

A REVIEW OF THE TRANSITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (TAP)

HEARING

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS

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A REVIEW OF THE TRANSITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (TAP)

Tuesday, January 27, 2015

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

The subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 2:00 p.m., in Room 334, Cannon House Office Building, Hon. Brad Wenstrup [chairman of the subcommittee] presiding.

Present: Representatives Wenstrup, Costello, Radewagen, Takano, Titus, and Rice.

OPENING STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN BRAD WENSTRUP

Dr. WENSTRUP. Well good afternoon, everyone. I want to welcome you all to the first hearing of the Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity for the 114th Congress. I have to tell you I am very honored to serve as chairman of this subcommittee and I look forward to working with Ranking Member Takano and other members to improve economic opportunities for our nation's veterans. Before we begin I will tell you that Mr. Coffman may join us and I ask unanimous consent that our colleague Mr. Coffman be allowed to join us at the dais and ask questions. Hearing no objection, so ordered.

We are here today to discuss implementation of the Transition Assistance Program, or TAP. TAP is a critically important step for today's servicemembers because if we can get TAP right for them at the onset of their transition from active duty I believe we can mitigate many other issues that have plagued and continue to plague previous generations of America's veterans.

The information on financial management, job search skills, and veteran benefits are light years away from what was being provided to servicemembers under previous versions of TAP, which was called by many death by PowerPoint. And while the structure of TAP has been greatly improved we can and should do more and I want to briefly make a few points.

It has been suggested by some that there is no need to continue to provide TAP in a classroom setting and that the online version is sufficient. While I agree that the online version can be helpful it was designed to only be a supplement to the classroom version and not to replace it. I understand that in a constrained fiscal environment the services have had the difficult task of implementing the VOW Act provision which made TAP mandatory. But I believe

that focusing only on the online version would shortchange our servicemembers of critically important information.

I also want to echo the comments from the past two chairmen of this subcommittee by saying that I believe DoD is missing the mark by not making the education track mandatory for those servicemembers who are planning to use their G.I. Bill benefits upon transition. Under the right circumstances the Post 9/11 G.I. Bill can provide over \$300,000 worth of benefits to a veteran and with thousands of schools and training programs clamoring for veteran students we must do everything we can to make sure 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. Now from everything I have heard the education track does a great job in preparing servicemembers as they make this life changing choice and I believe it should be mandatory for servicemembers who are choosing to use their G.I. Bill benefits.

Another issue that I hope to hear more about today is how VA, DoD, and DoL are measuring and tracking performance and long term outcomes of TAP. Without measurable outcomes it is impossible to know for certain if this new curriculum is working. I know that hard statistics for a program like this can be difficult but I look forward to learning more about the steps the agencies have taken to track performance. Before I recognize the ranking member I do want to commend DoD, VA, and the Department of Labor for working together to transform TAP over the past two years. While many strides have been made a recent report from the VA's Office of Economic Opportunity highlighted a new challenge. The report stated that while unemployment rates for veterans continue to remain low, over half of the Post 9/11 veterans will face a period of unemployment upon transition. Helping facilitate a smooth transition so that veterans avoid this period of unemployment is our challenge and I look forward to exploring ways to address this challenge head on in today's hearing.

I now recognize Ranking Member Takano for his opening comments.

OPENING STATEMENT OF RANKING MEMBER MARK TAKANO

Mr. TAKANO. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and welcome to the Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity, especially to our new members Ms. Radewagen and Ms. Rice. We welcome you. I know we will accomplish a lot under your stewardship, Mr. Chairman, of the committee during this session. Also thank you for your continued service to the United States Army and we are excited to have that level of experience and understanding that you bring from your experience in tackling the economic issues facing our veterans.

Transitioning from the military is a defining moment in all of our servicemembers' lives. Upon exiting the military at a minimum servicemembers should understand the resources available through their branch of service, the benefits awaiting them as veterans, and perhaps most importantly how to find a job. From a retiring commander to a one-term enlisted soldier leaving the military means different things to different individuals. There is no one answer as to how we can prepare these individuals for what comes next. Yet

we have a responsibility to give them the best information available to help them focus on their next move as civilians. The Transition Assistance Program, or TAP, has gone through several iterations over the last several years and we expect it to continue to evolve as better practices are realized and implemented. The latest concept of TAP is Transition GPS, which is designed to deliver a wide array of information over a five-day period. One of the most important aspects of the program is a briefing on financial responsibility and access to financial counseling while still on active duty. Too many of our younger servicemembers are leaving the military without thinking about their financial futures and having access to a trained professional who can help guide them toward financial responsibility is extremely important. I look forward to hearing Dr. Kelly speak to the financial responsibility briefing and other aspects of the DoD portion of this training.

I am also looking forward to hearing from Mr. Coy about the VA portion of the training and how veterans are learning about how to access their veterans benefits. The Post 9/11 G.I. Bill is an incredible education benefit and I am very interested in hearing more about how servicemembers are learning about the optional education track briefing. Last Congress I was an original cosponsor to the legislation introduced by Congressman Flores that would have made the education track mandatory. In many instances student veterans are unaware of the differences between education institutions, the quality of education at those institutions, and the likelihood of finding a job upon graduation. The education track remains optional for the time being and I hope to hear from our agency witnesses that servicemembers are being encouraged to take this optional course if they are planning to use their education benefits.

Finally some portions of the Transition GPS training are now interactive and online. I am very interested in learning more about how servicemembers are utilizing these resources. I would also like to welcome our guests from the Veterans of Foreign Wars, the American Legion, Student Veterans of America, and Easter Seals Dixon Center. I look forward to hearing what some of the veterans you speak with are saying about TAP and any recommendations you may have.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I yield back.

Dr. WENSTRUP. I want to thank the Ranking Member for his comments and also I would like to reiterate what you said about welcoming our new members. I think that you should know that this is a committee, a subcommittee, that has great opportunity to really do a lot of benefit for our members of our country that serve in uniform, and for their families and their lives as they move forward and they leave the military. But now I would like to welcome our first panel to the witness table. First we have Mr. Davy Leghorn, Assistant Director of the Veteran Education and Employment Commission for the American Legion; Mr. Ryan Gallucci, Deputy Director of the National Veterans Service for the Veterans of Foreign Wars; Ms. Valrica Dunmyer, Chief of Staff and Chief Financial Officer for Student Veterans of America; and finally Colonel David Sutherland, Chairman and Co-Founder of the Easter Seals Dixon Center. I want thank you all for being here, for your service to our nation, and for those in uniform, and for your continued

hard work and advocacy for veterans. Mr. Leghorn, we will begin with you. You are now recognized for five minutes.

STATEMENT OF MR. DAVY LEGHORN

Mr. LEGHORN. Chairman Wenstrup, Ranking Member Takano, and distinguished members of the subcommittee, on behalf of National Commander Michael Helm and the 2.4 million members of the American Legion, we thank you for this opportunity to testify at this hearing on improving the Transition Assistance Program and veterans' transition in general.

Over the past two years the American Legion has intensely scrutinized the new TAP, observing it in operation across the country. The testimony we present today reflects this scrutiny and provides observations as well as recommendations for improvement. In general we were highly impressed both by the amount and the quality of information that was conveyed, particularly in such a relatively short period of time.

The American Legion has long advocated for the inclusion of VSOs in TAP. VSOs provide important services to transitioning servicemembers and we are pleased to note that during the TAP sessions we observed the attendees were referred to VSOs for claim services by the TAP instructors. We would, however, like to offer some recommendations. The first regards a need to increase emphasis on soft skills, that is behaviors and etiquette that makes an individual employable. The vast majority of personnel leaving the armed services have not had significant experience working in a civilian work setting. We believe that insufficient emphasis is placed on these soft skills during TAP. Further, a five-day course cannot hope to teach behaviors obtained by spending a substantial part of one's adult life in a civilian work place. However, we believe that transitioning servicemembers would benefit if there were more discussions of workplace culture.

The second regards an improvement to the information on education that is provided in TAP. With the Post 9/11 G.I. Bill every transitioning servicemember has access to the opportunity to attend a higher education program, or in some instances transfer the benefit to their dependents. As such we recommend that the educational track incorporate more input from the Department of Education and that the education track of Transition GPS be made mandatory for all transitioning servicemembers.

We believe that part of the solution to veterans unemployment lies in a collaboration between government entities and the private sector. As such the American Legion has responded by bringing Employment Workshops and hiring events to transitioning servicemembers. Our Employment and Empowerment Summit is a two-day event that ends with a job fair. We host this summit in various cities and provide transportation and lodging to servicemembers going through TAP. Servicemembers attending our events have had the chance to learn about various opportunities in fields ranging from the banking industry to the trades and are able to receive some preliminary instruction on the aforementioned soft skills needed to gain and maintain employment. Unfortunately at some locations we are met with resistance from contracted TAP facilitators. Contractually TAP facilitators are evaluated based on

a limited scope of performance measures, thus there is a lack of incentive for them to work outside the confines of their own programs. Amending DoD contracts for TAP facilitators to include a section regarding required collaboration with trusted private sector actors would solve this problem fairly easily.

We recognize that one of TAP's main roles is to introduce the employment services available to veterans and to provide a warm handoff to the agencies that administer those programs. However, we have become aware of an issue affecting veterans employment services that are funded by the JVSG and administered through DoL VETS. Last spring DoL issued a directive creating a hard distinction between disabled veteran outreach program representatives and the local veterans employment representatives which are funded by the JVSG grants and are located at DoL job centers across the country. Essentially this disallows DVOPs from seeing non-service disabled veterans even if they have time. DoL's self-imposed restrictions undermine the flexibility required to best serve veterans who are in need of employment services. These restrictions are contrary to the federal statute and have generated negative feedback from the field. The American Legion is adamant that a regulatory or legislative change reinstituting the roles of DVOP and LVERs by DoL would provide a significant improvement to the JVSG program. The American Legion is working with the office of Senator Pat Toomey of Pennsylvania to introduce a bill that would make this change explicit in the statute should DoL fail to make the regulatory change.

Overall the American Legion believes that the new TAP program represents an important step towards providing transitioning servicemembers with the information that they need to become successful. While there exists some shortcomings that require attention the program overall appears to be successful and implementation has been commendable. The American Legion looks forward to continuing our work with the agencies and with Congress to continue to improve this valuable resource for our transitioning servicemembers.

[THE PREPARED STATEMENT OF DAVY LEGHORN APPEARS IN THE APPENDIX]

Dr. WENSTRUP. Thank you very much. Thank you, Mr. Leghorn. Mr. Gallucci, you are now recognized for five minutes.

STATEMENT OF MR. RYAN M. GALLUCCI

Mr. GALLUCCI. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Chairman Wenstrup, Ranking Member Takano, and members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to present the VFW's thoughts on the Military Transition Assistance Program, or TAP.

The VFW has long recognized the need to provide transitioning servicemembers with a quality baseline of information with which to make informed decisions about their post-military lives. Over the past few years this subcommittee has driven significant change in TAP. The agencies responsible have rebuilt the program from the ground up and worked to foster consistency by introducing contract facilitators, individual curriculum tracks, and access to post-service TAP. My remarks will focus on these three areas.

First, the VFW generally agrees with the shift to contract facilitators, freeing up local resources to serve veterans. However, the shift has had some unintended consequences and the VFW encourages striking a proper balance on contract facilitation and local need. The VFW also recognizes that the military has made a significant investment in TAP in anticipation of the current military draw down. More transitioning servicemembers require more staff and more classroom space. As DoD seeks to meet this demand we must not forget that VSOs still play a critical role in transition. To assist in the process the VFW has professional staff on more than a dozen military installations with plans to expand.

Our staff provides free assistance to servicemembers seeking to file for VA disability benefits prior to separation. To do so we rely on our military hosts and TAP for access and support. Outgoing Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel recognized this in his recent memo to installation commanders, which outlines how they should provide for VSOs that deliver VA accredited, face-to-face services to transitioning servicemembers. Adherence to this memo is critical to the VFW as we see a correlation between exposure and access and the number of servicemembers seeking representation. We see fewer claims on installations where our access is limited, despite the increase in those leaving the military.

Next, the VFW applauds the hard work of the contract VA briefing facilitators, many of whom are recently transitioned veterans. However, we question why the contract leaves such little flexibility to adapt to local needs. We encourage VA and the subcommittee to review the contract and offer flexibility to reintegrate local resources like VSOs and reasonably adapt the curriculum to suit the audience.

Next, we must ensure consistent access to the new TAP tracks, as well as consistent delivery of timely and relevant training. During VFW's recent visits to our staff on military bases we spoke with those responsible for implementing TAP. They acknowledge that the training is a marked improvement and were grateful for the significant recent investment in the program, however they worried that unit commanders still struggle to see the value in allowing their personnel to participate. Sadly, this was not an isolated issue. Though TAP is now a commander's program the VFW worries that DoD lacks mechanisms to hold commanders accountable. This requires a significant cultural shift, one that is unlikely to happen during the current draw down. So in an effort to mitigate this concern the VFW encouraged DoD to make the curriculum accessible online. DoD complied, allowing servicemembers to complete the training through their secure JKO accounts. However, transitioning servicemembers still have no reasonable way to anticipate the specific challenges they will face after leaving the military. The simplest solution would be for DoD to finalize its information sharing agreement with the Department of Labor, offering workforce agencies access to the names of veterans returning to their communities. But the agreement is once again delayed. This is unacceptable and we encourage Congress to act on it.

Finally, we must continue to invest in the post-service availability of TAP. Over the past two years DoL worked with its contractors in West Virginia, Georgia, and Washington to facilitate 23

workshops as part of the Off Base Transition Training, or OBTT pilot program. Some workshops were more successful than others, with West Virginia experiencing the most success thanks to support from the National Guard. OBTT was very cost effective, costing only \$52,000 for the entire pilot. Through large scale community based TAP classes, OBTT serves veterans who otherwise would not have had access to the material or who could only rely on the, or could only receive the information by meeting one on one with an employment counselor. The VFW believes it is more cost effective to leverage the current TAP contract to facilitate large training sessions like OBTT before veterans meet one on one with counselors at American job centers. This way when veterans seek out services they are prepared to have a constructive meeting to find a job. OBTT expired this month and DoL will not have information on outcomes for another year. As we wait for final data on OBTT the VFW believes that Congress should at least extend the pilot, offering cost effective services to more veterans who need it.

Veterans can also access all the new TAP modules via a public facing website offered in joint venture by DoD and Department of Labor. The VFW believes this is a game changer for veterans. However, to improve the site the VFW recommends allowing veterans to navigate directly to modules they need and offering links to the participant guides. DoL should also track traffic to the site to identify trends and shortcomings in the Transition Assistance Program. These minor improvements would allow veterans to use the public facing site as an easy reference guide.

TAP is undergoing an amazing revolution and the VFW thanks everyone involved for their continued hard work on this project. However, we know that there are places that we can improve. With the current military draw down it is critical to ensure the future success of our war fighters and we look forward to working with this subcommittee on ways to make sure that we succeed in that mission. Chairman Wenstrup, Ranking Member Takano, and members of the committee, this concludes my testimony. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

[THE PREPARED STATEMENT OF RYAN GALLUCCI APPEARS IN THE APPENDIX]

Dr. WENSTRUP. Thank you, Mr. Gallucci. Ms. Dunmyer, you are now recognized for five minutes.

STATEMENT OF VALRICA MARSHALL DUNMYER

Ms. DUNMYER. Thank you, Chairman. Chairman Wenstrup, Ranking Member Takano, and other distinguished members of the subcommittee, thank you for calling this hearing and for continuing to monitor efforts to successfully transition our returning veterans out of the military and into civilian life. My name is Valrica Dunmyer and I am the Chief of Staff and Chief Financial Officer at Student Veterans of America. I am also here as a veteran with 26 years of Army service. We are honored that you have invited us to be a part of this session today.

On behalf of SVA and its more than 400,000 student veterans within a network of more than 1,200 chapter affiliates I am pleased to submit our testimony on the review of a Transition Assistance Program. SVA advocates for the rights of veterans in higher edu-

cation, rooted in the belief that investing in America's veterans today is a smart investment for the country tomorrow. SVA's top priorities include improving access to higher education and scaling effective services that empower student veterans to graduate on time with little to no student debt and successfully transition into civilian life.

Mr. Chairman, as a beneficiary of the current program I know that improvements have been made. Nevertheless, transitional challenges still exist as evidenced through the continuing struggle of our veterans, and more specifically our student veterans. One of the main challenges is knowing whether the TAP GPS program is truly working on the front end to produce the desired outcome on the back end. As of December 2, 2013 only 72 percent of TAP locations included the higher education track offered by the DoD. Now this may seem like a high number to you and something to be proud of. But consider for a moment, if you are that vet that's in the 28 percent group, and your release date is quickly approaching, imagine that that is you and you are thinking about getting out and you want to pursue a degree. You have not been provided any of the information and you have no idea where to start. For those veterans the system is still not working.

Our Million Records Project represents the most comprehensive examination of student veterans' post-secondary academic success that has ever been done in decades. The Million Records Project showed that more than a million veterans have used educational benefits from 2002 to 2010. Additional data indicates that there will be over five million veterans by 2020. These facts, coupled with ongoing budgetary constraints, prove that we can no longer hope that our brick and mortar delivery of information is sufficient. We must be innovative in our approach to information delivery while still ensuring the quality of information provided to our veterans. Most veterans frown on the current delivery method, describing the TAP program as death by Power Point due to the lengthy and enormous amount of information delivered. While the basic information such as months of Post 9/11 G.I. Bill eligibility should continue to be included, we must ensure that our entire instructional program is informed through research, best practices, and feedback.

As servicemembers contemplate pursuing a degree following the military the utilization of VSOs and VSAs can be looked upon as being a force multiplier, providing the necessary link between departure from the military and the veteran's introduction into civilian life. Veterans service organizations like SVA have a proven track record of success, to both its members, both today and its alumni, and it should have a seat at the table in further discussions. Through research, connection with our local SVA chapters, and advocacy, we know that the better informed and prepared student veterans are the greater the contributions and return on the investment for our nation. By integrating SVA and other VSOs into the assessing higher education track, we can ensure the same level of success for all vets transitioning into higher education.

We thank the chairman, ranking member, and the subcommittee members for your time, attention, and devotion to veterans and higher learning. We look forward to continuing to work with this subcommittee, the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, and the

Congress to ensure the success of all generations of veterans. Thank you.

[THE PREPARED STATEMENT OF VALRICA MARSHALL DUNMYER APPEARS IN THE APPENDIX]

Dr. WENSTRUP. Thank you, Ms. Dunmyer. Colonel Sutherland, you are now recognized for five minutes.

STATEMENT OF COLONEL DAVID W. SUTHERLAND

Colonel SUTHERLAND. Mr. Chairman and members of the subcommittee, my name is David Sutherland. I am representing Easter Seals Dixon Center and serve as its chairman. Easter Seals is a national nonprofit that helps individuals reach their potential through local services. I co-founded Easter Seals Dixon Center to forge community partnerships and harness local resources to more effectively serve veterans and transitioning servicemembers at the community level. As one of the 13 surge brigade commanders in Iraq in 2007 I observed firsthand the greatness that exists in our formations. And I also recognize the potential for greatness when our servicemembers come home. Thank you for inviting me to testify about the reintegration needs of our servicemembers and the role of communities and public-private partnerships.

I have dedicated the last several years on this very topic, both as a special assistant to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and now at Easter Seals Dixon Center. I am inspired by the sea of goodwill among Americans and U.S. communities that are ready to assist and welcome home our veterans and military families. I have seen that there are just some things that government cannot do that independent organizations working together locally can. Far too many servicemembers struggle during their transition because of missed opportunities and disconnected communities. The solution to successful transitions lies in American communities. My testimony today will focus on what government and communities can do together to improve this transition.

Let me start by saying the government is doing a better job. Thanks to steps by Congress and changes to the Transition Assistance Program curriculum, including the optional tracks on education, technical training, and entrepreneurship. I did not benefit from these changes when I attended TAP after 29 years in the U.S. Army. That said, TAP continues to lack a mechanism to measure outcomes and facilitate warm hand offs into communities.

In my testimony I share the transition experience of a Marine named Gary. He completed the new TAP, was self-motivated, and had a plan. However, his plan quickly unraveled when he hit a string of unfortunate events that left him homeless and in crisis. TAP and the military supports end the minute you walk off the base and so Gary was on his own. Gary and other veterans like him quickly learn that the hard work of transition begins after TAP and what typically separates the transition success story from a story of struggle is now a community welcomes, connects with, and responds to transitioning servicemembers.

