and Reserve

Requestors: Rep Timothy J. Walz

Witness: Lyons, Judd

QFR ID: HVAC-01-001 QFR

Question Number: 1

Question: With the increased utilization of the National Guard and Reserve forces, which seems to be only increasing going forward, has DoD spent any time looking beyond TAP and looking at the larger picture of employment for these soldiers, sailors, marines, and airmen when they return? a. The Army is talking about 60+ day a year of collective training for some units, with service members being required to do additional days for military schools necessary for career advancement. That's approaching a quarter of the year that these service members will be in uniform. How is that affecting their employers and how can the TAP program help with efforts to keep these service members employed? b. We are hearing anecdotal evidence, as well as articles in the press, that employers are avoiding hiring Guardsmen and Reservists, or deciding against retaining them. Does DoD see addressing this issue as an extension of DoD's commitment to help service members successfully transition off of active duty? if so, has DoD done any data collection in this area? c. Does DoD view unemployment of National Guardsmen and Reservists as a readiness issue? d. Has the Secretary taken any steps to mitigate the decrease in hiring and retention rates of National Guardsmen and Reservists in their civilian employment due to increased utilization of the Guard and Reserves - especially for those units that will be doing 60+ collective training days a year? e. Has the Secretary tailored transition policies specifically for National Guardsmen and Reservists? For instance, has any thought been given to allowing Guardsmen and Reservists to return home, get their feet under them and assess their situation during their terminal leave, and then take the TAPS classes during their yellow ribbon events?

Answer: 1. Yes; DoD looks beyond the Transition Assistance Program (TAP) at the larger picture of employment for members of the National Guard and Reserve when they return to home station. For example, DoD's Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve (ESGR) program is supported by a network of more than 3,750 volunteers located across 50 states, U.S. Territories and the District of Columbia. Volunteers from small business, industry, government, education, and prior military service bring a vast wealth of experience to supporting employers, Service members, and their families. The ESGR staff and a small cadre of contracted full-time support staff work to promote and enhance employer support for military service in the National Guard and Reserve. The four ESGR missions executed through 54 committees are:

- Employer Outreach: Promote a culture where all employers support and value military service through education, recognition, and mediation.
- Military Outreach: Make Service members aware of their rights and responsibilities under the law and the value of employer support and recognition.
- Employment: Increase career opportunities through strategic relationships with employers, state and federal government partners, and professional associations.
- Ombudsman Services: Provide mediation for issues or conflicts between employers and Service members before they escalate. Another DoD program that goes beyond TAP is the Department's Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program

(YRRP). This DoD-wide effort promotes the well-being of National Guard and Reserve members and their families, by connecting them with resources throughout the deployment cycle. Commanders and leaders play a critical role in ensuring that National Guard and Reserve Service members and their families attend YRRP events where they can access information on healthcare, education, employment, and financial and legal benefits. YRRP:

- Provides education and supports the readiness of Service members of the unit and their families for the rigors of deployment.
- Implements reintegration curriculum throughout the deployment cycle that builds resilience for current and future deployments.

- Educates Service members and their families about resources available and connects them to service providers who can assist them in overcoming the challenges of reintegration. ESGR and YRRP provide Service members information about and referrals to programs, services, and employment assistance. The Department is also part of a broader interagency effort to support transitioning Service members. Service members attending TAP receive employment assistance during the Department of Labor Employment Workshop (DOLEW), which includes information on topics such as resume writing, networking, and job search skills, to name a few. During the DOLEW Service members are also informed about and strongly encouraged to register at one of the 2,500 Department of Labor American Job Centers (AJC) located throughout the United States. The AJCs provide resources for veterans and transitioning Service members (including National Guard and Reserve members) after TAP. The AJCs provide priority of service for veterans and eligible spouses in all qualified job training programs. The Department of Labor Veterans' Employment and Training Service provides funding for state and local Workforce Investment Boards, public agencies, non-profit organizations (including faith-based and community-based) and neighborhood partnerships to serve specific areas and populations with proven effective and timely programs. The Jobs for Veterans State Grants program provides Federal funding, through a formula grant, to 54 state workforce agencies to hire dedicated staff to provide individualized career and training-related services to veterans and eligible persons with significant barriers to employment and to help employers fill their workforce needs with job-seeking veterans. 1a. Any time a member of the National Guard or Reserve spends time away from their civilian job to perform their military duty, stress can result to the employer, the Service member, and their family. DoD helps to mitigate that stress through advance notification of military duty to the employer, encouraging continuous communication between the employer and Service member through the ESGR and TAP. ESGR educates both employers and Service members about their rights and responsibilities under the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act (USERRA). It also provides information and resources that mitigate the challenges employers and Service members face during transitions to and from periods of military duty. ESGR will continue to work closely with the Army National Guard and Army Reserve to identify those employers who may be affected by any proposed Army National Guard and Army Reserve enhanced readiness initiatives. ESGR staff actively supports all Reserve Components (RC) to develop strategies and communication tools that prepare employers for potential changes in training tempos. More than 3,750 ESGR volunteers located across the Nation stand by to conduct targeted outreach to those industries and specific employers affected by units in any proposed new training paradigm. Outreach efforts continue to focus on the value RC members bring to the workforce, how the additional training may benefit employers, and incentives available to employers for hiring and retaining RC employees. In 2017, ESGR engaged more than 81,000 employers nationwide. 1b. While anecdotal evidence and press coverage serve as important reminders of the need to continue TAP and ESGR's outreach and education efforts, the Department's data collected via the Status of Forces Survey-Reserve Component shows a downward trend in overall employment issues. The 2016 survey reports 69 percent of RC members' employers favor their RC member's continued participation in RC service, up from a baseline of 56 percent in 2000 and a post-9/11 low of 59 percent in 2005. When asked about their co-workers' view of their RC service, members reported a 73 percent rate of support, up from a baseline of 59 percent in 2000 and a post-9/11 low of 67 percent in 2005. The 2017 Status of Forces Survey-Reserve Component is being prepared for distribution and will contain the same series of employment-related questions from previous iterations. 1c. Yes. The Department views civilian employment as one of the pillars of RC members' readiness. DoD cannot retain RC Service members and maintain the level of readiness required in the current operational environment

