

**STATEMENT OF  
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VETERANS' EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING SERVICE  
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR  
BEFORE THE  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY  
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS  
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**January 21, 2026**

**Introduction**

Chairman Van Orden, Ranking Member Pappas, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify at today's legislative hearing. The mission of the Department of Labor (DOL or Department), Veterans' Employment and Training Service (VETS), is to prepare America's veterans, service members, and military spouses for meaningful careers, provide them with employment resources and expertise, protect their employment rights, and promote their employment opportunities. As a retired Staff Sergeant of the United States Marine Corps, combat veteran, Navy Cross recipient and a tireless advocate for veterans, I am honored and humbled to serve as Assistant Secretary of DOL VETS. While I've only been with VETS for less than a month, I'm impressed by their dedication to the VETS mission.

President Donald Trump has demonstrated his unrelenting support for our military, veterans, and military spouses, placing a renewed national focus on honoring their service and expanding their opportunities after they leave the uniform behind. We owe our eternal thanks to those who have served our country. Public service has long been a part of my family's story. My grandfather served in World War II and my father is a U.S. Army veteran. For me, the decision to serve came early - I enlisted in the Marine Corps at age 17. On the morning of September 11, 2001, I was in a barber shop at Parris Island. A few years later, in December 2004, I was deployed with a team of Marines to Fallujah, Iraq, as part of Operation Phantom Fury. Our mission was going house to house clearing insurgents in one of the fiercest urban battles of the Iraq War. During one operation, we engaged more than two dozen insurgents fortified inside a safe house. The details of that day are well documented, and I won't recount them all here—but I will say this: the bravery and sacrifice I witnessed from my fellow Marines on that day continues to inspire my life's work.

Since leaving active duty, I've committed myself to serving veterans. Throughout my work in the government and the private sector, I've always had the same focus—making sure veterans don't fall through the cracks. I've seen how powerful the right support at the right time can be. And I've also seen what happens when we fail to deliver. I've experienced firsthand both the immense pride of military service and the complex challenges of transitioning back into civilian life. I've also seen the untapped potential that every veteran carries with them after service. That's why I'm committed to the mission of DOL VETS, and to working with Congress to continuously improve our programs.

## **H.R. 982: The Warriors to Workforce Act**

This bill would amend 38 U.S.C. 3313(g)(3)(B) to increase the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Post-9/11 G.I. Bill Monthly Housing Allowance<sup>1</sup> (MHA) benefits for apprenticeships and on-the-job training (OJT) programs from 80% to 90% during the second six-month period of the program.

As you know, the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill is an education benefit program administered by VA. For qualifying individuals, the program provides tuition, fees, MHA, and other related benefits. The MHA is calculated by VA based off the location of the educational program, and locations with a higher cost of living generally have a higher MHA. Eligible individuals can utilize their Post-9/11 G.I. Bill benefits for apprenticeship and on-the-job training (OJT) programs. This includes Registered Apprenticeships, a highly effective pathway to develop in-demand skills while also earning a paycheck from day one. Registered Apprenticeships train workers for careers using a structured combination of paid OJT and related instruction. In addition to being an effective sector-based strategy, training programs focused on skilled trade jobs provide participants with transferable education, licenses, certifications, and work experience that are valuable across many in-demand job sectors. Extensive evidence from “gold standard” randomized evaluations has shown that sector-focused training programs designed to prepare workers for industries with strong employer demand can lead to substantial and long-lasting earnings gains.<sup>2</sup> Registered Apprenticeships also help employers attract and retain veterans, in part because some may offer a structured training environment similar to their military experience.