Luckily for Gary his home of Cincinnati was prepared to assist him. Several months earlier I had helped organize a coordinated community response in Cincinnati among Easter Seals and other community groups through Operation Veterans Thrive. Chairman

Wenstrup is very familiar with this effort funded by three local community foundations. Gary's initial call into the community led to several warm handoffs. First, to local organizations to address his immediate needs. Then to Easter Seals Tri-State for employment services to help him find a job. Gary is firmly on his path towards greatness thanks to a little community support during transition.

The connectedness of Cincinnati was the result of comprehensive community asset mapping and community convenings. Not all communities are as prepared. Easter Seals Dixon Center works across the country to build community partnerships and share innovative approaches to assist our veterans. We are stronger and more effective by working together.

While we have succeeded in shepherding community resources and fostering community collaborations in places like Ohio, New York, California, and Indiana, the need and work continues. Congress could make a difference by funding community asset mapping and coordination efforts through a community grant.

While this hearing focuses on initial transition into civilian life, reintegration struggles for some can surface several months or years after leaving the military. Congress has supported care coordination and supportive services models to address the most compelling needs, such as veterans unemployment and homelessness. However, more must be done to intervene earlier before crisis hits. I urge Congress to expand community models focused on early intervention and support services. Communities and groups like Easter Seals are part of the solution in promoting successful transitions. Congress could accelerate this effort by establishing outcome measurements and increasing community connections within TAP, supporting communities to more effectively serve veterans and military families, and expanding access to care coordination and support services to address ongoing reintegration needs.

As I alluded to throughout my testimony, we are veterans, we are not victims. That this is not about pity but recognizing potential, and that this generation of veterans are wired to serve. They just need a little community based support during transition and reintegration and they will thrive.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I will be pleased to answer any questions.

[THE PREPARED STATEMENT OF COLONEL DAVID SUTHERLAND APPEARS IN THE APPENDIX]

Dr. WENSTRUP. Well, thank you, Colonel Sutherland. I now yield myself five minutes for questions and first I want to say I appreciate all of your testimonies and your lifelong concern for our veteran and for those that have served. And certainly we don't want this program to be death by Power Point, which we have heard about, and we don't want it to be just a box that you check. We are all familiar with that process and coming away with nothing. But we also need to look for opportunities outside of those several days where we can reach our veterans and those that are still in uniform as they are transitioning out of the military. Our goal here is to get it right and to get it right as many times as we possibly can.

You know, with that in mind as you are looking at the long term effects, I ask all of you what is your understanding of how the VA, Department of Labor, and Department of Defense are tracking long-term performance outcomes of TAP? And how do you think they could improve such reporting? What are you hearing from members on how TAP has or has not adequately prepared them for their transition? And I will start with you, Mr. Leghorn.

Mr. LEGHORN. Mr. Chairman, we had very good feedback from our members that have gone through the TAP program. There is obviously some small tweaking that needs to happen, but for the most part it has been, all the feedback has been positive.

Dr. WENSTRUP. What about the long term, my concern is about the long term reporting of how people are doing through, after this process. We know that they may go through the program and find it beneficial. What about looking at where they are two years from now? Five years from now? That is one of the issues that I want to address with all of you.

Mr. LEGHORN. We talked to the Department of Labor about this in the past. And I believe we were told that they had a, a while back they had a direct calling campaign where they were reaching, actually reaching out to the people that have gone through TAP. And they captured their information and they were following up with them afterwards. So I do not know if that is still happening, but the American Legion was in support of that program.

Mr. GALLAGHER. Thank you for the chairman, thank you for the question, Mr. Chairman. A couple of items on this. Now first, DoD is conducting exit surveys for participants in the Transition Assistance Program. Overall the feedback has been generally positive from what the VFW has seen. Now to do our own due diligence we also had a survey of recently transitioned servicemembers asking for their feedback on the Transition Assistance Program. A little bit of what we found from our respondents is that 65 percent reported that overall they were very satisfied with the level of training that they received. Only five percent reported that they were dissatisfied. Although the response, the sampling was very small, we hit major installations like, major combat installations like Fort Campbell, Fort Bragg, Hood, Camp Pendleton, and so on.

Now as far as the Department of Labor briefing, 72 percent found it very useful, 26 somewhat useful. And 68 percent reported very likely to use the resources after they separated. Now the problem with this is that it does not capture what happens in the out years. This is what we were talking about in our testimony about the DoD, the importance of the Department of Defense and Department of Labor information sharing agreement. Department of Labor does want to track veterans once they separate from the military and what their employment interactions are like but they do not have consistent access to the information from when servicemembers leave the military and become veterans.

Also with the Off Base Transition Training Program, I think that is why we think this is an important investment. OBTT has the potential to reach veteran who never had an opportunity to go through TAP, which is the majority of the veteran population. I know when I left the military it still was not mandatory. The mandate is only hitting people who are going through it now. And also,

that is not necessarily even the right time to ask those questions because you do not know the challenges you will face until after you leave.

There are some issues with the current population survey and how the Bureau of Labor Statistics identifies veterans within the workforce. There are some tweaks we could make there to make it more beneficial. But there, we have a long way to go before properly evaluating the effectiveness of TAP and the long term employment of veterans.

Ms. DUNMYER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I am not aware of a formal program of tracking departing servicemembers to assess the effectiveness of TAP. But what I can share with you is what we are getting back from our student veterans. For the most part they are, they have benefitted from the TAP training but there are some instances where they are not prepared to enter college. They did not receive the information on how to engage the process and then what financial assistance is out there. So as we have identified through this hearing, we have also identified that there are still areas where we still need to show improvements.

Colonel SUTHERLAND. So we did from our discussions, and I have visited over 600 communities in the past several years, worked and spoken to veterans from all generations, but with this particular audience that have gone through the current transition it is, the struggle is the warm hand-off, the connection with where they are going. The personal information disclosure and connecting them before they get home, to network, to assist, and knowing where to go if they have an emergency during that time period. That is what is missing.

We have to measure the success or failure of our graduates. And if we look at our veterans as graduates and measure their success or failure, whether it is in full-time education, full-time employment, or other challenges, then we can assess and measure how we adjust TAP for the future. What are we hitting on? What are we not hitting on? If we continue to just measure 100 percent attendance, that is not going to help us achieve our goals. And my recommendation is that we say the goal is 100 percent of these veterans are employed, or 100 percent are in education, or bring it down to a more realistic number based on the staff estimate of Labor, VA, and DoD. But then we can measure it and we can come back and not say that this group got a better education experience or a better transition experience, but handing them off warmly.

The lessons learned in the recent Rand study for the 100,000 jobs mission that came out discusses the significance of the TAP program but it also more informed our transitioning servicemembers of what resources are available in the community they are going to, and creating that advance warning to the local community is a benefit, and then measuring their success or failure as graduates of the program.

Dr. WENSTRUP. Thank you all very much. I now recognize the ranking member for any questions he may have.

Mr. TAKANO. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. You know, I will throw this question out to anybody who feels they can answer it. How is it that we can retain or engage engaging instructors? I think part of the problem is that we have, we have got a large trainer corps

out there which has a great variety in terms of their skill level and equality and how do we retain these folks that are good, and how do we evaluate them?

Mr. GALLAGHER. Ranking Member Takano, I just had an opportunity to visit with some of the transition facilitators as we do our routine site visits. And just from speaking to some of the contractors who facilitate this, I think they are doing a good job of that already. I think the contractor is hiring quality individuals who want to deliver quality training. Some of them that we speak, most of them that we speak to are veterans themselves or veteran family members, and of those veterans most of them are recently transitioned. So whatever they are doing to recruit these personnel they, in my opinion they seem to be doing a good job.

Now retaining them in the long term and evaluating their effectiveness may be a different story. One of the concerns that we do have is the rigidity of the contract, especially when it comes to integrating community resources like VSOs, like DVOPs, and LVERs, who could provide the landscape around that military installation, what the employment situation is. I think that is why we are asking the committee to take a look at the rigidity of the contract and whether there is any flexibility that could be worked in to put those resources back in where appropriate.

Mr. TAKANO. All right, thank you. Ms. Dunmyer, I want to turn to a question, since you represent, your organization represents students, how much of a factor should the type of institution and the type of accreditation the institution has be in a veteran's decision of where to use their G.I. benefits? Do you think enough information about the type of accreditation is provided in TAP? I mean, for instance many veterans may not know that courses at a particular type of institution may not be transferrable. The difference between regional and national accreditation, for example. Is this information, how important is it? And is it in your opinion delivered with enough effectiveness?

Ms. DUNMYER. Thank you, Ranking Member Takano. What is happening is that level of detail of information, you are normally not going to have time to be able to hear that information with military members as they are going through the TAP training. And that is why I think it is so important to have VSOs start to play an earlier role in the process. Because specifically SVA, we have got chapters on the ground throughout all of the 50 states. And what you would have happening there, and let me go back to your initial comment. Yes, there is a difference with the accreditation. Because unless you explain that in detail to the student vet, they don't understand that some of the credits may not be transferrable. And so they are going into school and by the time they figure out that the 10 or 12 credits that they have taken previously are not going to be able to be transferred, now they have got to spend additional money or potentially go into debt. And so it is a downhill spiraling process that is going on. So what you want to be able to do is to inform them, make them, provide as much information to them before they actually start the process. And so having a part of that track where it is mandatory that they go down it if they are, they want to pursue college, it is also important to have the VSO there to be able to explain that process to

them. And in doing so, then they will be able to make a better informed decision about which schools that they want to go to.

Mr. TAKANO. I wonder whether or not the federal government has been able to track, or VSOs track the decisions that students have made vis-à-vis what educational institution they are attending, and whether we are able to measure a level of regret that they would have made better decisions had they known. I mean, whether we have been able to assess retroactively among people who have used their veterans benefits?

Ms. DUNMYER. We have been able to. The Million Records Project that was just done, phase one, we were able to track, and this was the first time that we have ever had research done on that population to find out who has gone to school, what were the degrees that they were pursuing, what were the types of institutions that they were actually enrolled in. So that was phase one of the Million Records Project. And what we found out was that you had 80 percent of the student veterans that were going or that had been enrolled in college from 2002 through 2010, 80 percent of them had attended public schools, ten percent of them were in private schools, and then another ten percent were in your proprietary schools. So there is information out there.

Now that was phase one. Phase two, we are going back to look at the institutions themselves and look at the policies and practices of institutions. And what we want to be able to see is how much of a role the institutions play in helping veterans actually achieve success and attaining a degree from that institution.

Mr. TAKANO. I am sorry, my time is up. Thank you. I would be very much interested in that information. Thank you.

Ms. DUNMYER. Yes, sir.

Dr. WENSTRUP. I now recognize the remaining members in order of arrival, alternating sides. First is Ms. Radewagen.

Mrs. RADEWAGEN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, ranking member, and members of the subcommittee, talofa. My home district of American Samoa is an isolated group of islands about five and a half hours by plane south of Hawaii. It's the only U.S. soil that's south of the equator. And for a small group of islands we have a tremendous number of our sons and daughters serving and that have served in the armed forces. In fact, ten percent of our entire population is made up of military veterans. I want to make sure we cover as much as possible for our veterans. Too often in the past, not just in this committee but throughout the House, legislation has passed Congress that has forgotten American Samoa and the territories and I am pleased to see that in this bill our veterans are eligible for this assistance just as those in the States are.

I have a question for Mr. Gallucci. I appreciate your suggestion in your written testimony that you believe a disabled veterans outreach program and the local veterans employment representatives should be more involved in TAP. Short of repealing the law mandating that contractors teach TAP, how would you envision DVOPs and LVERs being more involved?

Mr. GALLUCCI. Well, thank you for the question. I do want to clarify one point. We support further integration of DVOPs and LVERs in the transition process overall. However, given the scope of the training that Department of Labor needs to deliver or that

Department of Defense needs to deliver to transitioning servicemembers, that the way to go is through contract facilitation. The reason behind this is because through the TAP mandate in talking to the transition centers at major military installations, they are constantly running classes, five days a week, 48 to 50 weeks a year. So the problem is if you had DVOPs and LVERs still facilitating the training they would have absolutely no time to work in their communities to identify job opportunities or work face to face with veterans who require their services.

That being said, when we spoke to some of those responsible for transition management, their concern was that the contract facilitators did not necessarily integrate local resources into the Transition Assistance Program at all. So there was not really an opportunity for an LVER or a DVOP to come in and brief military personnel or make themselves available. These may have been isolated to a handful of military installations but it is something that we would want to look into to make sure that we are not losing that community connection that Colonel Sutherland stressed is so important.

Dr. WENSTRUP. Next Miss Rice, you have five minutes.

Ms. RICE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. This question is for Ms. Dunmyer. What kind of training innovations would you suggest to improve the delivery of benefits information to avoid what you refer to and others have referred to as the death by Power Point situation?

Ms. DUNMYER. My first suggestion would be that we advance with advancements in technology. There is quite a few universities out there that are using distance learning and e-learning types of venues. And I would recommend that that is one option, even though I know it has been previously discussed. I think that is more of a viable option than the current one that we have where you are sitting in a classroom. And I was a part of that. And while my first week of it, at least the first two days, I thought were very beneficial, I was very attentive. But after about two or three days and you are sitting in a classroom for eight hours and the information is coming at your nonstop, it tends to be repetitious and it starts to be boring even though it is beneficial information. So I would say that we start to look at other types of venues to present the information so that you alleviate some of the boredom and monotony that comes with that classroom environment.

Ms. RICE. One other question. For Mr. Gallucci, I am going to ask you this question. You spoke about the DoD and DoL formalizing their information sharing agreement. Does not, I would assume that DoL already has the names of veterans who are transitioning to civilian life as part of their own Employment Workshop? Is that true? I mean, it seems like the information is already—

Mr. GALLUCCI. Our understanding is they do not readily have that information at the moment. And that this is, this is being able to gather the information from these transition points and then distribute it to workforce development agencies that have, DVOPs and LVERs that have employment counselors who are able to deliver services directly to the veterans. This is something that Department of Labor first brought to our attention in 2012, that they were working to codify a formal agreement with Department of De-

fense. There have been several implementation points that have been missed. The most recent that I am aware of is September of 2014, they were supposed to have an agreement implemented by, well like end of September, October 1, 2014. And that time lapsed and so that is really where we are at the moment.

Ms RICE. What are, so what would you think is the reason for the lack of desire to use contract facilitators that you were referring to before, given the limited ability of DVOP and LVERs?

Mr. GALLUCCI. As far as a reluctance to use contract—

Ms RICE. Well is there, what is the issue?

Mr. GALLUCCI. I do not think there is. I think there is a concern, though, that local resources may not have as much of a presence in the Transition Assistance Program that they had before. So before they went to, before Department of Labor went to contract facilitators it was usually DVOPs or LVERs who conducted the training, who conducted the Department of Labor briefing for the TAP program. When they went to contract facilitation a lot of the DVOPs and LVERs were not able to participate in the TAP program at the level they used to and it was contract facilitation on all military installations so they are delivering the three-day Employment Workshop and DVOPs and LVERs would be integrated in other ways into the program. So that is the concern that we have heard from some DVOPs and LVERs.

Our stance, from the VFW's perspective, contract facilitation has to be the way to go given the scalability of the task of training everyone who is leaving the military. There would be, there is no reasonable way to expect JVSG grant recipients to continue to deliver that training given the scope of investment that we have made in the program.

Ms RICE. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Dr. WENSTRUP. Mr. Costello, you are recognized for five minutes.

Mr. COSTELLO. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And I want to thank each of you for your testimony. I believe I can generalize that each of you has said that TAP is an improvement but that TAP itself can be improved. And I think that it is refreshing for all of us to hear that TAP is an improvement.

My question is directly oriented to Colonel Sutherland, although I invite anyone else to offer their comments. Colonel, I am just going to read a couple pieces of your testimony and then ask a question to provide the context. This is you speaking. I have found what typically separates a transition success story from a transition story of struggle and crisis lies in how a community welcomes, connects with, and responds to servicemembers leaving the military. We do not need more organizations but rather we need to harness existing community based programs and get organizations from across society to be inclusive of those touched by military service, to use our leadership locally to bring these organizations together to achieve collective impact. On page four you note, more needs to be done to localize the TAP training for transitioning servicemembers. And then to page seven you state that, you speak about the warm hand off between TAP and community as being lacking and there needs to be a more effective way of connecting the separating servicemember to the community he or she is planning to either prior to or during their transition. The DoD, for ex-

ample, is not designed to provide these follow along community supports but some type of hand off within the community to the state director of veterans services, American Job Center staff, or local veterans service organization could help promote smoother transitions.

The question is, and it need not necessarily be an economic development agency although being a county commissioner, I mean, I am aware that every region has an economic development agency that handles workforce development programs. My question is because it is necessarily something very local, and because each community is a little bit different, do you envision sort of a unified delivery model for dealing with that warm hand off and for dealing with that ongoing issue of reintegration? Or is it something that really falls outside of government and is much more to use the term community based? I am curious if you could reflect on that a little bit further. Because I find it very interesting. And it really hits to the nexus of what the focus is, which is how do you transform TAP into its next iteration?

Colonel SUTHERLAND. It does, and I understand exactly the challenge. The institutions need to err on the side of the veterans as opposed to err on the side of the institution, and to do that we have to understand if you have met a servicemember you have met a servicemember. If you have met a veteran, you have met a veteran. And if you are going to a community, you are going to a community. Each community has different resources, different capacity. And then what we have seen though in those communities, those local communities, is organizations that have stood up over the past several years because of this desire to want to connect and enable this generation of veterans.

We have seen whole of society approaches take place, whether it is in Wilkes-Barre or whether it is in Cincinnati or Boise, Idaho with the Wyakin Warrior Program. But what we have seen is that as the veterans transition, a more personalized approach to connect them to what are their desires as opposed to what do we think they should do. And what we have seen is over the past year some great advancement as far as apprenticeships and internships through Skills Bridge, with DoD working with the VA, as well as with teamster organizations. Trade and local organizations are phenomenal at not only recognizing the skill sets of the veterans but then tying them to what do the veterans want to do? What does the servicemember want to do? And now with the opportunities with the changes in DoD regulations that took place last January, or instructions that have taken place last January, we are now doing internships on installations. We just kicked off in Fort Sill with the teamsters doing truck driver training with a large group that want to drive trucks, commercial rigs. And so understanding that it is a whole of society approach but tailoring it after the institutionalized training that they go through in the TAP program as they get closer.

Because honestly when you are at 180 days out, I am thinking 180, 179, 178, I am counting down. As you get closer to the end and having a follow up, a care coordination effort, but connecting them to some sort of network in their local community. And that is what the state directors of veterans services have been talking

about as well. Because we have been leaving them out of the conversations in some cases. Including them and then understanding that another part of this is building public awareness. The American people know what we are. They may not know us. They know we served in Iraq and Afghanistan, they know we served on a ship or an aircraft, we need to bring it down to a personal level once we connect with them in the local community. And that is why that network is so, so important. And having, harnessing community based programs. That is how J.P. Morgan has hired over 100,000, UBS has hired several thousand veterans. And through the work of local organizations coming together, what we have seen in Cincinnati that has reduced the unemployment. It is the public and private partnership that really takes place after that institutional training. Does that answer your question, sir?

Mr. COSTELLO. It does. I appreciate that.

Colonel SUTHERLAND. Thank you.

Dr. WENSTRUP. Ms. Titus, you are recognized for five minutes.

Ms. TITUS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. First I would like to say to Mr. Leghorn, I appreciated your observation and comment that the education track should be a mandatory part of the program. Because even if our servicemen and women are not thinking about going directly on to college, they need to have that information so they know what their options are down the road. Because many times they may get out for a year or two and then want to come back. And that brings me to my question to Ms. Dunmyer, I recently met with the student veterans at UNLV. And they like to go out to Nellis or to Creech and recruit some folks to come to UNLV. But they tell me that they have a hard time getting onto the bases, getting in touch with these young people. And they wonder how, what they can do to make it better. Because they believe if these folks heard from fellow students maybe as part of the TAP program it would be less boring than sitting in the classroom, as you referenced, and have some relevant information. I just wonder is this a problem across campuses? Is it just UNLV? Is there something we can do to maybe facilitate that relationship earlier in the process?

Ms. DUNMYER. Well ma'am, I am not aware that that is a problem. I know access requirements or access standards are different for different installations. So it is something that we can go back and look at. But it should not be, their access onto the installation should not be a problem. I think the new policy for most installations is as long as you have got an ID normally you can gain access into the installation.

Ms. TITUS. Well I do not think they had a problem getting onto the base. I am talking about access to the TAP program and being a part of maybe that transition in a formal way before people get out of the service, and then kind of disappear before they come back to UNLV.