without them having stable and fulfilling civilian employment. The latest numbers from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) show a downward trend in post-9/11 veteran unemployment. The November 2017 BLS report shows an unemployment rate of 3.6 percent among that population, down from 4.7 percent in November 2016. 1d. Through ESGR and YRRP, the Department provides employment information and resources to RC members and their families, leveraging partnerships inside and outside of government. Working with government agencies (e.g., the Department of Labor Veterans' Employment and Training Service) and private sector organizations (e.g., the Society for Human Resource Management), these programs help connect potential employees with employers and mentors. ESGR works directly with the Army National Guard and Army Reserve employment programs such as the Employment Support Program and Public-Private Partnership, to support their efforts. YRRP receives Congressional funding which is disbursed by the Department to fund state-based RC employment programs under the Department's "Beyond the Yellow Ribbon" initiative. DoD informs these initiatives by ongoing communication with RC leaders at the national and state level, and places special emphasis on units impacted by increased training requirements. ESGR conducts numerous employer-oriented events such as 'bosslifts' on military aircraft or ships that increase employer understanding of Service member/employee requirements. 'bosslifts' bring employers to military duty locations around the nation to show them the training their employees receive. For example, ESGR is planning a 'bosslift' in support of the Tennessee Army National Guard's 278th Armored Cavalry Regiment rotation to the National Training Center in May 2018. Employers from Tennessee will travel via military aircraft to Fort Irwin, CA, to see their employees in action, learn about their mission, and understand the importance of the role they play in our national security. Additionally, ESGR helps facilitate communication between employers and the appropriate military authority for the Service member in order to discuss any concerns over the timing, frequency or duration of military duty. 1e. Title 10, United States Code (U.S. Code) mandates transition requirements be completed while in a full-time Title 10 active duty status. Conducting TAP during Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program events would not be in compliance with Title 10, U.S. Code, as these events occur after a Service member leaves full-time Title 10 active duty status. Apart from noncompliance with current statute, the Yellow Ribbon events as currently programmed (approximately 2 ° days in length over a weekend) simply do not provide sufficient time for RC Service members to complete all TAP requirements. To expand Yellow Ribbon events to include TAP would also keep RC Service members away from work or school even longer after their return from deployment or activation. However, DoD has tailored transition policy to better meet the needs of the Reserve Components while remaining in compliance with Title 10, U.S. Code. To avoid RC members having to repeat pre-separation counseling, they may decline pre-separation or transition counseling for each successive period of full-time active duty in Title 10 status consisting of 180 days or more of continuous active duty. Other transition policies for members of the RC include exemption from the 3-day DOLEW if they are retiring with 20 or more years of qualifying military service; can document civilian employment post-demobilization or deactivation; can provide documented acceptance into an accredited career technical training, undergraduate or graduate degree program; or have previously participated in the DOLEW. All exemptions are documented. Members of the RC may be exempted from the requirement to begin pre-separation or transition counseling no less than 90 days from separation if being demobilized or deactivated from active duty under circumstances in which operational requirements, as determined by the Secretary concerned, make the 90-day requirement unfeasible. Similarly, for RC members being released from active duty, in which operational requirements as determined by the Secretary concerned make the timeline to complete Capstone unfeasible, Capstone must begin no later than the date of release from active duty as reflected on the DD Form 214.

QFR Title: Service Members Educational Background

Requestors: Rep Timothy J. Walz

Witness: Lyons, Judd

QFR ID: HVAC-01-002 QFR

Question Number: 2

Question: Does DoD collect data on service member's educational backgrounds before they enter military service? a. If so, how is that data

used? b. Does the DoD use data on service member's educational background to identify shortcomings that could hinder their transition to the private sector or to higher education? If these shortcomings are identified, how are they remedied?

Answer: Yes, DoD does collect data on Service member's educational background before they enter the military. 2.a. These data are used for a number of purposes. For officer candidates, education attainment and the source of the education credential may be used as a factor in determining a person's competitiveness for a given program. For example, an individual with an advanced technical degree from a well-known university would likely be more competitive than an individual with a non-technical degree from a lesser known school. In the enlistment process, these data are used to classify new recruits and to project attrition rates. Data show that individuals with high school diplomas are more likely to complete their first-term of enlistment than individuals with other education credentials. In Fiscal Year 2017, nearly 96 percent of all new enlisted accessions had at least a high school diploma. 2.b. No, DoD does not use data on Service member's educational background at accession to identify shortcomings that could hinder their transition to the private sector or to higher education. Generally, the dramatic change in experience and education gained during service would make such an accession evaluation moot. As mentioned above, these data are used for classifying new recruits and for projecting attrition.

QFR Title: Rates of Compliance

Requestors: Rep Timothy J. Walz

Witness: Lyons, Judd

QFR ID: HVAC-01-003 QFR

Question Number: 3

Question: How is the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) addressing the varied rates of compliance among the Services? In other words, is there a larger effort within OSD to address the lower rates of compliance among the Navy and the Marine Corps to bring them up to the 85% goal or is it left up to the individual services to deal with?