Post-9/11 G.I. Bill MHA benefits do not decrease over time for participants who attend an institution of higher learning (i.e., colleges and universities) and certain other non-college degree programs. But under current law, the MHA for apprenticeship and OJT programs decreases every six months. Participants earn 100% of their MHA for the first six months of training, 80% during the second six months, 60% for the third six months, 40% for the fourth six months, and 20% during the rest of the training period. Less than 0.5% of G.I. Bill participants utilize their benefits for apprenticeships and OJT, including just 0.31% (1,784 out of 573,732) in Fiscal Year (FY) 2024.<sup>3</sup>

In April 2025, President Trump signed an Executive Order on Preparing Americans for High-Paying Skilled Trade Jobs of the Future,<sup>4</sup> which established that it is the policy of the United States to optimize and target Federal investments in workforce development to align with our country’s reindustrialization needs and equip American workers to fill the growing demand for skilled trades and other occupations. In the Executive Order, the President set the goal of at least one million new active apprentices nationwide. This goal is closely aligned with current labor market demand. Skilled trade jobs are facing a significant labor shortage, leading to

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.va.gov/education/benefit-rates/post-9-11-gi-bill-rates/#monthly-housing-allowance>

<sup>2</sup> Katz, Lawrence F., Roth, Jonathan, Hendra, Richard, and Schaberg, Kelsey (April 2022). Why Do Sectoral Employment Programs Work? Lessons from WorkAdvance. *Journal of Labor Economics* (40, S1).

<https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/10.1086/717932>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.benefits.va.gov/REPORTS/abr/docs/2024-education.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Executive Order 14278: <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2025/04/28/2025-07369/preparing-americans-for-high-paying-skilled-trade-jobs-of-the-future>

increased demand for qualified workers. In alignment with the President’s priorities and the growing demand for highly skilled trade jobs, it is my hope that we can continue to expand veteran participation in Registered Apprenticeship programs.

**DOL supports this bill.**

**H.R. XXXX: To amend title 38, United States Code, to eliminate the maximum authorizations of appropriations for certain benefits for homeless veterans administered by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs and to make permanent the authority of the Secretary to carry out certain programs for homeless veterans.**

This bill would, among other provisions, amend Title 38 of the U.S. Code<sup>5</sup> to eliminate the maximum authorizations of appropriations for the DOL VETS-administered Homeless Veterans’ Reintegration Program (HVRP) and related grants.

HVRP is the only federal grant to focus exclusively on competitive employment for veterans experiencing or at risk of homelessness, so that they can reach their full employment potential and obtain high-paying careers. In Program Year (PY) 2024, HVRP awarded more than \$61 million to 161 grantees, and served 15,888 veterans across the country. Participants had median second quarter after exit earnings of \$8,710, and average hourly wages at job placement increased to \$19.49, up from \$19.44 the previous year. Each HVRP participant receives customized employment and training services to address their specific barriers to employment. Services may include occupational, classroom, and on-the-job training, as well as job search and placement assistance and post-placement follow-up services.

The Department strongly supports HVRP and shares Congress’ commitment to improving outcomes for veterans experiencing homelessness. However, the Department has concerns with provisions in this bill that would eliminate maximum authorizations of appropriations in favor of “such sums as may be necessary.” Removing these statutory guardrails would reduce fiscal discipline and undermine effective program oversight. The Department is prepared to work with the Committee on amendments that preserve Congress’ intent while maintaining reasonable authorization levels and accountability measures so HVRP can continue delivering strong results for veterans and taxpayers. DOL VETS-funded staff in American Job Centers will continue to help HVRP grant recipients achieve job placement and retention goals by providing workforce system resources that support case management, direct employer contact, job development, and follow-up services.

**DOL supports this bill if amended.**

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<sup>5</sup> Section 2(c) of the bill is premised on the authorization of appropriations at 38 U.S.C. 2021A(f) running through 2025. This authorization was, however, extended from 2025 to 2026 in the most recent Continuing Resolution. See Pub. L. No. 119-37, § 7301, 139 Stat. 495, 650 (2025). We recommend revising section 2(c) of the bill to account for this latest statutory amendment.