Ms. DUNMYER. Well, we do not. There is not a formal—

Ms. TITUS. That is my point.

Ms. DUNMYER. Yes, ma'am.

Ms. TITUS. Is there something we could do too, or do you not think that would be a good idea?

Ms. DUNMYER. That is what we are hoping to accomplish today. That is what we are hoping that will happen, will come out of this. That we are able to be, that SVA, the VSOs are able to be on the front end of the process instead of the back end. That we can be there when the decisions are made, we are a part of the discussions that are going on, and we can add to it. That is what we are trying to do here today.

Ms. TITUS. I know that. I guess I was just looking for something a little more specific that we could be doing. But I, I appreciate the general sentiment and I share it. So maybe we will just go beyond students. We also have in Las Vegas gaming companies, like MGM and Harrah's, have very active job fairs for veterans. But that is, again, after the fact. They are not at the front end, they are not on the facilities, they are not talking to the soldiers so to speak before they become veterans. Tell me how we can make that better, anybody who would address. Give me something specific.

Mr. GALLUCCI. Madam Titus, thank you for the question. I think we can—there is a little bit of insight that the VFW has on this issue. So, first, there were a couple of memoranda that the Department of Defense put out very recently, the outgoing Secretary of Defense Hagel put out, about base access for nonprofit organizations, organizations that serve veterans. One was for organizations like The American Legion and the VFW who provide VA accredited disability claim service. The other is for organizations to conduct events on the installation. What that was is to clarify how you can make that happen. This may be something that UNLV can take a look at if they are having problems integrating into that system.

We heard these issues a lot from who has access and who doesn't have access to the TAP program, but I do want to say that there is a lot of innovation going on out there from what I have seen from the transition managers. The Department of Defense deserves a lot of credit for the men and women that they hire to manage their Transition Assistance Programs. They do integrate a lot of community resources beyond the scope of what we have mandated through the mandatory portion of TAP.

For instance, out at Fort Lewis they have a lot of local employers that they integrate into the transition process. Fort Bragg has hiring events that are beyond hiring affairs; it is prescreened servicemembers who have resumes ready to go who have met with employers and then they just do interviews and they find jobs on the spot. There has been a lot of innovation, but I think one of the problems is consistency across the board or sharing of these good ideas; they are not identifying resources in those communities.

Beyond that, as far as preparing servicemembers to make educational choices, there is something that I hit on in my testimony about the career technical track and the higher education track, and this actually speaks to what Ranking Member Takano was concerned about. In the career technical track there is an in-depth discussion about the difference in accreditation, what the model of a school is: for profit, nonprofit, career, education, and so on. There is not much of that in the higher education track and in many ways, they are complimentary, but a servicemember who doesn't have reasonable access to all the tracks or knows where to look for this information may not find it.

And I think that speaks to what Chairman Wenstrup wants to see with mandating the education track and mandating other components of TAP.

Ms. TITUS. Maybe we need an inventory of what is happening in different places so we can come up with best practices and have some consistency across the board.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Dr. WENSTRUP. Thank you.

Mr. Gallucci, can you expand on suggestions for expanding the off-base TAP pilot program and do you believe that we are doing as best we can or what are your thoughts of that?

Mr. GALLUCCI. That is an interesting question. OBTT was something the VFW and our partners in the veterans community really pushed for back in 2012 and we were happy to see it pass. But when it was implemented it probably could have been done with better community coordination. Now, recognizing the Department of Labor had very scant resources with which to implement the program, but I think the philosophy the VFW has behind supporting this is that when a veteran goes to an American Job Center to meet one-on-one with either an employment counselor or a DVOP, that is not the time to answer your general questions; it is a better use of that advisor's time if you are ready to seek out a job.

So if you have large-scale briefings like we do with the Transition Assistance Program on bases, you get a good baseline of information and then when you are ready for that one-on-one meeting, you go to that one-on-one meeting prepared to do work. We do the same thing with our disability claims assistance on military installations. So we rely on the contracted staff that VA provides to deliver the framework that you would need to know about the disability claims process. Where we fall into it is you schedule an appointment with one of our disability claims representatives and they go through your medical records; they help you fill out the paperwork; they take your power of attorney; and you file the claim from there.

So that is the kind of interaction that we think could be fostered through OBTT is delivering resources at the right time in the community to the veterans and then when they seek out services, one-on-one services in an American Job Center, they are ready to find a job.

Dr. WENSTRUP. Thank you.

Mr. Takano, you are recognized.

Mr. TAKANO. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Ms. Titus, I mean I share your concern about trying to bring some of these job resources up to the front. Congressman Cook and I had cosponsored legislation for a pilot, Work for Warriors, which was not for veterans, but was for our guardsmen, but which directly placed people in the job. So we had employees that have jobs, we should be able to not just teach people how to get the jobs with the resumes, but maybe find some direct placement.

But the question I have—and I in no way want to denigrate technical or other tracks—but, Ms. Dunmyer, do you have any idea how many of our servicemembers who are transitioning have issues with remediation? Because as I understand it, remediation edu-

cation—remedial education is not currently covered as a funded part of their benefits, and I have a suspicion that it cannot be too far off of what the community colleges in California face. I mean up to 80 percent of our community college students who come to us are not really college-ready, and I know many of our servicemembers who are not attending the non-mandatory education track may not fully partake of their education benefits because they may be insecure about their readiness for college. But I want to get a handle on, you know, just the student success or non-student success that is tied to this college readiness issue. How many more of our veterans would maybe take on higher education if remediation were maybe funded by their veterans benefits?

And if you don't have the answer, maybe some others of you might step forward.

Ms. DUNMYER. I don't have an exact number, but it is about 50, 53 percent, and, of course, it is not funded and we have identified that, especially with some of the stem majors, that math is one of the biggest challenges for our student veterans going back because they have been out of the classroom for years and so a lot of that training that they received going—you know, coming through high school, they have lost that skill.

Mr. TAKANO. So you are saying that up to 50 percent of our veterans who actually have—are interested in seeking higher education—we are not even talking about those veterans who may have been maybe—

Ms. DUNMYER. Graduating.

Mr. TAKANO [continuing]. That our veterans who are going the higher education, using their benefits, up to 50 percent of them are sort of not college-ready at the outset, is that what you are saying? I mean it would seem to be a number that would be reasonable, given the generates that I have seen at community colleges.

Colonel SUTHERLAND. Sir, if I can help?

We have seen the graduation rate is what Student Veterans of America was talking about. How many are college-ready is difficult to assess because our veterans may not complete for different reasons. They may not complete graduation or get to graduation because 50 percent of them are married. They may not get—and they have to take care of their families, so—

Mr. TAKANO. So we are not able to tease out, just aggregate out how many of those students may have started college not completely ready and may have even gotten discouraged because they couldn't complete their first year math or English class?

Ms. DUNMYER. No, we are not able to give you an exact percentage of that, no, sir. But we can give you—it is, for the most part, I would say you still have a high percentage of graduates that are able to achieve their degree. Our percentages are similar to what your traditional student would complete their degree—time frame that they would complete their degree in, as well.

Mr. TAKANO. And I recognize there are other challenges beyond maybe the college-readiness which may impact our graduation rates at the colleges, but, specifically, because we don't fund remediation, remedial education, whether it is a semester, a year that we need to boost up that student's skills, this is an area that I am

concerned with and trying to get a handle on the quantification of how many students may be involved.

Ms. DUNMYER. Well, I can't give you an exact percentage; what I can tell you is that that is an area that we have identified as a problem. And to go back to math—and what we started is we did a pilot program a couple of months ago and it was to focus on math because our student veterans identified that they were having problems with math and that they are having—that the universities are requiring that they take a preparatory course in order to be able to start their core math courses for a particular degree.

So we started a pilot program with math. When we started out, we had—our hopes were that we would have at least 30 people that would enroll. To our surprise, it ended up being a little over a hundred—300 people that actually ended up enrolling in the course, and so from all measures, that was extremely successful.

Now, because of that, what we started to do is to look at other areas that veterans are having problems with, as well, and we plan to do other pilots like that to address other areas that veterans are challenged in before they actually start their degree for studied.

Mr. TAKANO. Thank you so much, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the extra questioning time.

Dr. WENSTRUP. Sure. With votes coming up, if there is a second round of questions, if you could make them brief, I would appreciate it.

Ms. Radewagen, you are recognized if you have another question.

Ms. RADEWAGEN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I'd like to express my proceedings to the entire panel.

Colonel Sutherland, Dixon Center, I would like to thank you for sharing in your written statement the heartwarming story of the U.S. Marine Corps veteran named Gary which illustrates the efforts and positive effects that local nonprofits can provide to servicemembers. How can Congress and the Administration better assist nonprofits connect to servicemembers in need?

Colonel SUTHERLAND. Yes, ma'am.

It is a great question; I appreciate you asking. And I am happy to give you a more detailed answer, as well. What has taken place recently with the change in instructions from Secretary Hagel for access for VSOs needs to go further. It needs to broaden the definition of those that can have access.

With the number of nonprofits that exist, every single one of them does a good job, but making sure that locally—I fought for my family, my neighbor and my community, and I come home to my family, my neighbor and my community, and so encouraging their participation through—and through expanding the efforts of SSVF, expanding the efforts of the Supportive Services for Veteran Families, as well as HVRP, and other efforts to locally connect those services and expanding the definition of in your community of asking other nonprofits just be inclusive.

Easter Seals is an organization that has been inclusive of veterans since World War II and provides direct services to 165,000. We don't market. We don't spend a lot of money marketing. So it is build public awareness, encourage community involvement and promote community-based services, and I am happy to give you a much more expansive answer, as well.

And we appreciate our American Samoans that have fought with us, as well. I had a large number in my brigade combat team.

Ms. RADEWAGEN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Dr. WENSTRUP. Well, if there are no other questions, I want to thank the first panel for being here today. You are now excused, but thank you for your dedication to our country and to our servicemembers.

I now invite our second panel to the witness table. Joining us is Mr. Curt Coy, Deputy Under Secretary for Economic Opportunity at the Department of Veterans Affairs; Ms. Teresa Gerton, Deputy Assistant Secretary at the Veterans' Employment and Training Service at the Department of Labor; and Dr. Susan Kelly, Director of the Transition to Veterans Program Office at the Department of Defense.

I thank you for being with us today and for your service to our nation's veterans.

Mr. Coy, let's begin with you; you are now recognized for five minutes, sir.

STATEMENT OF CURTIS L. COY

Mr. COY. Well, thank you, Chairman Wenstrup, Ranking Member Takano, and other members of the subcommittee.

I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss the current status of VA's Transition Assistance Program. Accompanying me today is Ms. Rosye Cloud, our senior advisor for veteran employment and the acting director of the VBA/DoD Program Office, the organization in my office that managing the day-to-day operations of TAP.

We all believe that it is critical for today's servicemembers are prepared to transition to civilian life. We have been working collaboratively with all of our partners to deliver transition tools to help them and their families. It's been a whirlwind time frame, and for the most part, a successful journey.

In November 2011, Congress passed and the President signed the VOW to Hire Heroes Act which made participation in TAP mandatory for all servicemembers. The following month a joint Veterans Employment Initiative Task Force delivered its principal recommendations, all of which have been incorporated into TAP.

The new VA curriculum now consists of two briefings broken into four and two-hour sessions. Additionally, last year, VA fully deployed the career technical training track, a course designed for servicemembers wishing to transition into technical fields that may not require—that may require additional credentials, but certainly not a four-year degree. A contract vehicle was put into place to provide the resources and expertise to deliver TAP worldwide.

Our contractors share VA's commitment to veteran employment. Ninety-five percent of our benefits advisors are veterans. Four percent are military spouses. We currently have over 300 VA benefits advisors permanently stationed at 107 military installations who also provide itinerant support to an additional 189 military installations worldwide. We are reaching out to those communities outside the gates of those installations as well changing the way servicemembers view us.

Between our 300 benefits advisors and our 400 IDES staff, we are now permanently stationed in hundreds of locations. We consider reaching out to servicemembers while they are still in uniform and where they work is critical. TAP GPS is the key front door to the VA.

To meet the needs of the National Guard and Reserve component members, VA deployed benefits advisors at all formal demobilization locations, as well as we remain flexible for Yellow Ribbon and community-based events. In just over the last 15 months, through the middle of this month, VA has conducted over 10,000 benefits briefings to over 280,000 servicemembers.

VA and our partner agencies have also developed an online—developed a virtual curriculum hosted on the Joint Knowledge Online Web site, providing access from remote sites. We have also posted the complete curriculum on our eBenefits portal.

VA has developed and implemented a comprehensive approach to quality assurance. Benefits advisors complete a rigorous training program before being placed in the field and we follow up that training with intensive site visits.

VA has worked hard to develop a number of tools to help and assist transitioning servicemembers do everything possible to help them become informed consumers of their benefits ranging from career scope, GI Bill comparison tool, feedback tools, choosing the right school, and most recently, the Veterans Employment Center or VEC.

The VEC is the federal government's single authoritative Internet source for connecting transitioning servicemembers, veterans and their families to meaningful career opportunities. It is the first government-wide product that brings together a cadre of public and private employers with real job opportunities. Currently, 1.7 million posted on the VEC, thanks in large part to our Department of Labor partners. It also provides tools to translate military skills into language that civilian employers can understand. Job seekers can also build a profile to share with employers. Since its launch nine months ago, we have seen the VEC have over nine million visitors.

The VA has incorporated all of these tools into our briefings and all benefits advisors have been fully trained. Finally, it is important to note and acknowledge our veteran service organizations who are often included in our TAP sessions. VA collaboratively works with our partner agencies to continually improve the quality and breadth of our TAP program. We have come a long way, but also know there is more to do.

Mr. Chairman, we are rowing hard and we will continue to do so. This concludes my statement. I would be pleased to answer any questions you or other members of the subcommittee may have.

[THE PREPARED STATEMENT OF CURTIS L. COY APPEARS IN THE APPENDIX]

Dr. WENSTRUP. Thank you, Mr. Coy.

Ms. Gerton, you are now recognized for five minutes.

STATEMENT OF TERESA W. GERTON

Ms. GERTON. Good afternoon, Chairman Wenstrup, Ranking Member Takano and distinguished members of the Subcommittee.

My name is Teresa Gerton and I am the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Policy at the Veterans' Employment and Training Service in the Department of Labor.

Thank you for the opportunity to participate in today's hearing to discuss the implementation of the revised Transition Assistance Program, Transition Goals, Plans, Success, also known as GPS. Since the inception of TAP over 20 years ago, the Department of Labor has provided training and services through the Employment Workshop to over 2.6 million separating or retiring servicemembers and their spouses. Last year alone, DoL conducted more than 6,600 Employment Workshops for over 207,000 participants at 206 military installations worldwide.

The VOW Act of 2011 required that DoL use contract facilitators to deliver its Employment Workshops, to ensure a standardized, high-quality professional cadre of facilitators. DoL awarded a contract to GBX Consultants, Incorporated, a Service Disabled-Veteran-Owned Small Business in August of 2012 for the facilitation of all DoL Employment Workshops.

In fiscal year 2013 we unveiled an entirely new Employment Workshop that provides a highly effective training experience and prepares servicemembers for a successful transition to the civilian workplace at all military installations worldwide. This three-day program uses modern adult learning techniques to actively engage transitioning servicemembers in critical transition skills.

Along with the synchronous virtual workshop, DoL worked with DoD Joint Knowledge Online to convert the Employment Workshop instructor-led classroom curriculum into an asynchronous online distance learning format. This is a self-paced online version of the Employment Workshop that servicemembers can use to reinforce and refresh what they have learned in the classroom.

On day one, participants develop their Change Management Plan And identify overall strategies for transitioning into the civilian workforce. On day two, participants learn how to analyze the job market and use social media in job searches and networking. On day three, instructors impart critical information about special veterans' hiring authorities and how the federal job application process differs from the private sector.

Throughout the Employment Workshop, participants work extensively on their master job application, targeted resumes, and interviewing skills, and finish with a mock interview exercise. Instructors also discuss relevant employment services, including benefits available to dislocated workers that are available to assist transitioning servicemembers, veterans, and their families before, during, and after their separation from the military.

All veterans, including recently separated servicemembers receive priority service in DoL-funded employment and training programs. Many of these programs and services are available through the nationwide network of nearly 2,500 American Job Centers. During the DoL-Employment Workshop, servicemembers learn that they are entitled to intensive services for up to six months at an American Job Center.

DoL is pleased to report that the new Employment Workshop curriculum has been well received. Of the 11,000 participants who responded to the most recent survey, 91 percent reported that they would use what they learned in their own transition planning and 89 percent reported that the DoL Employment Workshop enhanced their confidence in transition planning. DoL will continue to review feedback and evaluate the program to ensure that the curriculum remains relevant, that meaningful learning is taking place, and that servicemembers feel prepared to transition from military service and pursue other career goals.

Joining my colleagues from the other agencies, I want to remark on the strong partnership we have across the federal government in executing this program. We meet regularly to administer and update the program and we are proud of our collaboration on numerous initiatives including the Veterans Employment Center, the DoD SkillBridge Program, and our joint participation with the Chamber of Commerces' Hiring Our Heroes job summits at installations around the country. The Department looks forward to working with the Subcommittee to ensure that our separating servicemembers have the resources and training they need to successfully transition to the civilian workforce.

Mr. Chairman and Ranking Member Takano, and distinguished members of the committee, that concludes my oral statement. Thank you for the opportunity.

[THE PREPARED STATEMENT OF TERESA W. GERTON APPEARS IN THE APPENDIX]

Dr. WENSTRUP. Thank you, Ms. Gerton.

Dr. Kelly, you are now recognized for five minutes.

STATEMENT OF DR. SUSAN KELLY

Ms. KELLY. Good afternoon, Chairman Wenstrup and Ranking Member Takano and distinguished members of the subcommittee. I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today joined by my colleagues from the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Department of Labor to discuss the status of implementing the redesigned TAP.

Redesigning TAP in collaboration are our interagency partners brings together a unique set of capabilities benefitting approximately one million servicemembers separating from active duty over the next four years. The foundation of the redesigned TAP is a set of career-readiness standards that are verified for all transitioning servicemembers during a Capstone event no later than 90 days prior to separation. If career readiness standards are not met, the servicemembers are provided further training or a warm hand-over to interagency partners who ensure servicemembers receive post-separation assistance.

Part of the redesign includes the robust transition GPS curriculum, goals, plan, success. It builds the skills that transitioning servicemembers will need to meet career-readiness standards and it is now fully implemented at 206 military sites in the United States and overseas. In addition to VOW Act mandated requirements, transition GPS includes modules for financial planning and a military occupational code crosswalk to civilian workforce skills. It also includes three supplement training tracks, accessing higher

education, career technical training and entrepreneurship. To ensure that all servicemembers have access to the transition GPS regardless of their duty, station or location, we have made it available virtually on DoD's Joint Knowledge Online platform.

Another area of substantial progress is within our evaluation and assessment of TAP. DoD, in collaboration with our partners developed a TAP-evaluation strategy to address three overarching goals, accountability, customer satisfaction, and program effectiveness with long-term measures being developed by VA, DoL, and the Small Business Administration. Outcome measures are a priority for the TAP evaluations strategy, beginning with VOW Act and career-readiness standards compliance.

Based on the Defense Manpower Data Center, verified data for fiscal year to date 2015 across the services, that compliance for their active-duty servicemembers ranged from 91 to 97 percent. These results account for three-quarters of the members who are separated from active duty. We realize, however, that we must work hard to close the remaining reporting gap.

In fiscal year 2014, we also focused on a commune indicating our redesigned TAP to servicemembers. Throughout the month of September, 2014, we conducted a comprehensive communications campaign. For your reference, we have provided materials to each one of the members of the subcommittee. This year we shifted our focus to implementation of the Military Life Cycle TAP Transition Model. This marks a major cultural shift for the Department. In December, 2014, the military services reported to the White House that Military Life Cycle Transition preparation was fully implemented at their installations, which the new TAP interagency governing structure will continue to monitor and improve.

Your continued support is greatly appreciated and I look forward to your questions.

[THE PREPARED STATEMENT OF SUSAN KELLY APPEARS IN THE APPENDIX]

Dr. WENSTRUP. Thank you. I thank you all for your remarks and I now yield myself five minutes for questioning.

One of the things we discussed with the first panel is looking at long-term outcomes, you know, long-term outcomes beyond just instructor surveys that immediately follow going to TAP. We all know that in human nature we can sometimes lead a horse to water, but we can't make them drink, and there are times where we have to be careful that we are not setting someone up for failure in engaging in something where they are not going to succeed.

But my question of you is what can we, here, what can we do to help you track these outcomes more successfully down the road to see where we are and make adjustments as we go? And I will go down the line.