Answer: It is important to note that DoD relies on compliance information based on completed records in our IT system of record for computing Veterans Opportunity to Work (VOW) Act and Career Readiness Standards compliance. Based on known information reflecting only the Service members for whom a completed DD Form 2958 was received by the Department for Fiscal Year 2016, all Services (including Navy and Marine Corps) met the 85% threshold. The Department is working with the Military Services and the Defense Manpower Data Center to reduce the amount of missing data for compliance reporting. For example, in Fiscal Year 2017, we launched a department-wide, TAP-IT Enterprise System that streamlined the data collection process and will enhance the Department's ability to maintain accountability. The Department will continue to improve data tracking and work with the Services to reduce the extent of missing data.

QFR Title: Successful Transitions

Requestors: Rep Timothy J. Walz

Witness: Lyons, Judd

QFR ID: HVAC-01-004 QFR

Question Number: 4

Question: Does the Secretary see it as a future recruitment issue if service members are not successfully transitioned into civilian life?

Answer: Yes, the successful transition of Service members is important for future recruiting efforts. Both potential recruits and the influencers that help those recruits make their decision about serving in today's military look at how the individuals that served before them have fared. Today, more than ever, youth believe the risks associated with serving far outweighs the benefits. It is important that potential recruits and influencers see service in today's military as an opportunity to better prepare themselves for a career after the military. The Department believes our strongest recruiting tool is a successfully transitioned Service member contributing to the Nation and their community in a meaningful way. Conversely, unprepared transitioning Service members are a risk to the recruiting pool for the All-Volunteer Force by lowering the propensity for Service members to serve as ambassadors and not recommend military service to others. The Nation must see,

consistently, that those who serve also thrive in civilian life. The Department is changing its culture from an end-of-service transition planning to a Military Life Cycle approach, emphasizing career readiness planning throughout a Service member's career. In doing so, we ensure mission readiness is maintained, while also sustaining the All-Volunteer Force for both the Active and Reserve Component.

QFR Title: Supplemental TAP Courses and Backfilling Transitioning Service Members

Requestors: Rep Timothy J. Walz

Witness: Lyons, Judd

QFR ID: HVAC-01-005 QFR

Question Number: 5

Question: The Government Accountability Office (GAO) study found very low rates of attendance for the supplemental TAP courses on accessing higher education, career and technical training, and entrepreneurship. There is concern that because these courses are seen as optional, unit commanders are not allowing attendance of interested service members. Has OSD thought about mandating that service members attend at least one of these currently supplemental programs to ensure their ability to attend if they are interested? a. From visits to military bases and asking service members about their transition process, the Committee has heard that commanders are often unwilling to let service members attend additional supplemental classes or repeat classes that service members might feel they need to repeat. Often the reason given is that the unit is short-staffed and that the commander is unable to get a replacement for that service member until they are out-processed from the military, so they need them to continue training to hit readiness numbers. Have the services considered changing policy to allow the unit to request a fill for a service member they know is or will be transitioning out? b. Have the services considered manning units to be over 100% strength? c. We have also heard troubling anecdotes of commanders telling their units to sign in to their TAP classes so that their attendance is recorded but the to leave and return to work without actually sitting through the class. And GAO reported that after attending TAP class to make up for having attended TAP class. Have the services looked at how DoD can better monitor and address deliberate subversion of the rules? d. How are commanders at the lower echelons being educated about the importance of preparation and TAP courses for a successful transition? e. Have the services considered including transition numbers and metrics in commanders' evaluations, similar to how they are evaluated on readiness?

Answer: TAP interagency partners have previously discussed making the additional tracks mandatory; however, not all Service members' transition plans include topics covered in those tracks. Participant assessment feedback on the TAP has also emphasized Service members' preference for flexibility and not pursuing a one-size-fits-all approach. The Department's focus is for transitioning Service members to meet Career Readiness Standards (CRS). There are nine common CRSs applicable to all Service members. Service members interested in pursuing higher education and/or career technical training must also meet four additional education-oriented CRS. The 2-day tracks were developed and made available to help those who require assistance in meeting these additional CRS. Transitioning Services members are encouraged to take advantage of these additional tracks. All curriculum, both core and additional, are offered frequently, and advertised through multiple means and platforms. All Service members are able to participate in the additional 2-day tracks, as these tracks are available both via classroom setting and virtually through Joint Knowledge Online. Once the Service member begins pre-separation counseling, they register for the mandatory curriculum and are made aware of the benefits of additional tracks to support their long-term goals and encouraged to attend.

QFR Title: Homelessness, Unemployment or Mental Health Issues

Requestors: Rep Timothy J. Walz

Witness: Lyons, Judd

QFR ID: HVAC-01-007 QFR

Question Number: 7

Question: Has DoD identified certain groups that are at higher risk for homelessness, unemployment, or mental health issues during or after transition? a. If so, is DoD tracking any specific statistics or metrics for those at risk groups, and what are those statistics? b. Does DoD consider service members receiving a discharge other than “Honorable” to be at higher risk for homelessness, unemployment, or mental health issues when compared to the general transitioning population?

Answer: The Department has identified that eligible transitioning Service members who have not met all applicable career readiness standards (CRS), do not have a viable post-transition transportation or post-transition housing plan that meets their personal/family needs, and/or those with an ‘other than honorable’ discharge may be at greater risk, for example, for homelessness or unemployment challenges. These individuals are provided with a ‘warm handover’ referral by the Military Services to appropriate partner agencies and other relevant resources, with referrals made to specific program sites based upon the expected geographic location of the Service member following transition. For example, for those failing to meet an employment-related CRS, a warm handover is provided to an on-site Department of Labor (DOL) representative, if available at the site, or a designated POC at the appropriate DOL American Job Center (AJC). As another example, for those without a viable post-transition transportation or housing plan, the expectation is that Service members transitioning with an honorable discharge status will be referred to a Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Capstone Liaison who will connect the Service member to the appropriate VA Homeless Program contact or Healthcare Liaison based on the installation and Service member’s post-transition address. The expectation is that Service members transitioning with an other than honorable discharge status will be referred to an on-site DOL representative, if available at the site, or a designated POC at the appropriate DOL AJC. Further, there are occasions when transitioning Service members may be referred to both VA and DOL. Twenty-one (21) DoD locations have an on-site Veterans Health Administration Liaison who manages these referrals. At approximately 300 other sites, these referrals are facilitated through contracted Veterans Benefits Administration Benefits Advisors or by DoD personnel.