## **H.R. 4105: The “VET Act of 2025”**

This bill would establish a new \$60 million per year grant program administered by DOL to assist members of the Armed Forces who are transitioning to civilian employment, veterans, and their spouses to obtain employment in the energy industry. Grants would be provided to entities whose primary function is the generation, transmission, storage, or distribution of energy, and the manufacture or distribution of equipment and components critical to the energy industry. Grant funds could be used for recruitment, training, education, licensure, certification, orientation, administrative, and relocation costs. Each grantee could be awarded no more than \$10,000 per covered individual and no more than \$500,000 total in any fiscal year. DOL would be required to coordinate with VA and the Department of War (DoW) to avoid duplication with existing programs for transitioning service members, including the Transition Assistance Program (TAP), SkillBridge, and Solid Start. The bill also requires consultation with the Transition Executive Committee and submission of an initial and final coordination plan, an annual coordination report, and DOL’s evaluation of and recommendations for the program created by this bill.

DOL VETS shares the Committee’s commitment to helping transitioning service members, veterans, and military spouses connect to jobs in the energy sector. However, the Department has significant concerns with the approach in this bill, which would establish a new, industry-specific grant program that directly subsidizes employers for these costs. This model is uncommon in federal workforce programs, which generally invest in education providers, the public workforce system, and/or state and local governments. Directly making payments to businesses for their recruitment, training, and related costs in the way that the bill mandates may lead to several unintended consequences. For example, employers may fire some of their current employees to make room for new employees who qualify for the \$10,000 per person reimbursement, and potentially cycle through new employees every year, harming retention. Employers could also recruit employees for low-skill positions with low wages which are still technically employed within the energy industries identified in the bill and still be reimbursed \$10,000 per qualifying employee. In addition, the bill’s annual reporting framework may limit the Department’s ability to provide more frequent technical assistance and monitor performance to ensure funds support high-quality training and strong employment outcomes, including wages and credential attainment.

More broadly, creating a new industry- and population-specific grant program runs counter to the Administration’s emphasis on consolidating workforce development programs at DOL, as laid out in “[America’s Talent Strategy: Building the Workforce for the Golden Age](#),” rather than expanding the footprint through new categorical initiatives. Streamlining these programs reduces administrative overhead and compliance burden for grantees and partners, limits duplicative federal bureaucracy, and helps ensure a greater share of federal resources is directed to direct services and measurable outcomes for veterans.

Some businesses, especially small businesses, may lack the capacity or expertise needed to apply for and manage federal grants. In contrast, state and local workforce development boards<sup>6</sup> are business-led organizations designed to manage federal education and training grants

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<sup>6</sup> Established under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Sections 101 and 107.

and connect employers to job seekers in their communities through the administration of approximately 2,300 American Job Centers across the country. These one-stop locations offer a broad range of career and supportive services to the public, such as employment services, job training programs (including Registered Apprenticeships), unemployment compensation, and referrals to other programs. Veterans receive priority of service for all workforce training programs funded in whole or in part by DOL, as established by the Jobs for Veterans Act of 2002 (38 U.S.C. § 4215), ensuring that they are always at the front of the line for these resources.

DOL VETS also administers the Jobs for Veterans State Grants (JVSG) program, which provides funding for dedicated staff who work in the American Job Centers to provide individualized career and training-related services to eligible veterans and other eligible persons, and to assist employers to fill their workforce needs with job-seeking veterans. JVSG staff also partner with TAP, and transitioning service members who need such assistance receive “warm handover” person-to-person connections to American Job Centers. JVSG and other American Job Center staff would therefore be well situated to assist energy employers with recruiting and training veterans and other eligible employees.

The Department looks forward to working with the Committee on alternative approaches that advance these shared goals by leveraging existing workforce and veterans’ employment programs and strengthening connections between employers and veterans through the proven American Job Center network.

### **Conclusion**

I appreciate the opportunity to speak before you today and welcome any questions you may have. Thank you for your continued support of veterans and the many programs to support them through the Department of Labor.