Mr. COY. I will go ahead and start off, Mr. Chairman.

I think tracking long-term outcomes is an incredibly valuable tool as we go forward. We have discussed with our partners a number of different things. One thing that we are doing and we are putting together is putting in our voice of the veteran survey TAP and making sure we are working with our partners to make sure that we ask the right questions and the right amount of questions as well. We also are looking at ways that we could possibly do longitu-

dinal approaches. We do longitudinal studies in both VRE and education, and we are looking at ways that we could add TAP to that mix. And then most certainly, I think, Mr. Chairman, you referenced it in your opening statement, we recently released our economic opportunity report. It is the first that we have ever done and we plan on making TAP also a part of future economic opportunity reports, as well.

Ms. GERTON. DoL does track the long-term outcomes of individuals who receive services at an American Job Center. We track three particular metrics, entered employment, retained employment, and average six-month salary.

Beginning in 2013 we added a field that asked incoming veterans for services at American Job Centers whether or not they had participated in the TAP program within the last three years. As states implement that new data element in their reporting systems, we are beginning to gather information about the outcomes of TAP participants, as distinguished from other veterans who may not have gone through that. As that reporting process matures, we will have better outcome-related data to TAP participants who do get services through an American Job Center.

We are also working very closely with our colleagues in DoD to create an opt-in field for servicemembers when they go through the Capstone counseling that will allow them to provide personal contact information for eventual follow-up by DoD counselors so that we can have a better long-term picture of what is going on with them as they transition. As we mature that collection process with DoD, we will keep you informed.

Dr. WENSTRUP. Well, that is one of my questions you mentioned there, is how you are maintaining that communication, and is it by email? Is it by telephone? Are they coming in to meet with you? Are they coming in six months later? A year later? Two years later? What is the timeline and how are you maintaining that communication?

Ms. GERTON. Right now our maintenance records track individuals who are receiving services at the job centers and then they become part of our long-term record. We don't, at this point, have the means of communicating with individuals who haven't opted to provide their personal contact information to our job centers, so that is what we are working on with DoD.

Once we do that, then we will have the data transmission and sharing agreement with DoD that will allow us to maintain that contact. We hope to contact that local outreach push that out through our job centers.

Dr. WENSTRUP. So in that vein, is there something that we need to be doing here?

Ms. GERTON. I think in terms of getting that communication and data sharing underway, we have all the support that we need. In the longer term, there may be issues relating to DoL's ability to track individuals to their long-term wage records that would allow us to have a better long-term perspective on an individual's outcomes over their life cycle.

Dr. WENSTRUP. Currently, what is your timeline? For those that you do have that communication set up, what is your timeline? Are you checking with them again after they get a job? Are you check-

ing with them again in six months? Are they still there? Are you checking with them in a year?

Ms. GERTON. We track their outcomes for the three quarters after they have received their last service. So did they enter employment in the quarter following their last American Job Center service? Then we look to see if they had wage records in the next two quarters. And we follow that through until there was some reason that they needed American Job Center services again, they would come back into the survey.

Dr. WENSTRUP. Okay. Thank you.

Dr. Kelly.

Ms. KELLY. Well, we recognize that data tracking and the tracking of our servicemembers as they went through the redesigned TAP would be a concern, so what we have done is we developed, through the Capstone process, which is part of the TAP redesign, is a completion of a new defense form. So every single servicemember who is transitioning and separates, just like they get a DD214 also gets a new copy of this form. That data is fed to the Defense Management Data Center and we have established a web service that will allow our partners to tap into that data and track those servicemembers. That IT architecture and those business cases and those approvals are still going through the processes right now.

But what we are also doing through DMDC, again, it is the Defense Manpower Data Center, is to actually pilot with eight states the flow of the data from the DD214 on every servicemember to each of those states. We are piloting that because as you go to each state, the ability of the states and the local communities to capture that data and to secure that data varies from one state to the next. So it is an IT architecture issue within each one of the states that has to be addressed. But we started that pilot in January and we will see how that progresses and report out to you the results of that once that pilot is completed.

Dr. WENSTRUP. Thank you very much.

I now recognize Ranking Member Takano for five minutes.

Mr. TAKANO. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Ms. Gerton, you mentioned that servicemembers must meet career-readiness standards. Can you—what does that mean?

Ms. GERTON. These are established in a partnership with both the Veterans Affairs agency and the Department of Defense in terms of what the servicemembers must be prepared to demonstrate in terms of which career track they plan to take. For example, if they are going to go to higher education, there is a checklist of things that they need to demonstrate.

If they are looking to get a job, from our perspective, they have to demonstrate that they have completed the basics of the exercises in the TAP class. They have to present a resumé and a cover letter. They have to provide the results of their skills assessment. They have to show that they have done a local market job survey so that they have assessed whether or not the positions that they are interested in are available in the community that they would like to go back to and an understanding of the salary range that might be appropriate for them. And then they have to demonstrate that they have looked for or have made progress towards getting some job interviews.

If they haven't, then they go back through for remediation processes, either back through TAP, back through additional counseling, or in our case, they may be referred to the local American Job Center for additional intervention.

Mr. TAKANO. Can you incorporate the concerns about soft skills mentioned by the earlier panel into the career-readiness section?

Ms. GERTON. We take all the input from our stakeholders very seriously. We are sort of limited in the amount of time we have to communicate the material in the TAP class. We have basically three days, eight hours a day to get them all the way through all the basic fundamentals of how to do a job search. We do an annual curriculum review; in fact, just this week, we are rolling out our new curriculum that replaced some outdated information, adds in information about disability, entitlements, education about the Veterans Employment Center, and some of the other new tools that are available. We do that on an annual cycle and we are getting ready to kick off another annual curriculum review here in the next couple of months, so we will certainly take that under advisement.

Mr. TAKANO. This might not be under your purview, it might be under Mr. Coy's, but is there any point, you know, an emphasis on this career-readiness standards, assessing whether or not—what about the college-readiness, I mean, in terms of whether—obviously we don't do enough of the assessment of whether students are ready actually to go to college, but can you comment on that Mr. Coy.

Mr. COY. Absolutely, Congressman Takano.

As you know from past years, this is also a subject that I am passionate about as well. What is interesting with the students that we see coming out, we don't know how many of those students require remedial training or not, but often times as we go through this process, I tell folks that 36 months of Post-9/11 G.I. Bill benefits is two semesters for four years and there is not much room for do-overs that are in there.

So we share your concern as well about remediation. It is one of those things that we saw in our public-private partnership strategy that Ms. Cloud has been working on. We, right now, have an organization called Coursera and they are offering a free online remedial-type course on the Veterans Employment Center. So we are doing those kinds of things. Interestingly, as well, SVA has come out with a mentor-type program where they also provide those kinds of things.

And then the other final thing is we currently have a VetsSuccess on campus counselor on 94 campuses across the country. We are hoping to expand that, as well, where we have VR counselors literally on campus full-time.

Mr. TAKANO. That is wonderful.

Dr. Kelly [continuing]. I want to thank you, Mr. Coy, Dr. Kelly, I want to commend the Department of Defense for it is Military Life Cycle concept. I am just wondering if there is an opportunity for you all to think about when a servicemember might identify an interest in a higher education, and if there is a possibility of being able to assess that student or that servicemember in terms of their college-readiness and then find ways to encourage that student

years before, sometime before they exit to begin to address any readiness issues they might have, and even if the Defense Department could encourage that to happen?

Ms. KELLY. Well, I wish the DoD could take credit for the Military Life Cycle TAP singularly, but that was a concept that was developed by the Task Force and was the bedrock of the TAP redesign. We developed the transitioning GPS curriculum, reverse engineered it to build the career-readiness standards, but all along, the fourth recommendation to the president was to embed that entire curriculum across Military Life Cycle touch points.

So, for instance, to your point about assessments, one of the career-readiness standards is an educational assessment and that is to be done at the first duty site of the servicemembers, so that is a career-readiness standard.

Mr. TAKANO. I would love to get hold of that material from the DoD.

Ms. KELLY. Sure.

Mr. TAKANO. Wonderful. I commend you all for doing that.

Ms. KELLY. Happy to provide it.

Dr. WENSTRUP. They are going to be calling the votes in about five minutes. Hopefully we can get through the members' questions before we have to go, and with that, I recognize Ms. Radewagen for five minutes.

Ms. RADEWAGEN. My pleasure.

As part of the Capstone event, the TAP MOU requires that a commander sign off if the servicemember meets the career-readiness standards. What type of training are commanders, or really their designees, being given to ensure that they are qualified to make such a distinction, and what happens if the commander does not sign his paperwork?

Ms. KELLY. Actually, each one of the services was required to provide their plan on how they were going to educate the commanders for their new responsibilities for the entire transition GPS, as well as that Capstone. So that is taking place in the service schoolhouses, commanders' and leadership courses right now. The commanders, or someone in the chain of command, it is a mandate to have those career-readiness standards reviewed and signed off by the commander or the commander's designee, as well as the transition staff because commanders may or may not have the expertise in all of the career-readiness standards. So the review is first conducted by the transition staff. It's also signed off by the servicemember.

If a career-readiness standard is not met in the servicemember's personal goal pathway, if you allow me that word, the warm hand-off to one of our partner agencies is also documented. So the staff member to whom that warm hand-over is given is actually documented again on that DD form.

We are not seeing a problem with either the commanders or the commander's designee signing off on those DD forms.

Ms. RADEWAGEN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Dr. WENSTRUP. Thank you.

Ms. Rice.

Ms. RICE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

This is for Ms. Gerton. During the DoL's Employment Workshops, are private sector employers brought in to do mock interviews, and if so, are you getting feedback to the servicemembers on their interview performance? I mean is there any aspect of private sector involvement?

Ms. GERTON. So, actually during the eight hours a day for the three days, we do not have private sector involvement. The mock interviews are managed within the classroom itself and individuals are provided feedback on their performance through the instructor staff, the facilitators; however, at the discretion of the individual TAP managers on the bases, they may be able to bring in private sector folks around the curriculum to have additional conversations with the servicemembers, especially those that are in the practice of hiring veterans, I think that would be—

Ms. RICE. Thank you. I yield back my time. Thank you.

Dr. WENSTRUP. Thank you.

Ms. Titus, you are recognized for five minutes.

Ms. TITUS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I would like to ask you, Mr. Coy, a question about how you explain VBA benefits to separating servicemembers as part of the TAP program, especially benefits for same-sex couples. As you know, the Department of Defense recognizes marriage equality and provides marriage benefits to all families of active duty members of the armed services; unfortunately, due to an outdated law, the VA is unable to provide benefits to married couples in a few states that are home to a large number of veterans.

So that means that an active-duty member can have access to certain benefits on Monday and lose them on Tuesday as he or she separates from the armed services. Now, I don't think that is fair, but this committee last year voted to continue the injustice.

Now, you said that TAP is the front door to the VA, but apparently there is no welcome mat in front of that door for some of our veterans. So how do you explain to them that these are the benefits that they will or will not be getting when they go through the TAP program?

Mr. COY. Congresswoman, I couldn't agree more that we need to get better at explaining the same-sex benefits. We do the VA benefits, and as I mentioned, a four-hour course and a two-hour course. VA has fully embraced the same-sex marriage provisions. There are statutory things that are in the way of that, and so we are sometimes caught in the middle of that, if you will, from that perspective, but we try to explain as best we can to our servicemembers as they are going through their VA benefits briefs.

Ms. TITUS. Thank you.

I yield back.

Dr. WENSTRUP. Well, thank you.

If there are no further questions, I want to thank everyone here today for taking time to come to share your views on this critical program. As I have said before, I believe that if we can get TAP right and effectively prepare our transitioning servicemembers for life after active duty, we can probably mitigate a lot of the problems and issues that our veterans face.

Finally, I ask unanimous consent that all members have five legislative days to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material.

Without objection, so ordered.

The hearing is now adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 3:45 p.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

Appendix
STATEMENT OF
ASSISTANT DIRECTOR OF THE VETERAN EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT
COMMISSION OF THE AMERICAN LEGION
BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY OF THE
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
ON
“A REVIEW OF THE TRANSITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (TAP)”
JANUARY 27, 2015

On behalf of our National Commander, Michael Helm, and the 2.4 million members of The American Legion, we thank you for this opportunity to testify at this hearing on improving the Transition Assistance Program (TAP), and veteran transition in general.

The new TAP, authorized as part of the VOW to Hire Heroes Act of 2011 – now Public Law 112-56 – is an important step toward providing transitioning servicemembers with the information and skills they need to successfully transition into civilian life. The VOW to Hire Heroes Act of 2011 (VOW Act of 2011) resulted in the establishment of the Veterans Employment Initiative (VEI) Task Force recommendations for improving and standardizing transition activities among the Services. The standardization includes the development and implementation of Career Readiness Standards (CRS); institutionalizing Transition GPS (Goals, Plans, Success) revamped program curriculum; and integrating a culminating Capstone event prior to service members transition or retirement, implementation of a Military Life Cycle (MLC) model to maximize the benefits of interagency and joint interoperability.

Over the past two years, The American Legion has intensely scrutinized the new program, observing it in operation at Ft. Hood, Ft. Sam Houston, Randolph Air Force Base, Ft. Bragg, MCB Quantico, Walter Reed Medical Center and Naval Submarine Base Kings Bay. We have observed both the five-day mandatory portion, as well as the specialized capstone courses that comprise Transition GPS. The testimony we present today reflects this scrutiny, and provides some observations as well as some recommendations for improvement.

Positives of the Program

Overall Impression

In general The American Legion was highly impressed both by the amount and the quality of information that was conveyed, particularly in such a relatively short period of time. The information was presented by instructors who were contracted by the Department of Labor and Department of Veterans Affairs. These instructors seemed to have a very good grasp on the material being presented, and were able to answer nearly all questions. The student interaction was excellent, especially compared with the pilot versions of the program, which may be due to the smaller class size in the fully implemented program – less than 30 individuals, in most cases.

Allowing servicemembers to attend class in business casual attire seemed to contribute to the learning environment by providing a more relaxed atmosphere.

Veteran Service Organization Involvement

The American Legion has long advocated for the inclusion of congressionally chartered Veteran Service Organizations (VSOs) into TAP.¹ VSOs provide services to transitioning servicemembers, including claims assistance.

During both the VA and DOL portions of the TAP sessions that we observed, the attendees were referred to VSOs by the instructors for help filing claims.

The utilization of veterans as instructors is a good practice because they were able to impart first-hand knowledge of how the VSOs help. In one class, an instructor specifically mentioned The American Legion, as the Legion had assisted him with his own VA medical claim and as such, he was familiar with the services veterans' service organizations provide.

On October 23, 2013, a letter from the Under Secretary of Veterans Affairs for Benefits requested that the Veterans Affairs "part of the Transition Assistance Program (TAP) classes include VSOs from the local areas who want to attend." This letter further mandated that VA Briefers "welcome and introduce VSO representatives in the classroom during VA's portion of the TAP briefing."

The Secretary of Defense recognizes "national Veterans Service Organizations (VSOs) and Military Service Organizations (MSOs) are a critical component of our overall framework of care for our servicemembers throughout all phases of their military service."² The American Legion completely supports the Department of Defense (DOD) maintaining a strong relationship with VSOs/MSOs approved and recognized by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs (VA) for the preparation, presentation, and prosecution of VA claims.

The American Legion has access to DOD Installations for the purpose of VA-accredited representation services under section 2670 of title 10, U.S.C. The Secretary of Defense memorandum dated December 23, 2014 reemphasizes this privilege under the law, directed additional measures to facilitate VSOs consistent delivery across DOD Installations, and provided clarity to installation commanders on adjudicating requests for access. "Commanders are authorized to use official command communication channels to include the Transition Assistance Program materials, to inform Service members about the availability of VA-accredited presentation services provided by VSOs/MSOs operating under the provisions of stated memorandum."

¹ Resolution No. 20: Service Officers Participation in the Transition Goals, Plans and Success (GPS) Program (National Convention, 2014)

² SECDEF Memo dated 23Dec2014 signed by Sec. Hagel

Recommendations for Improvement

Lack of Focus on Soft Skills

The vast majority of the personnel leaving the armed services after their first or second enlistment have not had significant experience working in a civilian workplace setting as compared to their civilian counterparts. They lack the 'soft skills' that are most commonly learned by spending a substantial part of one's adult life in a civilian work environment.

By "soft skills" we mean personal qualities, habits, attitudes, and social graces that can make an individual employable. Human resource staff value 'soft skills' because research shows that these skills are an important indicator of job performance.

From our observations, we believe that while TAP includes ample focus on the translation of military skills and experiences into core-competencies in the private sector, insufficient emphasis is placed on these soft skills.

It is impossible for transitioning servicemembers to quickly rid themselves of the habits they acquired in order to thrive in service. While many of these habits are also conducive to thriving in a civilian workplace environment, many are not. We, of course, recognize that a five day course cannot hope to inculcate etiquette and behaviors obtained by spending a substantial part of one's adult life in a civilian workplace environment.

However, we believe that TAP would be improved if accompanied by some kind of program that would allow the veteran to gradually assimilate to the civilian office environment or if it at least included private sector companies to discuss office and/or workplace culture. The American Legion cannot stress how crucial it is that more emphasis and instruction be provided to the servicemember on this matter.³

Improvement Needed in the "Accessing Higher Education" (AHE) GPS Portion

Since the implementation of the Post-9/11 GI Bill in 2009, every transitioning servicemember now has access to the opportunity to attend a higher education program of their choice. Even if they do not plan to utilize that benefit immediately upon exiting the military, The American Legion believes that it is important that all servicemembers be informed of the benefit, and be given a basic understanding of how to use it, particularly in conjunction with Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment and Title IV benefits.

As such, The American Legion recommends that the Transition GPS education track be reevaluated for content and that it incorporate more input from the Department of Education. Further, we recommend that the education GPS track be made mandatory for all servicemembers attending TAP.

³ Resolution No. 310: Improve Transition Assistance Program (2014 National Convention)

What We are Doing to Help

It is often stated by the VSOs and echoed by the administration that veterans' unemployment cannot be solved by government alone. The American Legion believes the solution lies in a collaboration between government entities and the private sector. The American Legion has responded by working with the US Chamber of Commerce, various large and small businesses and TAP facilitators to bring employment workshops and hiring events to transitioning servicemembers. Our Employment & Empowerment Summit is a two-day workshop intensive event that ends with a Hiring our Heroes Job Fair. We host this Summit in various cities and provide transportation and lodging for transitioning servicemembers going through TAP.

Servicemembers attending our events have the chance to learn about various opportunities in multiple types of businesses ranging from the banking industry to the trades. They are exposed to the distinct corporate culture of the companies in attendance, they are encouraged to network with executives and hiring managers from these companies and they receive one-on-one resume assistance for applying to jobs within these companies from their decision makers, and are able to receive some preliminary instruction on the aforementioned soft skills needed to gain and maintain employment.

Improvement Needed in Contracts

Unfortunately, we are consistently met with resistance from contracted ACAP/TAP facilitators in some of the bases we've contacted, for example Ft. Bragg, Ft. Jackson and Camp Lejeune. We were informed by DOD personnel that contractually, TAP facilitators are evaluated based on a limited scope of performance measures, that only involve the administration of their programs, and as such, there is a lack of incentive for them to work outside the parameters.

The American Legion believes that this situation hinders the provision of important services to transitioning servicemembers. Amending DOD contracts for TAP facilitators to include a section regarding required collaboration with trusted private sector employers and service providers would solve this problem fairly easily.

Improving Transition in General

Improving the transition experience of servicemembers is an ongoing process with many components to consider. Many issues could be mentioned, from the creation of a lifetime medical record to the improvement of credentialing for military experience. However, I would like to highlight one issue that we are particularly concerned about, and that we feel would be a fairly simple fix.

The American Legion recognizes that one of TAP's main roles is to be an introduction to the services and programs available to veterans, and to provide a "warm handoff" to the agencies that administer those programs.

We have become aware of an issue affecting veteran employment services that are funded by the Jobs for Veterans State Grants (JVSG) and administered through the Department of Labor's

(DOL) Veterans Employment and Training Service (VETS). Last spring, DOL issued a directive creating a hard distinction between the Disabled Veteran Outreach Program representatives (DVOPs) and the Local Veteran Employment Representatives (LVERs), which are funded by the JVSG grants, and are located at DOL job centers across the country. Essentially, this disallows DVOPs from seeing non-service disabled veterans, *even if they have extra time in which they could do so*.

Granted that in many job centers, there is little spare time. This, however, is not the case in every location. The DOL's restrictive regulation undermines the flexibility that is needed to best serve veterans who are in need of employment services.