7a. Yes, the Department tracks eligible transitioning Service members who do not meet all applicable career readiness standards (CRS) or do not have a viable post-transition transportation or post-transition housing plan, and whether these individuals receive a ‘warm handover’ by the Military Services to appropriate partner agencies. The Department also tracks eligible transitioning Service members that are separating with an ‘other than honorable’ discharge and receive a warm handover to Department of Labor. Through August Fiscal Year to Date (FYTD) 2017, the Department received 138,671 completed DD Form 2648 (or legacy DD Form 2958). Of this, 135,096 (97.4 percent) either met CRS or received a warm handover to a partner agency (e.g., VA or DOL). Specifically, 132,063 Service members met CRS, while 3,033 members received a warm handover. The remaining 3,575 Service members (2.6 percent) did not meet CRS and did not receive a warm handover in FYTD 2017. The Department is working to close this remaining gap, so that all Service members either meet CRS or receive a warm handover for additional support. Note that this CRS compliance rate reflects only the Service members for whom a completed DD Form 2648 (or legacy DD Form 2958) was received by the Department. The Department is working with the Military Services and the Defense Manpower Data Center to reduce the amount of missing data for compliance reporting. In FY 2017, we launched a department-wide, TAP-IT Enterprise System that streamlined the data collection process and will enhance the Department’s ability to maintain accountability. The Department will continue to improve data tracking and work with the Services to reduce the extent of missing data. The Department also tracked eligible transitioning Service members at risk of homelessness. 197,307 Service members transitioned from active duty during the period between October 2015 and September 2016. The Department received more than 143,000 DD Form 2958’s from the Military Services. Of the more than 143,000 forms received, 4,504 Service members (3.1 percent) had not evaluated their post-military housing requirements and developed a plan to meet personal and family needs prior to their separation, retirement, or release from active duty. Of those 4,504 Service members, 1,671 (37.1 percent) received a warm handover to at least one partner agency (VA, DOL, or other agency). Specifically for VA, 1,628 members (36.2 percent of those 4,504 Service members) were documented as having received a warm handover to the VA for additional assistance. This is an improvement as compared to the year prior (October 2014 - August 2015), where 483 Service members (8.0 percent of 6,044 Service members) without a post-military housing plan received a warm handover to the VA.

FY 2017 data will be available in FY 2018. 7b. Yes, based on studies, survey data and anecdotal comments, DoD believes Service members receiving a discharge other than “Honorable” are at a higher risk when compared to the general transitioning Service member population. However, it should be noted that the Department does not have available post-transition data on these Service members; the Department must rely on data from our TAP interagency partner agencies and other stakeholders. The Department is also aware of reports that Service members with discharge characterizations other than Honorable or uncharacterized may be at higher risk of suicide. In April 2016, the Department issued the memo ‘Warm Handover Guidance for Transitioning Service Members Who Do Not Separate with an Honorable Discharge’ for commanders or their designee to execute warm handovers during the Capstone event and document those handovers on DD Form 2958. The Department expects that Service members transitioning with an other than honorable discharge will be referred to an on-site DOL representative, if available at the site, or a designated POC at the appropriate DOL American Job Center (AJC). There are occasions when transitioning Service members may be referred to both VA and DOL.

QFR Title: TAP Classes

Requestors: Rep Timothy J. Walz

Witness: Lyons, Judd

QFR ID: HVAC-01-008 QFR

Question Number: 8

Question: Has DoD considered moving TAPs classes from the final year (or 18 months in the case of a retiring service member) to a model that focuses on continual learning within a service member’s military career?

Answer: The Department expanded career preparation and transition activities through development and implementation of the Transition Preparation Military Life Cycle (MLC) model. The MLC model provides Service members the time and resources to plan for their inevitable transition from Active Duty; reduces mission impact as many transition-related actions are completed during the normal course of business instead of at the end of a Service member’s time on Active Duty; and allows increased flexibility for transition service delivery. The MLC model provides Service members, at various key touch points throughout their MLC, with opportunities to align their military career with their civilian goals. They are made aware of the Career Readiness Standards they must meet before their intended retirement, separation, or release from active duty, and they remain engaged throughout their military careers in mapping and refining their individual development plan to achieve their military goals and their post-military goals for employment, education, career technical training, and/or starting their own business. This will enable transition to become a well-planned, organized process that empowers Service members to make informed career decisions and take responsibility for advancing their personal goals. While implementation varies for each Service, career preparation and transition assistance activities occur at key touch points throughout a Service member’s career, to include: accessions/initial drilling weekends; first permanent duty station; reenlistment; promotion; change of duty station; deployment and redeployment; mobilization, demobilization, and deactivation; and separation, retirement, or release from active duty. Such activities include development/update of an Individual Development Plan, financial planning, eBenefits registration, personal skills/aptitude/interests assessment, review of Military Occupational Code alignment to civilian occupations, the five day TAP curriculum, and the training tracks for accessing higher education, entrepreneurship, and career technical training.

QFR Title: Successful Transition

Requestors: Rep Timothy J. Walz

Witness: Lyons, Judd

QFR ID: HVAC-01-009 QFR

Question Number: 9

Question: From DoD’s perspective, what does a successful transition look like and what metrics should be used to evaluate for that? a. What follow-up does DoD conduct with service members after their transition? b. What data does DoD need from the Department of Labor and VA to improve transition programs?

Answer: Currently, the Department believes a successful transition is one in which a Service member is career-ready when he or she separates, retires, or is released from active duty; whether they are pursuing additional education, finding a job in the public or private sector, or starting their own business. Career readiness is assessed by the Department as attainment of Career Readiness Standards (CRS). The provision of a warm handover by the Military Services to appropriate partner agencies for those Service members needing additional transition support is also critical. The Interagency TAP Evaluation Plan for FY 2017–2018, approved by the Office of Management and Budget, includes attainment of CRS or a warm handover as one of the examined program output measures. In addition, the plan includes a set of assessment methods and tools to assess the processes for TAP delivery, immediate results of program delivery (e.g., whether separations comply with statute and policy), and the desired systematic impacts (e.g., whether veterans successfully obtain employment, start new business, and/or seek additional education). Further, as part of the 60-day request from the HVAC EO Subcommittee, the TAP interagency partners are further working together to collaboratively define success (including desired outcomes and success metrics of the TAP). 9a. The Department coordinates with our TAP interagency partners (e.g., VA, DOL, and the Small Business Administration) on their follow-up assessments and evaluations of Service members after they transition. The TAP interagency partners collaborate together to develop post-separation assessments and evaluations (such as the planned VA Post-Separation Assessment). The TAP interagency partners have shared (or will share) their findings with the Department. Such coordination with the interagency partners allows the Department to learn about Service members after their transition. 9b. The Department is currently working with DOL and VA to address the question of what additional services our transitioning Service members receive if they are provided a warm handover to DOL or VA (e.g., due to failing to meet CRS or failing to have a viable post-transition housing plan), as well as the outcomes of these additional services. The Department needs this data to determine if our existing warm handover processes are successful and to inform any needed improvements. The Department is also coordinating with our TAP interagency partners on their post-transition assessments, evaluations, and outcome measures/indicators. The TAP interagency partners have shared (or will share) their findings and data with the Department. This information is needed to inform the effectiveness of the program post-transition.

QFR Title: Supplemental TAP Courses and Backfilling Transitioning Service Members

Requestors: Rep Timothy J. Walz

Witness: Stein, Kurt W

QFR ID: HVAC-01-005 QFR

Question Number: 5

Question: The Government Accountability Office (GAO) study found very low rates of attendance for the supplemental TAP courses on accessing higher education, career and technical training, and entrepreneurship. There is concern that because these courses are seen as optional, unit commanders are not allowing attendance of interested service members. Has OSD thought about mandating that service members attend at least one of these currently supplemental programs to ensure their ability to attend if they are interested? a. From visits to military bases and asking service members about their transition process, the Committee has heard that commanders are often unwilling to let service members attend additional supplemental classes or repeat classes that service members might feel they need to repeat. Often the reason given is that the unit is short-staffed and that the commander is unable to get a replacement for that service member until they are out-processed from the military, so they need them to continue training to hit readiness numbers. Have the services considered changing policy to allow the unit to request a fill for a service member they know is or will be transitioning out? b. Have the services considered manning units to be over 100% strength? c. We have also heard troubling anecdotes of commanders telling their units to sign in to their TAP classes so that their attendance is recorded but the to leave and return to work without actually sitting through the class. And GAO reported that after attending TAP class to make up for having attended TAP class. Have the services looked at how DoD can better monitor and address deliberate subversion of the rules? d. How are com-

manders at the lower echelons being educated about the importance of preparation and TAP courses for a successful transition? e. Have the services considered including transition numbers and metrics in commanders' evaluations, similar to how they are evaluated on readiness?

Answer: 5.a Currently, the Marine Corps does not mandate or has considered mandating the attendance of supplemental courses, but does support the attendance of Marines through Marine Corps Order 1700.31. Specific guidance to Commanders is to allow all Marines necessary time off to attend the 2-day Track options. Additionally, Commanding Officer support for attendance at 2-day tracks is validated as part of the current Inspector General command inspection process. 5.b. It would be beneficial to have additional manning. However, funding, end strength limitations, and training cycles are limiting factors in manning all units at or above 100%. 5.c. The Marine Corps monitors attendance to TRS through morning and afternoon check in procedures. Policy prohibits any Marine from being pulled out of class as TRS is considered their place of duty. Additionally, Unit Transition Coordinators, who are liaisons in the unit that facilitate transition activities, are required by policy to ensure that Marines assigned to TRS do not have any scheduled appointments or commitments during TRS. Any Marine that does not complete an entire day must reschedule to complete that portion of the class before credit is provided. 5.d. Commanders are educated on the TRP in several different ways: Commander's courses, through the Unit Transition Coordinators who liaise with the transition offices, and regularly scheduled briefs through installation Transition Managers. Information dissemination is further supported via Transition Readiness Training materials toolkit online and MARADMINs. The Marine Corps is currently implementing a CO's dashboard specifically for the TRP which will provide compliance status for Marines scheduled to transition. 5.e. As part of the Inspector General's Critical or Requiring Evaluation program, inspection results are part of a "Commander's Report Card" that is reported to the CMC. Any findings are to be resolved and confirmed with the IG's office within 30 days of inspection.