In one instance, a blind veteran was escorted out of an American Job Center after he became upset that he no longer qualifies to meet with the DVOP he has been working with under the new regulation, because his disability was not service-connected. The American Legion believes a disabled veteran has significant barriers to employment regardless of whether the disability was resultant from their service or not. The categories imposed by the JVSG restructuring of veteran eligible to seek DVOP services are too restrictive. Some DVOPs have even noted to The American Legion that in the aftermath of this well-intentioned-but-misguided regulation the majority of veterans now receive a 'priority of greeting' but not the 'priority of service' mandated by law.

The American Legion has organized meetings and roundtable discussions with the majority of the stakeholders. There is a consensus in the veteran community that this regulation is problematic, and should be changed. Requiring this regulatory change by DOL would, in the opinion of The American Legion, provide a significant improvement to one of the major transition services available to veterans: the JVSG program.

Conclusion

The American Legion believes strongly that the new TAP program represents an important step toward providing transitioning servicemembers with the information that they need to become successful and productive members of society once they complete their military service. While there exist some shortcomings that require attention, the program overall appears to be successful, and the implementation has been commendable.

The American Legion looks forward to continue to work with the agencies and with Congress to continue to improve this valuable resource for our transitioning servicemembers.

STATEMENT OF
RYAN M. GALLUCCI, DEPUTY DIRECTOR
NATIONAL VETERANS SERVICE
VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS OF THE UNITED STATES
BEFORE THE
VETERANS' AFFAIRS SUBCOMMITTEE
ON ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
WITH RESPECT TO
A Review of the Transition Assistance Program (TAP)

WASHINGTON, D.C.

January 27, 2015

Chairman Wenstrup, Ranking Member Takano and members of the Subcommittee, on behalf of the men and women of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States (VFW) and our Auxiliaries, I want to thank you for the opportunity to present the VFW's thoughts on the current state of the military's Transition Assistance Program (TAP).

Over the past few years, this subcommittee has driven a significant evolution in the way the military prepares transitioning service members for civilian life. The VFW long recognized the need to provide transitioning service members with a quality baseline of information with which to make informed decisions about their post-military lives. This was one of the driving factors behind the TAP mandate that was included in the VOW to Hire Heroes Act of 2011.

The VFW also readily recognized that while transitioning service members are still in uniform, there is no reasonable way for them to anticipate the unique challenges they may face once the uniform comes off and military quality of life benefit programs disappear. This is why the VFW pushed for the Off-Base Transition Training (OBTT) pilot program in 2012.

Over the past three years, the departments of Defense, Veterans Affairs, Labor, and partners like the Department of Education and Small Business Administration have rebuilt the TAP curriculum from the ground up, and changed the standard delivery method to foster consistency across all branches of the military. Some of the most significant changes include adding three specific tracked courses designed for veterans seeking technical careers, access to higher education, and entrepreneurship; shifting to contact facilitators to teach each module; and offering TAP resources to veterans after they leave the military.

For our testimony, the VFW will focus on three specific issues: Striking the proper balance in contract facilitation; ensuring access to relevant tracked curricula; and post-service availability of TAP resources.

Striking the Proper Balance on Contract Facilitation

Each agency responsible for delivering a component of TAP has hired a cadre of contractors whose sole responsibility is to teach the curriculum. In the past, this was not the case. For example, past iterations of the Department of Labor employment workshop were facilitated by Disabled Veteran Outreach Specialists (DVOPs) or Local Employment Representatives (LVERs) from nearby state workforce agencies.

When the Department of Labor sought to replace DVOPs and LVERs with contract TAP instructors, the goal was to ensure that DVOPs and LVERs would no longer have to dedicate an inordinate amount of time to teaching, and could instead focus on developing employment opportunities for veterans in the community.

The VFW generally agrees with this shift to contract employees whose primary function is to provide information to service members, freeing up local resources to focus on local veteran employment. However, this shift has had some negative unintended consequences for both transitioning service members and local partners who can offer assistance in the difficult transition from military to civilian life.

The VFW recently visited with the Marine Corps civilians responsible for connecting wounded Marines to post-service employment opportunities. While they acknowledged that the TAP employment workshop was an improvement, they explained that missing the direct connection to DVOPs and LVERs, who work every day in veteran employment, proved problematic in helping transitioning service members understand the scope of services and benefits available to them in the community.

Another primary concern for the VFW is the lack of involvement of accredited Veterans Service Organizations in the new TAP process. A critical element in the transition process is ensuring that when service members leave the military they have timely access to their benefits. This includes VA service-connected disability compensation, which not only helps veterans make up for lost earning potential as a result of injuries and illnesses incurred on active duty, but also serves as a gateway to other benefits and services like VA health care, Vocational Rehabilitation, adaptive housing, or intensive job placement services.

To assist in this process, the VFW has professional Benefits Delivery at Discharge (BDD) staff stationed permanently on more than a dozen major military installations, and we plan to extend to additional installations in the near future. Today, the VFW has staff available to transitioning service members on Andrews Air Force Base, Bolling Air Force Base, Camp LeJeune, Camp Pendleton, Fort Belvoir, Fort Bragg, Fort Campbell, Fort Drum, Fort Hood, Fort Lewis, Fort Myer, Fort Stewart, Marine Corps Base Quantico and Walter Reed National Military Medical Center. Each VFW staff member's primary mission is to provide separating service members free assistance in reviewing their military health records and filing claims for VA disability

benefits prior to separation. At each of these installations, we rely on our military hosts for significant logistical and administrative support, to include integration into TAP to ensure that service members know the scope of services VSOs can provide to them.

The VFW recognizes that operational requirements and space considerations mean that no two of our BDD sites will have the same opportunities, but we have concerns over how TAP has changed and the level of support that the VFW will have from those now responsible for implementing the program.

To the VFW, the problem is two-fold. First, the military has made a significant investment in TAP. The VFW recognizes that this is in anticipation of the major military drawdown following the conclusion of combat operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. As a result, installations have been given the authority to hire a significant number of additional staff to train thousands of expected transitioning service members.

More transitioning service members require more staff. More transitioning service members also require more classroom space to facilitate training. So as DOD increases its staff to meet demand, an effort must also be made to ensure there is adequate space for VSOs to deliver their respective services as well.

Secretary of Defense, Chuck Hagel, recognized these concerns in his memo to installation commanders, which outlines the law requiring commanders to provide access and space for VSOs and MSOs so they can hold face-to-face meetings with transitioning service members seeking VA- accredited representation.

Adherence to this memo is critical to the VFW as we see a correlation between consistent exposure and access, and the number of service members seeking representation. On installations where our access is limited we are not seeing an increase in service members seeking to file a disability claim, while the number of service members transitioning out of the military continues to grow.

Next, the contract to deliver the VA Benefits I and II briefings is rigid. VA Undesecretary of Benefits Allison Hickey issued guidance to the contract staff, allotting up to five minutes of briefing time during which VSO representatives can introduce themselves to service members and share their contact information.

In our travels visiting military transition points, the VFW has had an opportunity to meet with many of the contractors responsible for facilitating the VA Benefits briefings. Many of these contractors are recently-transitioned veterans who readily understand the process and take their work very seriously. However, they acknowledge that their job has very specific requirements to ensure consistency in information for all transitioning service members. The VFW applauds their continued hard work. However, we question why the contract would leave such little flexibility for contractors to adapt to the transition needs of their service members. We encourage VA and this committee to review the contract and recommend offering flexibility for facilitators to not only reintegrate local resources, like VFW BDD staff, but also adapt the curriculum to suit the needs of their audience.

The VFW knows that consistency is important, but we must be able to strike a reasonable balance between consistent access to information and access to geographically-relevant information.

Access to Relevant Tracked Curricula

Another persistent issue with the delivery of TAP to transitioning service members is ensuring consistent access to the newly-established track curricula, as well as consistent delivery of timely and relevant training.

The VFW acknowledges that it was a bold task to create each curriculum track, and that the partners who developed each track invested significant time and resources to develop a reasonable program for the minimal time allotted.

However, after reviewing the curriculum for the Career Technical Training track and the Accessing Higher Education track, the VFW believes that these two modules would better serve as compliments to one another.

The VFW believes that the Accessing Higher Education track is a quality preparation course to help college-bound veterans learn about their options. It offers transitioning service members the tools necessary to compare academic programs and make an informed educational decision. However, the Career Technical Training track, which was developed independent of the Accessing Higher Education track, also contains some critical information about career readiness, accreditation and academic structure that the VFW believes would be beneficial to a college-bound veteran.

Considering this, the VFW worries that veterans who choose to only participate in the Accessing Higher Education track will miss out on critical information that would help to better inform their decision as to where they should use their earned education benefits.

The VFW would support ensuring that transitioning service members have access to the full suite of transitional training, should they choose to do so. However, the VFW also recognizes the operational limitations in mandating such participation across the military.

In our recent visits to military transition centers, I have had the opportunity to see first-hand how this training is delivered and to speak with the Department of Defense civilians responsible for implementing TAP. They echo the sentiment that the training is a marked improvement from past TAP iterations. They are grateful for the significant investment that Congress has made in improving the transition process for separating service members. However, they also worry that line unit commanders still struggle to see the value in allowing their service members to fully participate.

Sadly, this is an issue that is not isolated to one or two installations that we have visited, but instead is a consistent concern that commanders still do not take the transition process seriously.

I remember one specific quote from a Transition Manager. He told me in our meeting that as a young officer in the Army, his leaders made sure he latched on to the mantra of “Mission first, people always.” He said that to him this meant that if you took care of your people, they would be there for you when you needed to accomplish the mission.

Make no mistake, the VFW understands that the military needs its personnel to focus on the mission first. Commanders are often stuck with making the difficult call as to whether they can spare to let their people go while work still needs to be done. However, the VFW believes that leaders who fail to recognize the importance of the new military transition process are ultimately doing a disservice to the men and women they command. Though TAP is now distinguished as a commander’s program, the VFW worries that DOD lacks mechanisms to hold commanders accountable.

Thankfully, we have recognized that this will require a significant cultural shift – one that is unlikely to take place anytime during the anticipated military downsizing now that major combat operations in Iraq and Afghanistan are over. In an effort to mitigate the concern that TAP will not be a command imperative, the VFW encouraged DOD and its partners to make the curriculum modules readily available to service members online.

DOD took the first step by allowing transitioning service members to audit the modules through the secure Joint Knowledge Online (JKO) portal. Through JKO, service members could participate in all TAP briefings and tracks, as well as receive transition credit for completing the required practical exercises.

However, one challenge remains nearly insurmountable for commanders, TAP managers, and contract briefers - Transitioning service members have no reasonable way to anticipate the specific challenges they will face after leaving the military. This means that some will miss critical information or not fully understand the scope of benefits and services available or how to access them.

The VFW believes that one of the most simple solutions would be for DOD to finally formalize its information-sharing agreement with DOL to ensure that state workforce development agencies would have consistent access to the names of veterans leaving the military and relocating to their areas. When armed with this information, employment counselors could reach out directly to recently-transitioned veterans and speak to them face-to-face to ensure that they fully understand what is available to them locally.

Unfortunately, the proposed information sharing agreement is once again delayed. DOL first informed the VFW that it was working to codify the agreement in 2012. It’s 2015. At this point, the VFW believes it is unacceptable that DOD and DOL have yet to finalize this agreement, and we encourage Congress to act on it.

Post-Service Availability of TAP

Another simple solution to ensure veterans have access to the information in TAP at the time and place that they need it is to continue to bolster the post-service availability of TAP.

In 2012, the VFW had the opportunity to testify before this subcommittee in support of the *TAP Modernization Act*, which would commission a pilot program to offer post-service TAP to veterans in states with high veteran unemployment. The pilot was eventually signed into law as part of the *Dignified Burial and Other Veterans' Benefits Improvement Act of 2012*.

Over the past two years, Department of Labor worked with its contract TAP facilitators in West Virginia, Georgia, and Washington to facilitate 23 workshops as part of the Off-Base Transition Training (OBTT) program.

In speaking to DOL about the OBTT pilot, they acknowledged that some workshops were more successful than others, and that West Virginia experienced the most success due to extensive support from the West Virginia National Guard.

DOL also reported that OBTT was very cost-effective, costing only \$52,052 to administer the entire pilot. By facilitating large-scale, community-based TAP classes, OBTT serves veterans who otherwise would not have had access to the material, or who could only have received comparable information by meeting one-on-one with employment counselors at an American Jobs Center.

Unfortunately, the OBTT pilot expired this month, and DOL will not have information on employment outcomes for participants for another year.

To the VFW, the value proposition is simple: It is more cost-effective to leverage the current TAP contract to facilitate large group training sessions for veterans before they meet one-on-one with employment counselors at American Jobs Centers. We equate this to the relationships that our BDD representatives on military installations have with the contract facilitators of the VA Benefits I & II briefings.

On military installations, it is critical for contractors to provide transitioning service members with the basic information they would need to file a claim and to tell them about the assistance resources nearby, like the VFW BDD staff. This way, when service members come to meet one-on-one with VFW BDD staff, they are prepared to have a constructive meeting in which we can review health records and complete benefit applications.

The VFW believes that OBTT should be a permanent program, but until we have final data on the OBTT pilot, the VFW believes that Congress must work quickly to pass an extension of the pilot, offering training to more veterans who need it.

Thankfully, there is one more way for veterans to access TAP resources after separating from military service. DOL and DOD worked together to post every TAP module to a front-facing web site where veterans can click through the modules as a refresher.

The VFW believes this is a game-changer for separated service members, but we have some minor recommendations to improve the front-facing resources. Currently, a veteran who visits the site cannot easily skip from one section to another in a curriculum module. For example, if a

veteran needs help crafting a resume, they can click onto the Employment Workshop, but they cannot click directly to the resume section. Instead, they must skip through each section until they reach the section on resumes. Veterans also do not have access to the participant guides that serve as a supplement for transitioning service members who receive the modules in a classroom setting.

The VFW recommends that DOD and DOL should direct the contractor to allow veterans navigating to the front-facing TAP site to easily navigate directly to the modules they seek, and offer links to download participant guide materials. With these minor improvements, veterans could use the public-facing TAP site as an easy reference.

The VFW also recommends that DOL should track and report on traffic to the public-facing site to better understand how many veterans or family members navigate to the site and which resources generate the most traffic. The VFW believes that this information would be useful in identifying trends in the veterans' community or potential shortcomings in the TAP curriculum.

TAP is undergoing an amazing evolution, and the VFW wants to thank everyone who has been involved in the development of the new TAP for their continued hard work on this project. However, we also acknowledge persistent shortcomings that we can all work together to improve.

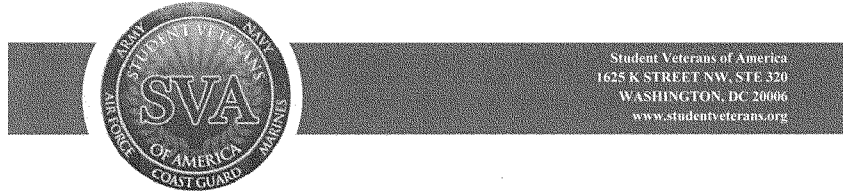
With the impending drawdown of our military, this is a critical mission to ensure the future success of the men and women who have volunteered to defend us for the past 14 years. We look forward to working with this subcommittee on ways to make sure we succeed in that mission.

Chairman Wenstrup, Ranking Member Takano, this concludes my testimony and I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

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

Pursuant to Rule XI2(g)(4) of the House of Representatives, VFW has not received any federal grants in Fiscal Year 2014, nor has it received any federal grants in the two previous Fiscal Years.

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



TESTIMONY OF
MS. VALRICA MARSHALL DUNMYER
CHIEF OF STAFF & CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER
STUDENT VETERANS OF AMERICA

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

LEGISLATIVE HEARING ON THE TOPIC OF:
"A REVIEW OF THE TRANSITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM"

JANUARY 27, 2015



Chairman Wenstrup, Ranking Member Takano and other distinguished members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for calling this hearing and for continuing to monitor efforts to successfully transition our returning Veterans out of the military and into civilian life.

My name is Valrica Marshall Dunmyer and I am here as the Chief of Staff and Chief Financial Officer of Student Veterans of America. I am also here as a veteran who served 26 years of Army service.

We are honored that you've invited us to be a part of this session today. On behalf of SVA and it's more than 400,000 student veterans within a network of more than 1,200 chapter affiliates, I am pleased to submit our testimony on, "A Review of the Transition Assistance Program (TAP)."

SVA advocates for the rights of veterans in higher education, rooted in the belief that investing in America's veterans today is a smart investment for the country tomorrow.

SVA's top priorities include improving access to higher education and scaling effective services that empower student veterans to graduate on time, with little-to-no student debt, and successfully transition into a civilian life.

Current Implementation of Transition GPS

Mr. Chairman, as a former recipient of the current program, the enhancements came as both a surprise and welcomed addition to better educate and inform service members of their options when departing the military.

Nevertheless, transitional challenges still exist as evidenced through the continuing struggle of our veterans, and more specifically our student veterans.

Issues & Recommendations

One of the primary challenges is knowing whether the TAP GPS program is truly working on the front end to produce the desired outcome on the back end.

As of December 2, 2013, only 72% of TAP locations included the higher education track offered by the DOD.¹ Now, this may seem like a high number to you and something to be proud of, but consider for a moment, if you're that veteran in the 28% group and your release date is quickly approaching. Imagine that you're that veteran, who is thinking about getting your degree, but haven't been provided with the resources or knowledge on how to even start the process. For those veterans, the system isn't working.

Our Million Record Project represents one of the most comprehensive examinations of student veterans' postsecondary academic success in decades. The initial results are a critical first step in filling research gaps regarding student veteran outcomes. The Million Records Project showed that more than 1 million veterans have used educational benefits from 2002–2010. Data also indicates that there will be over 5



million veterans by 2020¹⁴. These facts, coupled with ongoing budgetary constraints, prove that we can no longer hope that our brick and mortar delivery of information is sufficient.

We must be innovative in our approach to the delivery while still ensuring the quality of information provided to our veterans. Most veterans frown on the current delivery method, describing the TAP program as "death by PowerPoint" due to the lengthy and enormous amount of information delivered. While the basic information, such as how many months an eligible veteran has of Post 9/11 GI Bill benefits, should continue to be included, we should ensure our entire instructional program is informed through research, best practices and feedback.

As service members contemplate pursuing a degree following the military, the utilization of VSOs and VSAs can be looked upon as being a force multiplier, providing the necessary link between departure from the military and a veteran's introduction into civilian life. Veteran Service organizations, like SVA, have proven track records of success to its members both current and Alumni and should have a seat at the table in further discussions.

Our Final Thoughts

Through research, connection with local SVA chapters, and advocacy, we know that the better informed and prepared student veterans are, the greater the contributions and return on the investment for our Nation. By integrating SVA and other VSO's into the Assessing Higher Education tract, we can assist in assuring that same level of success for all Vets transitioning into higher education.

Mr. Chairman, at SVA, we are extremely proud of the impact and reach we have into making a difference in the lives of our Student Veterans. To give you a better appreciation of the breadth of our involvement with student veterans, I'd like to share an email with you that we received from a student vet that attended our most recent annual national conference. One of my staffers commented that it gave him goose bumps when he read it:

My name is Michael McCaffrey--I'm a senior at the University of Memphis and a chairman of our Student Veteran Organization on campus. The San Antonio conference was the first SVA conference I've attended, and the entire experience was unlike anything I've had the opportunity to do regarding Veterans. I am already anxiously awaiting details regarding next year's conference and will be attending as well.

With that said, I wanted to share a photo with you, which is attached to this e-mail. Although I do not know who captured this moment, this photo is of MoH recipient Kyle Carpenter and I, embracing one another after Vice President Biden's speech. The photo was originally posted on the morning of January 23rd by Kyle, on his personal Instagram account, @chiksdigscars, where users engaged it via likes, comments, and tagging at a rapid rate.

At the time, we were both unaware anyone was taking the picture, however if asked to describe it in one word, I would use "powerful". I wanted to share this photo with the SVA, because your dedication and advocacy efforts to Student Veterans is exceptional, however, at the core of the SVA, I believe the best thing you do is



simply bring Veterans together, who are trying to achieve great things, while keeping the battlefield in the rearview mirror.

The opportunity to meet your staff, Kyle, and other Veterans in San Antonio was worth the trip alone. When you factor in the discussion panels, speakers, corporate networking, and other events, the added value of attending increased dramatically. I hope this picture brings as much joy to you, as it did for me and so many other Veterans who have seen it. This powerful moment was possible, because of your ability to organize and commence a successful conference for Student Veterans to attend.