QFR Title: Supplemental TAP Courses and Backfilling Transitioning Service Members

Requestors: Rep Timothy J. Walz
 Witness: Bennett, Robert
 QFR ID: HVAC-01-005 QFR

Question Number: 5

Question: The Government Accountability Office (GAO) study found very low rates of attendance for the supplemental TAP courses on accessing higher education, career and technical training, and entrepreneurship. There is concern that because these courses are seen as optional, unit commanders are not allowing attendance of interested service members. Has OSD thought about mandating that service members attend at least one of these currently supplemental programs to ensure their ability to attend if they are interested? a. From visits to military bases and asking service members about their transition process, the Committee has heard that commanders are often unwilling to let service members attend additional supplemental classes or repeat classes that service members might feel they need to repeat. Often the reason given is that the unit is short-staffed and that the commander is unable to get a replacement for that service member until they are out-processed from the military, so they need them to continue training to hit readiness numbers. Have the services considered changing policy to allow the unit to request a fill for a service member they know is or will be transitioning out? b. Have the services considered manning units to be over 100% strength? c. We have also heard troubling anecdotes of commanders telling their units to sign in to their TAP classes so that their attendance is recorded but the to leave and return to work without actually sitting through the class. And GAO reported that after attending TAP class to make up for having attended TAP class. Have the services looked at how DoD can better monitor and address deliberate subversion of the rules? d. How are commanders at the lower echelons being educated about the importance of preparation and TAP courses for a successful transition? e. Have the services considered including transition numbers and metrics in commanders' evaluations, similar to how they are evaluated on readiness?

Answer: The Army does not believe DoD has mandated Service members attend supplemental programs. Career Tracks are optional, supplemental TAP courses that are offered to Soldiers looking for specialized training during pre-separation, initial counseling, and in the developmental stage of their Individual Transition Plan (ITP). a. No. The Army's inventory of Soldiers is not sufficient to offset losses any earlier than at separation date. b. No. The Army's inventory of Soldiers is not sufficient to man all units at over 100% strength. c. Yes. The Army requires transitioning Soldiers to sign in on rosters at all installations to ensure a Soldier's attendance is captured and recorded into the system of record. The Army has assigned Transition NCOs in each unit who monitor and report Soldiers not in attendance. Rosters are validated by roll call at least twice during the morning and afternoon sessions. If a Soldier is not present, they receive a "no-show" on the roster, which is followed by a report to the commander from the Transition Services Manager at the center. d. Each installation conducts professional development for commanders and leaders at lower echelons. Transition requirements are also taught at the commander and first sergeant courses, pre-command courses, the general officer transition course, and the command sergeant major transition course. In addition, Army Regulation 600-81, Soldier for Life - Transition Assistance Program (SFL-TAP) directs leaders to send their Soldiers to SFL-TAP. To encourage additional education, the Army provides contact avenues on the SFL-TAP website and in the regulation that allow leaders to get questions answered by subject matter experts. The Army educates leaders and Soldiers on the 24/7 SFL-TAP Virtual Center and phone line, which offers Commanders flexibility in helping Soldiers complete SFL-TAP CRS requirements during non-duty hours and without interfering with mission duties. e. Yes. Currently commanders are authorized to include SFL-TAP percentages in personnel evaluations.

QFR Title: Career Skills Programs

Requestors: Rep Timothy J. Walz

Witness: Bennett, Robert

QFR ID: HVAC-01-006 QFR

Question Number: 6

Question: The Army has focused on building Career Skills Programs (CSP) for transitioning service members. Are similar programs being implemented in other services through the Skillbridge program? a. What is the current participation rate in CSPs (or CSP like programs) across the services? b. How is DoD measuring success in CSPs?

Answer: Yes, The Army collaborates with the Navy, Air Force, and Marine Corps in order to share best practices, grow the enterprise of programs, and to make programs available to transitioning service members from all Services. For example, there is currently one Air Force member attending the Microsoft Software & Systems Academy (MSSA) CSP being held at Fort Benning, GA. a. Army CSP data/metrics are tracked with the Installation Management Command Common Operating Picture (COP) (as of 27NOV17). In FY16, 2,436 Soldiers enrolled, with 2,271 Soldiers completing a CSP (93%). As a result, 2,013 Soldiers received job placement (89%). In FY17, 4,251 Soldiers enrolled, with 3,930 Soldiers completing a CSP (92%) and to date, 3,722 Soldiers have received job placement (95%). b. For the Army, success is measured by achieving a 90% job placement rate upon transition from active duty for Soldiers completing a CSP. For the past two years, the Army has exceeded this goal and is on track to continue this standard of excellence in FY18.

QFR Title: Career Skills Programs

Requestors: Rep Timothy J. Walz

Witness: Stein, Kurt W

QFR ID: HVAC-01-006 QFR

Question Number: 6

Question: The Army has focused on building Career Skills Programs (CSP) for transitioning service members. Are similar programs being implemented in other services through the Skillbridge program? a. What is the current participation rate in CSPs (or CSP like programs) across the services? b. How is DoD measuring success in CSPs?

Answer: The Marine Corps has nine SkillBridge programs that include welding, cyber security, emergency medical services, and commercial driving training

across various installations, bases, and stations. In FY17, 755 Marines participated in these Skillbridge programs.

QFR Title: Flag and General Officers and Senior Enlisted Advisors

Requestors: Rep Timothy J. Walz

Witness: Stein, Kurt W

QFR ID: HVAC-01-010 QFR

Question Number: 10

Question: When flag officers testify to congressional committees or conduct office calls, are they encourage or directed to attend with their senior enlisted advisor? a. Would be beneficial for congressional committees to hear testimony directly from senior enlisted advisors?

Answer: The senior enlisted advisor provides important feedback and guidance to general officers. They may choose to consult with their senior enlisted advisor prior to testifying before Congress, however, each congressional engagement is unique and may not require their attendance. Congressional committees do hear testimony directly from senior enlisted advisors. The Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps typically testifies each year on quality of life issues affecting Marines and their families.

QFR Title: Flag and General Officers and Senior Enlisted Advisors

Requestors: Rep Timothy J. Walz

Witness: Bennett, Robert

QFR ID: HVAC-01-010 QFR

Question Number: 10

Question: When flag officers testify to congressional committees or conduct office calls, are they encourage or directed to attend with their senior enlisted advisor? a. Would be beneficial for congressional committees to hear testimony directly from senior enlisted advisors?