Best

*Michael McCaffrey
University of Memphis, Fogelman College of Business and Economics
Student Veteran Organization Chairman*

We thank the Chairman, Ranking Member, and the subcommittee members for your time, attention, and devotion to the cause of veterans in higher learning. We invite the subcommittee members to be a part of our National agenda as we showcase the great contributions our Veterans continue to make to our great Nation.

Again, we extend our sincere thanks to the Subcommittee and we look forward to continuing to work with this subcommittee, the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, and the Congress to ensure the success of all generations of veterans. Thank you.

¹ United States Government Accountability Office, Report to Congressional Committees, "Transitioning Veterans: Improved Oversight Needed to Enhance Implementation of Transition Assistance Program," March 2014.

¹⁰ Chairman Carper, Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, Chair Tom Harkin, Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions, Letter to the Honorable Jessica L. Wright, Acting Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, January 13, 2014.



**Easter Seals Military and Veterans Services & Easter Seals Dixon Center
1425 K Street, NW, Suite 200
Washington, DC 20005**

Written Testimony of:

**David W. Sutherland, Colonel, U.S. Army, Retired
Chairman and Co-Founder, Easter Seals Dixon Center**

Before the

**Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity
Committee on Veterans' Affairs
United States House of Representatives**

On

“A Review of the Transition Assistance Program”

January 27, 2015

Chairman Wenstrup, Ranking Member Takano and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for inviting me to discuss the transition and reintegration needs of America's service members and the public-private community partnerships needed to help make a soldier's transition to civilian life seamless and, ultimately, successful.

My name is David Sutherland. I am representing Easter Seals Dixon Center as an independent contractor. I serve as the Chairman of Easter Seals Dixon Center, a catalyst for forging community partnerships and harnessing local supports to assist veterans and their families to succeed where they live. Easter Seals is a leading non-profit organization that provides local services and supports to empower veterans, people with disabilities and others to reach their potential. Annually, Easter Seals provides direct services to about 165,000 veterans and military families. I co-founded Easter Seals Dixon Center in 2012 to leverage Easter Seals' nationwide network of community-based program locations and to work with private and public sector leaders across the U.S to create better ways for our veterans and military families to succeed in meaningful employment, education and overall wellness. During that time, Easter Seals Dixon Center has impacted the quality of life of nearly one million veterans and military families.

Before my work with Easter Seals Dixon Center, I had the privilege of serving in the United States Army for nearly three decades, including several combat tours in Desert Shield/Desert Storm and as a Brigade Commander during surge operations in Iraq during Operation Iraqi Freedom. My final assignment was as direct report and Special Assistant to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) from January 2010 through June 2012, where I focused on Warrior and Family Support and co-authored a white paper, *The Sea of Goodwill: Matching Donors to Needs*. In *The Sea of Goodwill*, my co-author, Major John Copeland, and I described a reintegration trinity of education, employment and access to health care which serves to improve the quality of life for returning service members and their families.

Through my JCS work with Admiral Michael Mullen and General Martin Dempsey and now as Chairman of Easter Seals Dixon Center, I regularly meet with service members (as they prepare to transition into communities), veterans and their families as well as with leaders of government, business and the social services network from the very communities these separating service members and their families will return to and call home. My team and I have also visited and worked with nearly 600 communities in the past five years to assist efforts to build public awareness, encourage community involvement, and promote community services. Our work with private, public and social organizations have been the inspiration for programs such as the Administration's Joining Forces initiative, JP Morgan Chase 100,000 jobs initiative, Robin Hood Foundation's Veterans Initiative in New York City, Rally Point 6 outside the gates of Joint Base Lewis McCord in Washington state, and thousands of other supportive efforts. **This experience and these coordinated efforts confirm my belief that the solution to the successful transition of service members lies in America's communities.** I found that what typically separates a transition success story from a transition story of struggle and crisis lies in how a community welcomes, connects with, and responds to service members leaving the military. We don't need more organizations but rather we need to harness existing community-based programs and get organizations from across society to be inclusive of those touched by military service – to use our leadership, locally, to bring these organizations together to achieve collective impact.

The federal government has a vital responsibility to ensure transitioning service members are prepared for their next, post-military step. Recent efforts to expand and improve the Transition

Assistance Program (TAP) are critically important. However, completion of TAP should be viewed as the beginning, not the end of the federal government's involvement in the reintegration process. The hardest work begins once the service members leave their final TAP session and after they have received the commander's Capstone blessing. The minute they step off the military base, they are in community. That is where the community transition starts. My testimony will highlight innovative community solutions that promote successful reintegration and will share ways the federal government – through congressional action and influence – can further support effective public-private partnerships to increase access to education, employment and health care for transitioning service members, veterans and their families. As an independent contractor, I have been authorized by Easter Seals, Inc. to present this testimony on behalf of their Military and Veterans Services.

REDESIGNED TRANSITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM A HEALTHY START:

The federal government's primary tool in helping service members transition into civilian life is the Transition Assistance Program. I commend Congress and the Administration for its recent steps to improve TAP, both in making it mandatory through the Veterans Opportunity to Work (VOW) to Hire Heroes Act and in redesigning TAP to include optional, tailored tracks focused on education, entrepreneurship and technical training. The updated TAP program is an improvement over the previous version. The sessions on translating military skills to civilian occupations (MOC Crosswalk) and on developing a budget and a plan for retirement (Personal Financial Planning) are essential components. The addition of specific next-step tracks that offer tailored instruction based on whether the individual plans to pursue a college education, seek an industry-recognized credential or start a business is also very valuable. Easter Seals would support proposals aimed at providing service members with greater flexibility and relevant tools they will need for a smooth and successful transition.

My own transition experience came before many of the TAP improvements were implemented. I attended TAP sessions at Fort Belvoir in Virginia, not far from where we are today. I will never forget the experience – not because of the valuable information I received but rather for who I was paired with during my transition training. In the chair to my left was a young corporal. To my right, an Army staff sergeant. We were all about to enter the civilian world after serving in uniform. But that was where our similarities ended. I was a 29 year Army veteran with a Master's degree who had commanded at all levels, from platoon to brigade combat team. The young corporal enlisted fresh out of high school and also honorably served our nation. On this day, we received the same curriculum, the same benefits briefing and the same employment advice, despite our vastly different military experiences, educational backgrounds and the fact we were positioned to join the civilian labor force at different entry points. We did not benefit from the more focused, tailored training options that are now available under TAP.

MORE FOCUS NEEDED ON DESTINATION AND OUTCOMES:

I met a young Marine Lance Corporal named Gary who participated in the redesigned transition program. Gary attended TAP courses over a two-week period, including in-depth training on employment and the career technical training track. "Overall, the information was good. I'd rate it a B-minus or C-plus," Gary told me. "It'd earn a higher grade had it been more specific to where I was going – even just sending me off with a list of key resources, such as the location of the VA or the job service." The Kentucky native and his wife decided to put down roots in Cincinnati, which

was only an hour north of the small town he was raised. However, Gary's transition training – which he received in North Carolina – lacked any specific information or guidance on the destination of his transition to civilian life, other than an exercise where he had to identify three open jobs in Cincinnati from which he then developed a tailored resume and participated in a mock interview. The redesigned transition program Gary went through is known as Transition GPS. The "GPS" in the name stands for goals, plans and success. In the civilian world, the acronym stands for global positioning system. Nearly every driver owns a vehicle GPS device to help them find their destination. That's really the point of a car GPS: to help you get to where you are going. Yet in Gary's Transition GPS training, his destination was merely a footnote. Gary was equipped with basic tools, but there was never instruction, strategies or next steps for connecting to the community he would soon call home. More needs to be done to localize the TAP training for transitioning service members. In addition, TAP could be improved if the program measured outcomes instead of simply completion. A focus on TAP outcomes was part of U.S. House legislation that would later become the VOW to Hire Heroes Act. Veterans' Affairs Committee Chairman Jeff Miller's Veterans Opportunity to Work Act¹ (H.R. 2433 – 112th Congress) included a section on "Transition Assistance Program Outcomes" that required the Secretaries of Labor and Defense to develop a method to measure TAP outcomes, including length of unemployment of a separated service member, beginning salary of first civilian job, and length of time enrolled in college or training following military separation. The provision focused on participation as well as the next-step outcomes. As best I can tell, this provision did not make it into the final VOW to Hire Heroes Act (P.L. 112-56) that was eventually approved by Congress and signed into law on November 21, 2011.

Easter Seals Dixon Center Recommendation: Congress should adopt outcome measures for the Transition Assistance Program to ensure that the information and tools service members receive during TAP are effective, including a post-TAP follow-up to track whether the service member is employed, is starting a business or is receiving education and training. In addition, TAP should be expanded to offer exiting service members the option of attending a post-service community connection session in the actual community they now reside to introduce them to the resources, services and supports in that community (to address the lack of community information identified by Gary's experience). The optional community connection classes could be organized in collaboration with community and veterans service organizations or other government agencies.

FACILITATING CONNECTIONS TO THE COMMUNITY FOR REINTEGRATION:

Under current TAP standards, Gary – the young Marine whom I mentioned earlier – would have been recorded as a transition success. He attended TAP and demonstrated he met career readiness standards. He developed an integrated 12 month post-separation budget, identified his desired employment field and the training (commercial driver's license) he would need to secure his ideal job, and completed a professional resume and references. Gary was self-motivated and anxious to start his new life in Ohio with his wife and son. He and his wife had their own family transition plan and saved for the expenses of moving their belongings from North Carolina to Cincinnati. Part of their plan was to use his final military check (due on October 1, 2013) to cover transition bills, including the first month's rent and deposit for an apartment he lined up for his family while

¹ Veterans Opportunity to Work Act of 2011, H.R. 2433, 112th Congress, <http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/bdquery/z?d112:h.r.2433>:

still in North Carolina. The paycheck would also include a lump sum payment for his unused paid leave and was more than enough to cover these initial expenses. Once Gary was settled, he had a plan and the personal motivation to aggressively pursue full-time employment.

Unfortunately, Gary's smooth transition derailed while en route to Cincinnati. Gary and his family pulled up to the apartment in their moving truck only to learn his check bounced. His automatic deposit didn't go through and so they couldn't move in and unload their belongings as they had planned. Gary learned later that the hiccup was a result of a processing delay due to the 2013 federal government shutdown. The matter would eventually get resolved but not before the deposit delay left he and his family homeless, broke and in crisis. They couldn't afford to keep the rental truck and so they unloaded their belongings in cheaper storage outside of Cincinnati. For the next two weeks Gary, his wife and son resorted to sofa surfing from one friend and family member to another, often having to sleep in separate locations due to space limitations. The transient and remote nature of their temporary living arrangements complicated Gary's job hunt.

Marines are known for their honor, courage and determination. And so asking for help and admitting struggle were especially hard for Gary. But with no options and a strong desire to get his life back on track, Gary made a call... a call to his community. "I'll never forget it," Gary said. "It was 2:30 in the morning. I was on a friend's sofa, wide-awake, when I made the call." He called United Way's 211 and asked for help. Less than six hours after placing his call, Gary received a follow up phone call from a specialist from Operation Vets THRIVE, an Easter Seals TriState program I helped to form that connects Cincinnati area veterans with local services and supports to help during their transition. The Easter Seals specialist learned of Gary's financial situation and quickly connected him to three community organizations that provided immediate assistance for the first month's rent, the initial security deposit and other pressing needs. He was then introduced to an Easter Seals Operation Vet THRIVE employment developer who had an immediate lead for a temporary work assignment in his chosen field: transportation. Gary jumped in his car and drove to the company, where he filled out a job application. Within the week, Gary was hired and working 40 hours a week. He slowly built up his resources and confidence. Easter Seals and the Cincinnati community rallied to assist Gary and his family to turn their situation around in a positive and dramatic way. Gary sent me an update last week with the news that he completed accredited training, secured his commercial driver's license and is working full time as an over-the-road truck driver. Gary is firmly on the path toward greatness thanks to a little community support during his transition. Gary and his generation of veterans are wired to serve and represent the best of our society. They have accepted the call to duty and have honorably served our nation against defying odds and enormous challenges. Easter Seals Dixon Center believes our transitioning service members, veterans and their families can thrive where they live and that communities play a key role in the reintegration.

I was drawn to the work of Easter Seals for its national scope and its long-standing commitment to serving veterans and military families. Easter Seals began serving veterans following World War II to address gaps in service to veterans returning home with service-connected disabilities. Today, our nation's veterans face similar challenges and once again Easter Seals is there, this time by mobilizing its national network of 73 affiliates and 550 community-based service sites through employment, caregiving, and transition services. Easter Seals was selected by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to train family caregivers of seriously injured Post-9/11 veterans through a program authorized by Congress. Since 2011, Easter Seals has trained more than 26,500 family caregivers across the country and we continue to expand our impact in this area through

partnerships with the Elizabeth Dole Foundation, USO and others. Easter Seals also specializes in helping veterans, homeless veterans, and military spouses develop new work skills and find jobs in their communities through existing programs and new efforts I've helped grow in Ohio, Indiana, New York, Minnesota, the District of Columbia, Virginia and California. And Easter Seals has developed and expanded its Veterans Count philanthropic effort to raise local private dollars to provide critical and timely financial assistance to veterans, service members and their families when no government or other resources are available throughout New England. Veterans Count started as an idea by an Easter Seals volunteer in New Hampshire who had served in the military and wanted a way to help service members and veterans who were struggling and just needed a little assistance during transition. Easter Seals Veterans Count now operates in multiple communities across two states.

Easter Seals Dixon Center is helping to further Easter Seals' efforts by working in communities to build partnerships and share innovative approaches to assist those who have served. Simply put, we believe we are stronger by working with other like-minded organizations. The sea of goodwill exists across the country with groups like Easter Seals Dixon Center who are willing to work together for the greater good within their local communities. We saw it in Cincinnati in its response to the needs of one young Marine and we are seeing it in towns and cities across the United States.

COMMUNITY COLLABORATION CREATES EFFECTIVE TRANSITION MODELS:

Operation Vet THRIVE in Cincinnati was developed with the support of community foundations that recognized the tremendous needs of America's service members and veterans. One of the first action steps we took in launching Operation Vets THRIVE was to host a series of community convening meetings to mobilize the community in support of veterans by identifying existing social programs and gaps in services. This year-long community asset mapping process brought together more than 60 agencies and 200 individuals who regularly communicated and collaborated to identify opportunities and needs around employment, education, health, housing, and family support. In May 2014, the community work group released an extensive community report that included, among other things, a resource inventory and recommendations for continued and more effective collaborations. We were pleased that Chairman Wenstrup shared his personal transition experience in the introduction of this community report. As you may recall, when Gary made his call in the middle of the night, he did not call Easter Seals directly. He called United Way, one of the collaborators in this community process. Recognizing Gary's needs, United Way made a warm handoff to Easter Seals TriState, which also connected to other community organizations, including Goodwill, The Thank You Foundation and USA Cares, for the emergency financial assistance. The veteran made a single call but behind the scenes that veteran was connected to the organizations and programs in that community that best matched his needs. This is the no-wrong-door approach to veteran services that we are facilitating through Easter Seals Dixon Center.

Over the past four years, the leadership of Easter Seals Dixon Center has worked with more than 560 communities, over 20,000 organizations and thousands of like-minded individuals. We understand the grassroots, community-based solutions that work, and those that do not. We completed comprehensive community asset mapping processes in Indianapolis, Indiana and St. Cloud, Minnesota as a result of support through Newman's Own Foundation, the foundation created by the late actor, Paul Newman. These collaborations are already leading to new and more effective reintegration services for veterans and transitioning service members, including a recent

federal grant award to Easter Seals Crossroads in Indianapolis to help address the employment and support needs of unemployed veterans who are homeless or at-risk of homelessness.

Like in the case of Gary, the community became the final catchall after all other systems and programs missed. Unfortunately, there is no mechanism for the social service network and other community organizations to actively engage in support of these service members. While we are creating warm handoffs in the private sector, there is no warm handoff between TAP and the community. There needs to be a more effective way of connecting the separating service member to the community he or she is planning to go – either prior to or during their transition. The Department of Defense, for example, is not designed to provide these follow-along community supports, but some type of handoff within the community to the state director of veteran services, American Job Center staff or local veteran service organizations could help promote smoother transitions. This handoff could be an optional follow-along for service members who sign a personal information disclosure form stating they want to disclose their information to the community they are transitioning into for additional community-based assistance during their transition. This disclosure form could also be the mechanism to help implement my earlier recommendation of an optional community connection TAP session held in the community where the recently transitioned service member lives.

Easter Seals Dixon Center Recommendation: Congress should authorize and allocate funding to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs to support communities in asset mapping and community collaboration around veteran services and programs to ensure that however a veteran connects to the community their call for assistance is answered and effectively addressed locally. In addition, Congress should push for changes to TAP to give service members the options of sharing their contact information to the community they are transitioning into to promote greater transition success.

VETERAN REINTEGRATION NEEDS BEYOND TRANSITION:

While this hearing is focused on the immediate transition needs of separating service members I want to raise a growing gap in services that exists for veterans who are experiencing serious reintegration challenges long after their combat missions and separations from the military. While the federal government and communities can and must do more to assist those who have recently transitioned or are scheduled to exit the military, we must also recognize that reintegration challenges often surface months or years after the initial transition. Communities need to be there to support these veterans and their families before their situations turn crisis and require more intensive and expensive interventions. VA Secretary Robert McDonald described at the National Press Club² that the peak demand for VA services from a veteran who served in a war occurs 40 years from the end of the war. However, early intervention and regular access to community-based services throughout the lifetime of a veteran can help minimize or alleviate this peak demand.

Easter Seals works regularly with veterans where challenges surface years after they served our nation. Their initial transition was smooth and seamless but issues rise later on – often when they feel under siege on the home front due to a broken relationship, lost job or other stress. These veterans rely on and often turn to their communities for assistance to help them thrive again. Some

² U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Secretary Robert McDonald, National Press Club speech, <http://www.c-span.org/video/?322615-1/national-press-club-luncheon-veterans-affairs-secretary-robert-mcdonald>

communities are prepared to embrace them and connect them to the services and supports they need to succeed. Others remain unprepared or lack resources to intervene in an effective way. The federal government should support these communities by expanding and funding care coordination models that can effectively connect with and meet the needs of veterans and their families before their situations turn crisis, including direct referrals to the VA or other community services.

Congress has done an effective job in developing and funding programs to assist veterans through community-based services and supports when they have hit crisis. For example, the Supportive Services for Veterans Families (SSVF) at the Department of Veterans Affairs provides grants to community organizations to provide care coordination and supportive services to veteran families who are homeless or at-risk for homeless. The Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Program (HVRP) at the U.S. Department of Labor provides grants to community organizations to provide employment supports and supportive services to unemployed veterans who are homeless or at-risk of homelessness. Both programs are effective because of the public-private care coordination model that recognizes the myriad reasons a veteran can become homeless, from poverty and lack of support from family or friends to substance use or mental health challenges.

However, both of these programs target veterans when they have hit a crisis situation and when they are the hardest-to-serve. All veterans that seek help in their communities should have access to early intervention and supportive services through a SSVF/HVRP-like community model. Easter Seals welcomes the VA's implementation of the Section 506 pilot program authorized through Public Law 111-163 to increase the coordination of services and benefits to assist veterans who are transitioning from military service to civilian life. Congress authorized four types of locations in the P.L. 111-163 pilot: rural areas, areas with populations that have a high proportion of minority group representation, areas with populations that have a high proportion of individuals who have limited access to health care, and areas that are not in close proximity to an active duty military installation. The two-year pilot (which the VA has implemented as the Rural Veterans Coordination Pilot) is further recognition that reintegration success lies in communities and that the federal government has a responsibility to help those communities effectively respond to the needs of their residents who are veterans.

***Easter Seals Dixon Center Recommendation:** Congress should expand community-based care management and supportive services models to address the unmet needs of veteran families. Congress could take immediate steps by extending the time-limited Section 506 pilot program (P.L. 111-163) and by expanding the pilot to all authorized community locations, including the use of multi-service site grants to test service delivery efficiencies.*

CONCLUSION:

My military service over two wars informs me about the difficult challenges facing America's transitioning service members and veterans and motivates me to help empower them to achieve their capacity for greatness. Effectively addressing the reintegration needs of transitioning service members and veterans will require attention, energy and resources. But every veteran matters. Communities are trying to respond but they need additional support from Congress to promote public-private partnerships and to increase access to community-based services and supports. As I discussed, Congress can start by:

- Establishing outcome measurements and increasing community connection within TAP, including an optional community-connection follow along session;
- Authorizing and funding asset mapping grants to communities and community organizations; and
- Extending and expanding programs such as the Rural Veterans Coordination Pilot (P.L. 111-163 Section 506 pilot) to address ongoing reintegration needs through community-based care coordination and supportive services.

Thank you for your leadership and for all you have done to help improve the transition and reintegration of America's service members and veterans. This is important work, but the reward of our hard work is in the altered lives of veterans like Gary. Their lives are better because of our collective efforts and attention. Their successes are what motivate us to continue our expansion of public-private partnerships to make sure all veterans and transitioning service members get the assistance they need during transition to thrive and grow in their communities. Thank you again. I am pleased to take your questions.

David W. Sutherland, U.S. Army, Retired
Co-Founder and Chairman, Easter Seals Dixon Center
Founder and President, Sutherland Partnership

Colonel David W. Sutherland is the co-founder and Chairman of Easter Seals Dixon Center and actively contributes to numerous national veteran and military family committees and boards. Sutherland speaks in communities at universities, businesses and conferences around the country as a vocal advocate and leader for transformational change. He is a vocal advocate for our service members, military veterans, their families, and the families of our fallen.

Colonel Sutherland culminated his 29 years of service following Brigade Command, as the Special Assistant to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff with principle focus on Warrior and Family Support. By visiting hundreds of communities and assisting thousands of organizations, he created a nationwide network of support utilizing grassroots solutions for veterans and their families.

Awards and decorations include, among others, the Bronze Star Medal with oak leaf cluster, Purple Heart, Ranger Tab, Combat Infantryman's Badge Second Award and Senior Parachutist Badge. He is also the 2008 Freedom Award recipient presented by the No Greater Sacrifice Foundation and the 2011 Meritorious Service Award recipient presented by the National Coalition for Homeless Veterans for his work on behalf of returning service members, veterans, military families and families of the fallen.

He holds a Bachelor's degree from Bowling Green State University in History and Economics and a Masters in Strategic Studies.

Contact Information

David W. Sutherland, Colonel, U.S. Army, Retired
Co-Founder and Chairman, Dixon Center
Founder and President, Sutherland Partnership
www.TheDixonCenter.org

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Sutherland Partnership, Inc., for which David Sutherland is founder and president, does not receive any Federal grants or contracts. Easter Seals, Inc., for which David Sutherland is an independent contractor, received contracts (\$2,414,029/2014; \$2,366,202/2013) through the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs to operate the National Veteran Caregiver Training Program (NVCTP), mandated by the Caregivers and Veterans Omnibus Health Services Act of 2010 (PL 111-163).

**STATEMENT OF
CURTIS L. COY
DEPUTY UNDER SECRETARY FOR ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY
VETERANS BENEFITS ADMINISTRATION (VBA)
DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS (VA)
BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS**

January 27, 2015

Chairman Wenstrup, Ranking Member Takano, and other Members of the Subcommittee, I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss VA's implementation and current status of the revised Transition Assistance Program (TAP). Accompanying me today is Ms. Rosye Cloud, Acting Director of the VBA/Department of Defense (DoD) Program Office.

Background

It is critical that today's Servicemembers are appropriately prepared to transition to civilian life as they seek a productive post-military career. In November 2011, Congress passed and the President signed the VOW to Hire Heroes Act of 2011 (VOW Act), which included steps to improve the existing TAP for Servicemembers. Among other things, the VOW Act made participation in TAP mandatory for all Servicemembers (except in certain limited circumstances). Mandatory components of TAP now include pre-separation counseling, two VA briefings on benefits, and a Department of Labor (DOL) Employment Workshop. Under the auspices of a memorandum of understanding executed in 2014, VA, DOL, DoD, Department of Homeland Security, Department of Education (ED), Small Business Administration (SBA), U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM), and other stakeholders are coordinating on the implementation of the redesigned TAP program to help strengthen and expand information, counseling, and support available to transitioning Servicemembers.

In December 2011, a joint Veterans Employment Initiative Task Force provided four major recommendations for a redesigned TAP:

- Adopt career-readiness standards for transitioning Servicemembers that capitalize on the skills and experiences that Servicemembers gain during military service, and align them with personal goals.
- Implement a revamped TAP curriculum, now known as Transition GPS, to provide Servicemembers with a set of value-added training programs, and services to equip them with the skills they need to successfully pursue post-military goals.
- Implement a Capstone event to verify and validate the outcomes of the training provided in the Transition GPS construct.

- Implement a Military Life Cycle transition model to prepare Servicemembers for transition over the entire span of their military career, rather than during just the last few months of their service in the military.

Implementation of these overarching recommendations is currently transforming our support of Servicemembers' transition to Veteran status into a well-planned, organized progression that prepares them to make informed career decisions and advances them toward achievement of their goals.

Implementation of VA's Portion of Transition GPS

VA continues to proactively support all transitioning Servicemembers to include Active Duty, National Guard, and Reserve Component, as mandated by the VOW Act. VA required assistance in developing the new Transition GPS curricula to adhere to recommended adult-learning principles, a facilitator training program, and a quality assurance program to monitor briefer performance. A contract vehicle was put in place to provide the resources and expertise to develop the new program elements and to deploy VA Benefits Advisors worldwide. Responsibilities of the Benefits Advisors include delivering the mandatory VA Benefits Briefings, facilitating the Career Technical Training Track (CTTT), supporting Capstone and Military Life Cycle events and briefings, and providing individual assistance to transitioning Servicemembers upon request. We have deployed over 300 Benefits Advisors to provide transition support to over 250 military installations worldwide. Our contractor shares VA's commitment to Veteran employment, as the current network of contract VA Benefits Advisors is comprised of over 95 percent Veterans and 4 percent military spouses.

VA met the requirements of the VOW Act by making its legacy TAP briefings available to 100 percent of transitioning Servicemembers effective November 21, 2012, while concurrently developing and deploying a revised TAP curriculum through a phased roll-out expansion. The revised curriculum now consists of the new 4-hour VA Benefits I Briefing, an overview of all VA benefits, and the 2-hour VA Benefits II Briefing, which provides in-depth focus on health care, eBenefits, and disability compensation. VA fully deployed the revised briefings, through a phased roll-out, to all military installations worldwide as of December 2013. Additionally, in March 2014, VA, with support on the curriculum design from partner agencies, fully deployed the additional CTTT, a course designed for Servicemembers wishing to transition into technical fields that may require additional credentials, but not a 4-year degree.

To meet the needs of National Guard and Reserve Component members, VA deployed Benefits Advisors to all formal demobilization locations (Fort Bliss, Fort Hood, and Joint-Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst). In addition, VA rapidly responds to Service requests for briefings at Yellow Ribbon and community-based events, as well as to short notice (same-day notification) demobilization events on installations.

VA's Portion of Transition GPS Curriculum

Benefits Briefings

VA Benefits I Briefing includes information on education, health care, compensation, life insurance, and home loans, as well as vocational rehabilitation and employment benefits. VA Benefits II Briefing provides an overview of VA health care and services and the disability compensation process and explores MyHealtheVet, the eBenefits portal, VA's Web-based benefits application system, and the new Veterans Employment Center. The theme for each program is eligibility requirements and the application process.

VA is responsible for the development and delivery of the 2-day CTTT workshop designed for those seeking job-ready skills and industry-recognized credentials in shorter-term training programs, but not 4-year degree programs. The workshop guides Servicemembers through a variety of decisions involved in identifying a technical career, determining credentialing requirements, researching and applying to training programs, exploring funding options, to include VA benefits that may assist in reaching their goals, and finally creating a plan for success.

VA and its partner agencies also developed a virtual curriculum that is hosted on the Joint Knowledge Online Web site, enabling Servicemembers to access the curriculum from remote locations and allowing participants to access the courses according to their own schedules and review the training at their own pace. VA posted the complete Transition GPS curriculum on the eBenefits portal, so Veterans and family members can access materials. VA also worked with the Army to deliver virtual briefings via live-meeting sessions to Servicemembers who are deployed to remote locations without access to VA Benefits Advisors.

VA Capstone Overview

Capstone is intended to serve as a standardized end-of-career experience to validate, verify, and bolster transition training and other services to prepare Servicemembers for civilian careers, including those services delivered throughout the entire span of a Servicemember's career, from accession to post-military civilian life. In order to coordinate support for Capstone events and provide support for a warm hand-over, VA has assigned a Benefits Advisor Capstone Liaison to each military installation where Transition GPS is delivered. The Capstone activity can be completed one-on-one or in group events, and VA supports both options. Benefits Advisors verify that Servicemembers previously completed the VA Benefits briefings, welcome them to the VA community, and provide local points of contact for future assistance and issues.

Individual assistance involves answering specific questions that may arise after completing the VA benefits briefings, aiding in the registration and navigation of the eBenefits portal and the Veterans Employment Center, and assisting with online benefits applications. VA Benefits Advisors also connect Servicemembers who need additional support with disability claims or other VA services to the appropriate Veterans Service Organization or VA representative at our VA regional offices, VA medical

centers, Vet Centers, or the National Call Center, and refer them to DoD points of contact and resources. The individual transition support includes services offered under the former Disability Transition Assistance Program to Servicemembers who are wounded, ill, or injured, or who may not be physically capable of sitting through the entire 6-hours VA Benefits Briefings.

VA Military Life Cycle (MLC) Overview

VA and its partner agencies continue to coordinate to refine implementation of the MLC transition model. The MLC transition model capitalizes on military training and development opportunities and leverages Transition GPS offerings to ensure that Servicemembers are fully successful. Through the use of both military career development opportunities and Transition GPS products, Servicemembers will develop the military skills they require for a successful military career, while mastering key career-readiness standards throughout military service.

VA has proposed involvement in certain MLC touch points, such as arrival at first permanent duty station, re-enlistment, promotion, deployment and redeployment, mobilization or activation, demobilization or deactivation, transfers between Active and Reserve Components, and other significant life events. The agency partners are continuing to collaborate on the appropriate touch points in the military life cycle model. We anticipate delivering customized overview briefings at these Service-coordinated touch points, to provide information on VA benefits and available contacts on installation. VA is providing MLC briefings upon request by military installation leadership.

The Veterans Employment Center

After a full review of existing employment Web sites, an interagency decision was made to use the VA-DoD eBenefits system as the logical place to house the Veterans Employment Center (VEC). The eBenefits system provides access to lifelong benefits for Servicemembers, Veterans, and their beneficiaries, to include the GI Bill that helps link education and training to employment.

The VEC is the Federal Government's single online tool for connecting transitioning Servicemembers, Veterans, and their families to meaningful career opportunities. The VEC is the first Government-wide product that brings together a reputable cadre of public and private employers with real job opportunities, and provides transitioning Servicemembers, Veterans, and their families with the tools to translate their military skills into plain language and build a profile that can be shared – in real time – with employers who have made a public commitment to hire Veterans. In connection with the First Lady and Dr. Biden's Joining Forces initiative, VA, DOL, DoD, ED, SBA, and the Office of Personnel Management collaborated to design, develop, and incorporate the best features of existing online employment tools into the VEC.

The Administration has made it a priority, and so has VA, DOL, DoD, and the Military Services. We are connecting Veterans and their spouses to more than 1.7 million jobs

that are open and waiting to be filled right now. VA also took action in June 2014, shortly after the launch of the VEC on April 23, 2014, to incorporate the VEC into all VA Transition GPS briefings and classes. All of the VA Benefits Advisors have been trained on how to work with transitioning Servicemembers to ensure they have an updated profile in the VEC. DoD and DOL updated their Transition GPS curricula with the VEC information, which was rolled out November 2014.

This addition of the VEC into the Transition GPS curriculum has already increased profiles and usage of the site. Since inception, the VEC had received nearly 2.5 million unique pageviews, and over 600,000 individuals have used the site. Our visitors are also spending more time on the site, originally only viewing about 5 pages per session to viewing over 12 pages per session currently. We are encouraged to see our visitors explore the site in more detail as they grow in familiarity to its features and the services it has to offer.

The VEC is the bridge for transitioning Servicemembers when they complete their Transition GPS curriculum and transition into the civilian workforce. They begin their search for internships, on-the-job training, apprenticeships, and jobs while still on active duty with the potential to take advantage of and gain skills through the DoD SkillBridge authority. This will only increase their economic opportunities with employers committed to hiring them, connecting them to meaningful employment and careers.

Measuring the Quality of Briefings and VA Benefits Advisors

VA is implementing a comprehensive approach for quality assurance to ensure the curriculum and training are of the utmost quality, and that the performance of VA Benefits Advisors also excels. The quality plan utilizes a robust and standardized set of processes for evaluating program activities, ensuring consistent, high-quality instruction and support. The plan sets a framework for continuous monitoring that includes planned oversight visits conducted by VA to ensure evaluation of all activities carried out in support of Transition GPS. Benefits Advisors complete a rigorous training program before being placed on the briefing rotation. Benefits I and II training consists of pre-requisite study of content knowledge and 80 hours of classroom-based instruction. Benefits Advisors are required to demonstrate their proficiency on a written examination of the materials and delivery of briefings. VA developed a standard evaluation rubric to assess Benefits Advisor performance. The rubric measures proficiency in areas such as content, knowledge of content, facilitation and platform skills, as well as professionalism and classroom preparation. Additionally, the CTTT training is highly interactive and consists of 120 hours of content study and practice.

Conclusion

VA continues to work with our partner agencies to assist with the transition of Servicemembers from military to civilian life. TAP is designed to give our Servicemembers and their families an opportunity to learn more about the benefits they have earned, identify benefits that fit their individual needs, and equip them with a plan for success outside of the military. VA continually improves the quality and breadth of our outreach services to all components – Active Duty, Reserve, and National Guard. VA fully supports the efforts of the Administration and Congress to ensure that transitioning Servicemembers are ready for civilian life upon separation from the military, and will continue to implement initiatives to achieve that goal.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my statement. I would be pleased to answer any questions you or other Members of the Subcommittee may have.

STATEMENT
OF
TERESA W. GERTON
DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY FOR
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 27, 2015

Introduction

Good Morning Chairman Wenstrup, Ranking Member Takano, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee. Thank you for the opportunity to participate in today's hearing. As Deputy Assistant Secretary for Policy at the Office of Veterans' Employment and Training Service (VETS) at the Department of Labor (DOL or Department), I appreciate the opportunity to discuss the implementation of the revised Transition Assistance Program (TAP), Transition Goals, Plans, Success (GPS).

As the military drawdown continues through Fiscal Year (FY) 2017, the Department of Defense estimates that approximately 250,000 service members (including members of the Guard and Reserve) will leave the military annually. The brave men and women who serve our nation deserve a good job and a chance to utilize their unique skills to help build our economy. Yet, many separating service members face a difficult transition and struggle to find a job worthy of their talents in an improving, but still-challenging labor market.

Under the leadership of President Obama, the Administration is committed to ensuring that America fulfills its obligations to our returning service members, veterans, and their families by providing them with the services and support they need to successfully transition to the civilian workforce. The TAP redesign is an important part of the Administration's efforts to fulfill this commitment.

Transition Assistance Program (TAP) Employment Workshops

TAP, as codified under 10 U.S.C. 1144, is a collaborative effort led by the Departments of Labor, Veterans Affairs (VA), and Defense (DoD), aimed at providing separating service members and their spouses with the training and support they need to transition successfully to the civilian workforce. Through TAP, DOL brings its extensive expertise in employment services to bear to provide a comprehensive three-day Employment Workshop at U.S. military installations around the world.

Since the Department started providing Employment Workshops over 20 years ago, the number of workshops, participants, and locations has continued to grow. In 2003, TAP was expanded to

overseas military installations, and in FY 2005, courses were offered to returning members of the Reserve and National Guard via the 30, 60, and 90-day Yellow Ribbon Reintegration programs. Most recently, Congress passed and President Obama signed into law the “VOW to Hire Heroes Act of 2011” (VOW Act), which, among other things, made participation in the DOL Employment Workshop mandatory for most transitioning service members, including those demobilizing from the National Guard and Reserve Components.

Since the inception of the program, the Department has provided training and services through Employment Workshops to over 2.6 million separating or retiring service members and their spouses. Last year alone, DOL conducted more than 6,600 Employment Workshops for over 207,000 participants at 206 military installations worldwide. Of the 207,000 participants, more than 9,000 were National Guard and Reserve.

Veterans Employment Initiative (VEI) Task Force for a Career-Ready Military

In 2011, the President established the VEI Task Force to ensure the career readiness of transitioning service members. The Task Force consists of joint representation from DOL, DoD, VA, Department of Homeland Security (U.S. Coast Guard), the Department of Education, the Small Business Administration, and the Office of Personnel Management. The President approved the Task Force’s plan to strengthen and build upon the existing TAP program which is now known as Transition Goals, Plans, Success program or Transition GPS.

DOL Employment Workshops – Redesign

Simultaneously, the Department initiated a significant redesign of the DOL Employment Workshop (DOLEW) to make it more engaging and relevant in light of the unique challenges facing returning 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 deliver its Employment Workshops to ensure a standardized, high-quality professional cadre of facilitators.

DOL awarded a contract to GBX Consultants, Incorporated, a Service-Disabled Veteran Owned Small Business, in August 2012 for the facilitation of all DOL Employment Workshops at locations worldwide as part of TAP. The contract is a Base year plus four option years, Indefinite Delivery Indefinite Quantity (IDIQ), that runs through September 2017. DOL will recompet the contract during FY 2017. DOL monitors the performance through review of Transition GPS Participant Survey results, regular site assessments by DOL federal field staff, and input from DoD and military services stakeholders. DOL can report thus far that the vendor is executing the contract requirements in a satisfactory manner.

In FY 2013, the Department completed the conversion to contract facilitation, as well as the full implementation of the new DOL Employment Workshop curriculum at all military installations worldwide. The result is an enhanced Employment Workshop that provides a highly effective training approach and prepares service members for a successful transition to the civilian workplace.

Transition Goals, Plans, Success (GPS) Program

Under the current Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), the supporting agencies have a greater sense of their roles and responsibilities in support of Transition GPS,¹ which now includes four basic components to help service members prepare for separation and meet career readiness standards. They include (1) Pre-Separation Assessment and Counseling, (2) Transition GPS Core Curriculum; (3) Career Specific Additional Curriculum; and (4) CAPSTONE.

Pre-Separation Assessment and Counseling: Through the new transition program, separating service members will receive individual counseling to discuss their career goals and start their transition process. Each service member will be introduced to the programs and services available to them during their transition. In addition, each service member will begin 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 Workshops, the redesigned DOL Employment Workshop, and other modules. Transitioning service members will also undertake a Military Occupational Code Crosswalk to translate their military skills, training, and experience into civilian occupations, credentials, and employment. To enhance the existing electronic tools used for the crosswalk, DOL contracted with an organization to identify equivalencies between military and civilian jobs, as required by the VOW Act. The results of the military equivalencies study have enhanced the military-civilian crosswalk by enabling the mapping of a single military occupation into multiple civilian occupations based on an analysis of embedded skill sets in addition to the similarity of tasks performed.

Career-Specific Additional Curriculum: In addition to completing the Transition GPS Core Curriculum, service members also have the option of participating in a series of two day tailored tracks within the Transition GPS curriculum: (1) an Accessing Higher Education Track (provided by DoD), for those pursuing a higher education degree; (2) a Career Technical Training Track (provided by VA), for those seeking job-ready skills and industry-recognized credentials in shorter-term training programs; and (3) the "Boots to Business" Entrepreneurship track (provided by SBA), for those wanting to start a business.

CAPSTONE: Before their separation from the military, service members participate in a CAPSTONE event, which will involve chain of command verification that transitioning service members completed the Transition GPS curriculum and achieved Career Readiness Standards. Service members who require additional assistance will be referred to supplemental training

¹ Memorandum of Understanding Among the Departments of Defense, Veterans Affairs, Labor, Education, and Homeland Security (U.S. Coast Guard), the U.S. Small Business Administration, and the U.S. Office of Personnel Management, regarding the *Transition Assistance Program for Separating Service Members* (TAP MOU), of January 31, 2014.
<http://prhome.defense.gov/Portals/52/Documents/RFM/TVPO/files/TAP%20MOU%20Final%20January%2031,%202013.pdf>

opportunities. In addition, through the CAPSTONE event, service members will be offered a “warm handover” to appropriate federal, state, and local government agencies, such as the American Job Centers, as needed.

Transition GPS Core Curriculum: DOL Employment Workshop

The redesigned DOL Employment Workshop includes three days of classroom instruction that is specifically geared toward the mechanics of getting a good job. On the first day of the Employment Workshop, participants develop their “Change Management Plan” and identify their overall strategy for transitioning into the workforce. They explore careers that complement the skills and expertise gained through their military service. Participants also develop a master job application from which they build targeted resumes, and they learn how to research the job market using the latest search tools.