Answer: Flag officers are not directed to attend with their Senior Enlisted Leaders (SEL). a. Yes. Also, the Sergeant Major of the Army, SMA Dailey, often encourages Army SELs to engage with Members and their staffs in an open dialogue when the voice of the enlisted force can offer an additional perspective unique to their respective formations.

QFR Title: Supplemental TAP Courses and Backfilling Transitioning Service Members

Requestors: Rep Timothy J. Walz

Witness: Thomas, Karl O

QFR ID: HVAC-01-005 QFR

Question Number: 5

Question: The Government Accountability Office (GAO) study found very low rates of attendance for the supplemental TAP courses on accessing higher education, career and technical training, and entrepreneurship. There is concern that because these courses are seen as optional, unit commanders are not allowing attendance of interested service members. Has OSD thought about mandating that service members attend at least one of these currently supplemental programs to ensure their ability to attend if they are interested? a. From visits to military bases and asking service members about their transition process, the Committee has heard that commanders are often unwilling to let service members attend additional supplemental classes or repeat classes that service members might feel they need to repeat. Often the reason given is that the unit is short-staffed and that the commander is unable to get a replacement for that service member until they are out-processed from the military, so they need them to continue training to hit readiness numbers. Have the services considered changing policy to allow the unit to request a fill for a service member they know is or will be transitioning out? b. Have the services considered manning units to be over 100% strength? c. We have also heard troubling anecdotes of commanders telling their units to sign in to their TAP classes so that their attendance is recorded but the to leave and return to work without actually sitting through the class. And GAO reported that after attending TAP class to make up for having attended TAP class. Have the services looked at how DoD can better mon-

itor and address deliberate subversion of the rules? d. How are commanders at the lower echelons being educated about the importance of preparation and TAP courses for a successful transition? e. Have the services considered including transition numbers and metrics in commanders' evaluations, similar to how they are evaluated on readiness?

Answer: The supplemental transition courses generally receive positive comments from Service members who attend across the Services. Consideration was given to mandate attendance, however, as an alternative it is Navy policy for the Sailor to participate if both the Sailor and command transition officer determine participation is required to achieve career readiness standards, which are based on Service member-defined objectives that must be achieved in order to meet their post-military service goals. The majority of Sailors look to reenter the civilian workforce after separation and many are already accessing higher education through our Navy Voluntary Education Program, which does not require them to attend the supplemental courses on accessing higher education, career and technical training or entrepreneurship to meet their career readiness standards. Commanders currently have the ability to request fills for transitioning Sailors, however, they are not always provided in time to help the separating Sailor prepare full-time for transition. While each unit's needs and capacity differ, transitioning Sailors are afforded time to prepare beginning at the start of their career and through their entire military life cycle and are provided information and guidance at career development boards for enlisted and mid-term counseling for officers. The military life cycle model provides Service members the time and resources to plan for their inevitable transition from Active Duty; reduces mission impact as many transition-related actions are completed during the normal course of business instead of at the end of a Service member's time on Active Duty; and allows increased flexibility for transition service delivery. Manning units above 100 percent is not feasible within existing funded and authorized end strength. Manpower requirements are based on Navy's force structure and manning units above 100 percent within existing funded end strength would create gaps in other valid manpower requirements ultimately degrading readiness. Our focus instead is on the military life cycle and ensuring preparations for transitioning out of the Navy commence at the beginning of a Sailor's military career, and continue throughout. Navy does not give credit for attendance if Sailors do not attend all modules of the transition assistance program curriculum. If members are called out of class by their command then they must reschedule to attend missed modules. However, in an effort to better capture and evaluate Sailor participation, the Navy has been working with Department of Defense and other Services to change the participant assessment to include questions on command support, timeliness of participation and reasons for virtual course participation vice brick and mortar. We leverage an extensive personal and professional Navy network to keep the Fleet informed of new policy changes and transition assistance program implementation challenges. We work with Fleet engagement teams to coordinate and provide training to commanders worldwide on procedures, policies, new aspects of the transition assistance program and reporting requirements. We also coordinate efforts with our Fleet and Force Career Counselors to provide timely and pertinent information through release of instructions, Navy Administrative Messages, emails, the transition webpage, and Plain Talk for Sailors bulletins. The addition of Transition Assistance Program compliance to the annual "Golden Anchor" retention award since 2016 increased self-awareness and provided motivation to improve transition performance at the Commander level. Navy provides transition assistance program metrics to Commanders and Commanding Officers. With this tool in place, my team worked with Fleet Commanders to add transition assistance program compliance as a criterion for the annual "Golden Anchor" retention award, which recognizes commands with exceptional Sailor retention programs. We also include Transition Assistance Program metrics in our Chief of Naval Operations Health of the Force report, which provides comprehensive information on personnel readiness issues.

QFR Title: Career Skills Programs

Requestors: Rep Timothy J. Walz

Witness: Thomas, Karl O

QFR ID: HVAC-01-006 QFR

Question Number: 6

Question: The Army has focused on building Career Skills Programs (CSP) for transitioning service members. Are similar programs being imple-

mented in other services through the Skillbridge program? a. What is the current participation rate in CSPs (or CSP like programs) across the services? b. How is DoD measuring success in CSPs?

Answer: Yes, Navy has 16 employment skills programs with 8 additional programs in the planning stages for fiscal year (FY) 2018. As of June 2017, 158 Navy personnel have completed SkillBridge programs with a job placement rate of 65 percent. Programs such as Onward-to-Opportunity (O2O) provide up to six to eight weeks of training for in-demand fields such as cybersecurity and software engineering. The O2O program is currently hosted at three Navy locations including Norfolk, VA, Jacksonville, FL, and San Diego, CA. Navy is also partnering with Microsoft and Amazon to provide employment skills training programs for FY2018 at various locations throughout the Navy enterprise including Gulfport, MS, Pensacola, FL, and Ventura County, CA. The Veterans-in-piping (VIP) pre-apprenticeship training at Naval Station Norfolk is considered a best practice program for Department of Defense SkillBridge. The VIP is designed to fill a critical workforce need for welders in Norfolk and Hampton Roads, VA, and involves 18 continuous weeks of full-time classroom and on-the-job training sessions. Navy actively seeks to collaborate with companies and training providers to establish more SkillBridge training programs on, or near, Navy installations.

QFR Title: Flag and General Officers and Senior Enlisted Advisors

Requestors: Rep Timothy J. Walz

Witness: Thomas, Karl O

QFR ID: HVAC-01-010 QFR

Question Number: 10

Question: When flag officers testify to congressional committees or conduct office calls, are they encourage or directed to attend with their senior enlisted advisor? a. Would be beneficial for congressional committees to hear testimony directly from senior enlisted advisors?

Answer: The senior enlisted advisor provides important feedback and guidance to flag officers. They may choose to consult with their senior enlisted advisor prior to testifying before Congress, however, each congressional engagement is unique and may not require their attendance. Congressional committees do hear testimony directly from senior enlisted advisors. The Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy typically testifies each year on quality of life issues affecting Sailors and their families.

Ranking Member Tim Walz, House Veterans Affairs Committee

Questions

1. In any of GAO's studies, has GAO collect data on service member's educational backgrounds before they enter military service? Ifso, please provide a copy of the study (or studies) that occurred in.

a.If GAO has collected such data:

i. What variation did GAO see in the level of education of services members upon entering the service?

ii. How many service members entering the service are not prepared to pursue higher education?

iii. How effectively is the Department of Defense addressing this issue? (What is the percentage of service members not prepared to pursue higher education upon leaving the service, as compared to the number in subsection ii?)

II.GAO response

GAO has not collected or analyzed data on servicemembers' educational backgrounds before entering military service. As a result, GAO cannot describe the extent to which new servicemembers' education levels vary or assess how prepared they are to pursue higher education when they leave military service. The Defense Manpower Data Center within the Department of Defense may be able to provide such data.

Full Committee Ranking Member Tim Walz to U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Question 1: What does VA consider a successful transition for a service member leaving the Department of Defense (DoD)?

VA Response: One of the key objectives of the Transition Assistance Program (TAP) is attainment of career-readiness skills that meet the standards as defined and measured by the Services. As part of the 60-day tasking from the HVAC EO Subcommittee, the interagency partners are working together to refine the definition of success, to include desired outcomes and success metrics.

Question 1a. What metrics does VA use to measure this success?

VA Response: VA uses the Transition Goals, Plans, Success (GPS) Participant Assessment performance metrics provided by DoD. The Participant assessment collects Servicemembers demographic data and includes questions to assess the quality of the course curriculum, materials, facilitators, and facilities. Participants also answer questions that gauge their intent to apply the information learned, confidence derived by completing the various modules/tracks, and self-assessed knowledge gain. VA consistently receives high evaluations from Servicemembers who attend VA Benefits Briefings I and II, averaging 96 percent satisfaction on information learned, 96 percent on facilitator effectiveness, and 94 percent on confidence gained from the material.

Question 2: Has VA identified certain groups that are at higher risk for homelessness, unemployment or mental health issues during or after transition?

VA Response: Not yet, but we are working to do so. Currently, for those identified by DoD who do not have a post-transition housing plan or do not meet Career Readiness Standards, VA facilitates warm handovers.

Question 2a: If so, is VA tracking any specific statistics or metrics for those at risk groups, and what are those statistics?

VA Response: VA currently does not have specific statistics or metrics for Servicemembers deemed at risk for homelessness, unemployment or mental health issues during or after transition. To begin collecting baseline data and examining trends around this group, we recently updated the TAP Memorandum of Understanding to aggregate the data and track Servicemembers requiring warm handovers because they lack a post-transition housing plan and/or do not meet Career Readiness Standards. VA aggregates the above data by Service, Component and Grade. This information will provide us with statistics that will be useful in better assisting high risk individuals.

Question 2b: Does VA consider service members receiving a discharge other than "Honorable" to be a higher risk for homelessness, unemployment or mental health issues when compared to the general transitioning population?

VA Response: Through an interagency work group with representation from VA, DoD, DoL, OPM, ED, DHS and SBA, VA is in the process of collecting and analyzing data to determine the impact of other-than-honorable separations on the associated level of risk for Servicemembers/Veterans.

Question 3: In her testimony, Ms. Margarita Devlin, Executive Director of Benefits Assistance Service, Veterans Benefits Administration, spoke about collecting information on post separation outcomes. Does VA plan to make this survey longitudinal?

VA Response: Yes, the current post separation assessment asks Veterans about their willingness to participate in a longer term study. The intention is to track the cohorts over time during their transition journey.

Question 3a: What outcomes and metrics will VA be measuring in this Survey?

VA Response: Objective and subjective measures will be gathered in the following domains: mental/physical health, social relationships, financial situation, employment, entrepreneurship, education and housing.

Question 4: Has VA considered evaluating the Benefits I and II programs using metrics measuring information retained by the service member?

VA Response: VA currently tracks Transitioning Servicemember knowledge through Direct Knowledge Questions administered in the Transition GPS Participant Assessment during the TAP GPS modules. Participants answer questions to

gauge their retention of the information learned. The results are used to inform question revision and curriculum content. VA receives the quarterly Transition GPS Participant Assessment data from DoD and consistently receives high evaluations from Servicemembers who attend Benefits Briefings I and II, averaging 96 percent satisfaction on information learned.