On the second day of the Employment Workshop, participants learn how to analyze the job market and use social media in job searches and networking. Instructors discuss the difference between applications and resumes, and participants practice completing applications and developing targeted resumes. On the third day of the Employment Workshop, participants learn about special veterans’ hiring authorities and how the Federal job application process differs from the private sector. Finally, participants work extensively on their interviewing skills and end the workshop with a mock interview exercise.

During the third quarter of FY 2014, VETS conducted a pilot with the Army’s Warrior Transition Command, Army Installation Management Command (IMCOM), and the Ft Bragg Army Career and Alumni Program (ACAP) to provide a modified DOLEW to the wounded warrior population residing at Ft Bragg, NC. That population’s medical conditions and appointment schedules made it very difficult for them to attend a regular 3-day workshop. The DOLEW curriculum was segmented into 6 modules taught in 3-hour blocks of instruction spaced out over several weeks. The pilot was well-received and VETS is preparing to expand the delivery of this modified workshop to additional Army installations, as well as the other military service branches this Fiscal Year.

In January 2015, the Department updated the Employment Workshop curriculum to include information about disability-related employment and education protections. DOL had already included that information in the online virtual curriculum and has updated the brick and mortar curriculum to reflect the additional information. Additionally, the updated Employment Workshop curriculum ties in the online Veteran Employment Center resource, a single veterans portal for employment resources jointly developed by the VA, DOL and DoD, for use in the participants’ transition.

DOL is pleased to report that the new Employment Workshop curriculum has been well received. From its introduction in fiscal year 2013 through the fourth quarter of fiscal year 2014, over 350,000 transitioning service members experienced the new curriculum. Of the over 11,000 participants who most recently responded to a survey in FY 14 Q4, 91% reported that they would use what they learned in their own transition planning and 89% reported that the DOLEW

enhanced their confidence in transition planning. The data strongly suggest that the Department's revised Employment Workshop is meeting the high expectations of its audience.

American Job Center (AJC) Resources and CAPSTONE

Throughout the DOL Employment Workshop, instructors discuss relevant employment services, including those pertaining to dislocated workers, available to assist transitioning service members, veterans and their families both before, during, and after their separation from the military. All veterans, including recently separated service members, and eligible spouses, receive priority of service in DOL-funded employment and training programs. As a result, DOL offers continuous employment services support to veterans before and after they leave active duty and leverages department-wide programs to provide comprehensive job services.

Most of these programs and services are available through the nationwide network of nearly 2,500 American Job Centers (AJC). The AJCs serve as the cornerstone for the Nation's workforce investment system and provide a range of services including counseling, resume writing workshops, job skills assessments, occupational training, on-the-job training, and job placement services.

During the DOL Employment Workshop, service members will also download and receive a "Gold Card," which entitles them to enhanced intensive services for six months from AJC staff. Veterans with significant barriers to employment will receive intensive employment services at AJCs from Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program (DVOP) specialists funded through the Jobs for Veterans State Grants (JVSG) program. However, most veterans who receive services through the AJCs are served by programs funded by DOL agencies other than VETS.

As previously mentioned, if a service member is assessed as not meeting Career Readiness Standards during their CAPSTONE event, their commander can facilitate a "warm handover" of the service member to the public workforce system for a review of the employment services available through AJCs and to facilitate access to appropriate services. This warm handover is accomplished either through introduction to a local AJC staff member, or through a call from the service member to the DOL Toll-Free Help Line (1-877-USA-JOBS or 1-877-872-5627). Being identified as not meeting these standards also allows the service member to receive services from a DVOP regardless of their disability status or other significant barriers to employment.

The Toll-Free Help Line is prepared to assist service members by identifying and providing contact information for the AJC that is located closest to the base from which they are transitioning or to the community to which they will be transitioning, and to describe the services available through that AJC.

DOL Employment Workshop: Online Training Resources

While completely redesigning the classroom version of the Employment Workshop during FY 2013, DOL also completed the development and implementation of a virtual Employment Workshop. Working with the U.S. Army Soldier For Life – Transition Assistance Program (SFL-TAP) office, DOL began conducting regular synchronous virtual Employment Workshops.

This is the same three-day workshop delivered in real time in a virtual classroom setting using the Army's virtual classroom platform.

Along with the synchronous virtual workshop, DOL worked with DoD Joint Knowledge Online (JKO) to convert the Employment Workshop instructor-led classroom curriculum into an asynchronous online distance-learning format. This is a self-paced online version of the Employment Workshop that service members can use to reinforce and refresh what they have learned in the classroom. DOL has made the virtual curriculum available to all veterans and transitioning service members through the DOL VETS web site at <http://www.dol.gov/vets/programs/tap/index.htm>.

Additionally, the Department assisted in the development and ongoing improvement of the online Veterans Employment Center. The new online resource brings together a wealth of public and private job opportunities, a profile-builder, military skills translator, and detailed career and training resources together all in one place. In November 2013, the Department also launched a new veteran-focused resource page for workforce practitioners. The resource page, available at <http://veterans.workforce3one.org>, is hosted on Workforce3One, the Employment and Training Administration's on-line technical assistance and peer learning platform.

Off-Base Transition Training Pilot

Section 301 of the Dignified Burial and Other Veterans' Benefits Improvement Act of 2012, PL 112-260, January 10, 2013, authorized the Secretary of Labor to provide the DOL Transition Assistance Program Employment Workshop under 10 U.S.C. § 1144 to veterans and their spouses at locations other than military installations via a pilot program. DOL conducted this two-year pilot "Off-Base Transition Training" program so that the feasibility and advisability of providing such a program to eligible individuals at locations other than military installations can be assessed.

After considering the requirements of Section 301(c) of the Dignified Burial Act, including that at least two participant states have high unemployment among veterans, and accounting for geographic dispersion, DOL invited Georgia, Washington, and West Virginia to participate in the pilot. All three states accepted. DOL used its current TAP contract facilitator to provide the selected states with the standard 3-day DOL Employment Workshop for the Off-Base Transition Training program. As of December 31, 2014, 22 three-day workshops have been conducted under the pilot. DOL concluded the pilot on January 9, 2015 and will submit its final report to Congress in March 2015.

Outcome Tracking & Studies

DOL will continue to review feedback and evaluate the Employment Workshops on an ongoing basis to ensure that the curriculum remains relevant, learning is taking place, and service members feel prepared to transition from military service and pursue other career goals.

For example, in FY 2014, DOL implemented a standardized assessment tool to measure the delivery of Employment Workshops by contract facilitators. DOL staff conduct on-site

assessments, using the tool to rate instructors on 10 elements. The score, as well as any identified weaknesses or best practices are communicated to DOL leadership and the facilitation contractor.

In order to assess the facilities in which classes are taught, site assessment reports by DOL staff and the DOL contractor provide critical information on each classroom where a workshop is conducted – whether it allows for interaction between students and facilitators, provides computers or internet capability, and whether it is properly lit and climate controlled. This information allows DOL to work with military installations to adjust learning conditions if necessary.

Additionally, DOL has awarded a contract to independently evaluate the Employment Workshop. The evaluation will include a quasi-experimental design (QED) impact analysis to analyze the impacts of the TAP DOLEW program on employment-related outcomes for separating military service members. It will also involve a small pilot to evaluate differential impacts of new delivery approaches for the TAP DOLEW (e.g., variations to the delivery of the program, the use of social media or other modes to enhance delivery or to serve as refreshers of TAP program lessons, or variations in the visual design of TAP program or outreach documents). The Employment Workshop Evaluation will utilize impact analysis to better understand the overall impact the Employment Workshop is having on transitioning service members' employment outcomes. Data for this evaluation is expected to be available in FY 2017.

Beginning in Program Year 2012, the TAP participant characteristic was added as a new reporting element for AJCs, indicating whether a participant attended the DOLEW within the past three years. This reporting element will be combined with other outcome measures such as:

- ▶ The percentage of TAP participants who are employed in the first quarter after exiting the AJC program;
- ▶ The percent of those entering employment who also are employed in the first and second quarters after entering employment; and
- ▶ Six-month average earnings.

State workforce systems are still implementing this new data field. Data are expected to be available in FY 2016 that will help assess the impact of attendance at the DOLEW on a veteran's successful transition to civilian employment.

In FY 2014, as a member of the TAP Senior Steering Group Curriculum Working Group, DOL began an annual curriculum evaluation. This included analysis of results from the web-based Transition GPS participant survey instrument developed by DoD, and input from various stakeholders. Based on this evaluation, DOL revised the Employment Workshop curriculum to include Equal Employment Opportunity and Americans with Disability Act content, the Veteran Employment Center content, and enhanced information on Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act training, dislocated worker training, and registered apprenticeship programs. The FY 2015 curriculum review will begin in April 2015, in conjunction with the TAP Senior Steering Group Curriculum Working Group's planned review of the entire Transition GPS curriculum.

Conclusion

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. Assistant Secretary Kelly, and I routinely visit TAP locations as we travel around the country and the world. Secretary Perez recently visited a TAP class in Kaiserslautern, Germany, and spoke with transitioning service members and their families about their TAP experience, and will continue to visit classes and meet with veterans and service members in his future travels. Additionally, Deputy Secretary Lu will be attending a local TAP class next week. 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.

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STATEMENT
OF
DR. SUSAN KELLY
DIRECTOR
TRANSITION TO VETERANS PROGRAM OFFICE
OFFICE OF THE UNDER SECRETARY OF DEFENSE FOR PERSONNEL AND
READINESS
DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE
BEFORE THE
HOUSE VETERANS AFFAIRS COMMITTEE
SUBCOMMITTEE
ON ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY
HEARING
ON THE
TRANSITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

January 27, 2015

Chairman Wenstrup, Ranking Member Takano, and Members of the Subcommittee, I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss the status of the implementation of the re-designed Transition Assistance Program (TAP), as requested by the Committee.

Re-designing this program in collaboration with the Departments of Veterans Affairs (VA), Labor (DOL), Education (ED), the Small Business Administration (SBA), and the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) brings together for the Department of Defense (DoD) a unique set of capabilities that will directly affect the approximately one million Service members who will separate from active duty over the next four years. These capabilities are now synchronized into a single program enabling successful transitions from Active Duty to civilian life, or, as in the case of our National Guard and Reserve Service members, a return to Reserve status.

The Veterans Employment Initiative Task Force, led by DoD and VA, stood down after investing two years re-designing the TAP to be a cohesive and outcome-based program that provides standardized curriculum, training, and services. A new TAP governance structure was established on October 1, 2013, with senior leaders from each federal agency partner participating as members of the TAP Inter-Agency Executive Council (EC) and Senior Steering Group (SSG). The EC and SSG are comprised of representatives of every Military Service, together with the Senior Enlisted Advisor to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. This structure commits all partners to the joint oversight and execution of TAP, while providing a means to continuously evaluate and improve the program to ensure it meets the needs of Service members.

The Department, together with our partner agencies, continues to make significant progress. One example is the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in January 2014 to record the long-term commitment of each partner to staff and resource their delivery of

the TAP at 206 military sites worldwide. This is a tremendous commitment! Our priority for the TAP redesign is to assist all eligible Service members, including members of the National Guard and Reserve, whether they are pursuing higher education, credentialing, finding a job, or starting a business.

REDESIGNED TAP

The Department of Defense, the Military Services, the U.S. Coast Guard, and our inter-agency partners are fully engaged in the implementation of the redesigned TAP. Previous testimony explained that the re-designed TAP complies with the VOW to Hire Heroes Act of 2011, now codified in Title 10 of the United States Code. This law requires Service members who are being discharged or released from Active Duty after the completion of that member's first 180 days of Active Duty (including members of the National Guard and Reserve) to participate in Pre-separation Counseling, VA Benefits Briefings, and the Department of Labor Employment Workshop (DOLEW).

Career Readiness Standards (CRS) are at the foundation of the re-designed TAP. The desired end state for all Service members is to meet CRS for their chosen civilian career path upon their departure from Military Service. The CRS are a set of documented activities that demonstrate the Service member is prepared to pursue personal post-separation career goals. An example is the preparation of a 12-month post-separation budget. These standards are verified during a "Capstone" event that should occur no later than 90 days prior to the Service member's separation date. If a Service member has not met the CRS, there is still time for further training or a "warm handover" to one or more of our inter-agency partners, who then will ensure that the

Service member receives all necessary and appropriate assistance, post-separation, to meet that individual's transition needs.

Transition GPS (Goals, Plans, Success) is a robust curriculum available to all Service members prior to separation. The Transition GPS curriculum builds the skills needed by every transitioning Service member to meet CRS and has been fully implemented across 206 Military sites in the United States and overseas. In addition to the VOW Act-mandated requirements, described above, Transition GPS includes modules in Personal Financial Planning for Transition and Military Occupational Code Crosswalk to civilian skills. During the sessions, Service members and transition staff also review a Service member's Individual Transition Plan (ITP), a document that is created, evolves, and is maintained by each Service members as he or she performs detailed assessments of their personal preparedness to achieve career goals after separation.

Recognizing the challenges that our Service members face as they separate, we developed three career-building training tracks: Accessing Higher Education, Career Technical Training, and Entrepreneurship. Transitioning Service members are provided the opportunity to participate in, and are strongly encouraged to take advantage of, one or more of these tracks as they align with a Service member's individual transition goals. The Accessing Higher Education Track (provided by DoD) is for Service members pursuing higher education. After completing this track, Service members are prepared to complete an application to an accredited educational institution, schedule a session with a counselor from an academic institution, or meet individually with education counselors. In the Career Technical Training Track (provided by VA), Service members pursuing technical training receive guidance in selecting technical training schools or programs that will lead to a license or certification in their chosen technical

career field. Service members interested in pursuing self-employment attend the SBA “Boots to Business” Entrepreneurship Track, where they receive information about the benefits and challenges of starting one’s own business. Upon completion of “Boots to Business,” Service members will have developed the initial components of a business feasibility plan. Graduates of “Boots to Business” are afforded the opportunity to enroll in an eight-week online, SBA-sponsored entrepreneurship course in which, under the instruction of renowned business educators, they will develop a viable business plan.

To ensure our curriculum remains relevant for all Service members, we established a process to collect Service member and subject matter expert feedback. We share this feedback and our analysis of it with our federal inter-agency partners through subject matter expert working groups. We use the input we received to revise the Transition GPS curriculum at regular intervals, ensuring that we deliver the best product and services possible to our transitioning Service members. The Senior Steering Group completed the first curriculum review in July 2014 and will repeat this review process annually. The results of the 2014 review are being applied to refresh the Transition GPS curriculum. All revised curriculum will be in place for access by Service members by the end of February 2015 in both brick and mortar and virtual delivery.

VIRTUAL CURRICULUM

We have duplicated all components of the “brick and mortar” classroom Transition GPS curriculum in a virtual curriculum (VC). Those Service members who might otherwise miss the opportunity to participate in Transition GPS, while on a ship at sea or assigned to a remote duty station anywhere across the globe, can now access an interactive VC designed with the principles

of adult learning in mind. This virtual curriculum meets the same standards and learning objectives as the “brick and mortar” Transition GPS sessions. The curriculum includes knowledge checks to ensure Service members are learning and benefitting from their “virtual” experience. This VC capability was an inter-agency undertaking, and the Department is grateful to our partners for their significant contributions to this effort.

DoD uses its Joint Knowledge Online (JKO) website to host the Transition GPS VC. We deliberately chose a virtual platform that we knew Service members already used for online military training. The choice of JKO conveys the message that Service members will be expected to complete transition preparation training just as they are required to complete other military training while on Active Duty. Veterans and military spouses also have access to the VC, which is hosted on both the VA eBenefits and the DOL Veterans Employment Training Service (VETS) websites. The Transition GPS VC was launched in October 2013. To date, more than 50,000 Service members have accessed the Transition GPS VC and have completed more than 185,000 curriculum modules.

MILITARY LIFE CYCLE MODEL

The last component of the re-designed TAP is the implementation of the Military Life Cycle (MLC) transition model. This will mark a major cultural shift for the Department. Rather than concentrating all transition preparation in the final months of service, the MLC model will align key transition preparation activities with pre-determined “touch points” built into the Service member’s life-cycle process unique to each Military Service.

In Fiscal Year (FY) 2014, TAP inter-agency partners and the Office of the Secretary of Defense agreed to those critical touch points throughout a Service member’s career at which

transition preparation would occur. The individual Services then developed their MLC implementation plans to incorporate transition-related activity at the following key touch points:

- (1) First permanent duty station (AC)/First home station (RC)
- (2) Re-enlistment
- (3) Promotion
- (4) Deployment, redeployment, mobilization/activation, demobilization/deactivation
- (5) Change of duty station
- (6) Major life events (e.g., change in family status), and
- (7) Retirement, separation, or release from active duty

Each Service's implementation plan also outlined how leaders and Service members would be held accountable for attaining CRS throughout the MLC transition preparation, and provided each Service's strategy for messaging this "transition preparation" culture change. For example, at the beginning of their military careers, all Service members will develop an Individual Development Plan (IDP), complete financial education requirements, and register for VA benefits on the eBenefits website. In December 2014, the Military Services reported to the White House that the MLC transition preparation was fully implemented at their installations.

The MLC TAP imposes new responsibilities for our inter-agency partners and participating Service members and leaders. Partner agencies will have the responsibility to keep their curriculum and services for transitioning Service members relevant and effective. Service members will have a responsibility to acquire and master career skills while actively filling gaps between their military duties and civilian goals. Commanders or their designees have the responsibility to verify that each Service member in their chain of command is prepared for transition to civilian life. They do this by verifying Service members have met CRS and have a

viable Individual Transition Program (ITP), or by ensuring that the Service member is provided a “warm handover” to the appropriate inter-agency partner.

INTER-AGENCY TAP EVALUATION STRATEGY

DoD, in collaboration with our inter-agency partners, developed a comprehensive interagency TAP evaluation strategy to address three overarching goals: accountability to ensure the program is delivered on military installations in accordance with law, policy, and leadership intent; customer satisfaction; and program effectiveness. Our plan focuses on the Transition GPS participant assessment, the use of site visits, and established performance measures. Additional long-term, outcome-oriented evaluations are also in development by VA, DOL, and SBA to further strengthen the inter-agency evaluation approach and ensure that TAP is continuously improved.

TRANSITION GPS PARTICIPANT ASSESSMENT RESULTS

The Transition GPS curriculum is currently taught in “brick and mortar” classrooms on military installations, as well as via the virtual curriculum (VC) on JKO. At the completion of each Transition GPS module, and again at the end of the entire program, each Service member is asked to complete a voluntary, anonymous online assessment. This assessment gathers Service member feedback on the effectiveness and value of Transition GPS, the quality of the facilitators and learning resources, and Service members’ intent to apply their learning toward their transition preparation and confidence in their ability to do so.

More than 198,000 Service members responded to this assessment from April 2013 to September 2014. Of the more than 42,000 Service members responding most recently to this

assessment during the last quarter of Fiscal Year 2014, 84 percent of the respondents were enlisted Service members, with approximately half (43 percent) at the rank of E1 to E4. Sixty-four percent of the respondents had 10 years or fewer of military service.

These demographics reinforce the importance of transition preparation. The majority of respondents were enlisted Service members with limited military experience, who might not have had the opportunity to establish a network of contacts in the civilian world and might not be fully aware of their post-military career options. Transition GPS is likely their first and primary source of information. These demographics drive home the critical importance of ensuring that the content of the Transition GPS meets participant needs. In addition, the modules must help transitioning Service members fully comprehend this information rapidly; 71 percent of the assessment respondents were six months or less away from their planned separation.

Service members responding to the assessment reported that the program was valuable to them. Specifically, 79 percent reported that Transition GPS was beneficial in helping them gain the information and skills they needed better to plan their transition and that they will use what they learned in their own transition planning. Seventy-eight percent reported that the program enhanced their confidence in transition planning, while 75 percent reported that it prepared them to transition from Active Duty in a career-ready status.

Respondents were also asked about each Transition GPS module in terms of their intent to apply material learned during the module and their confidence in doing so, as well as the quality of the facilitators and learning resources. Across all modules, 83 percent of transitioning Service members reported that the modules enhanced their confidence in transition planning. Likewise, across all of the modules, 86 percent of transitioning Service members reported that they would use what they learned in their own transition planning.

DoD and its partners provided extensive facilitation training to prepare staff to lead the Transition GPS modules, and feedback has been extremely positive. Across all modules, Service members reported that the facilitators for the Transition GPS program were professional (94 percent), knowledgeable (94 percent), and interacted well with the Service members completing the program (93 percent).

The learning resources for the Transition GPS program also were viewed favorably as a whole. Across all modules, 92 percent of respondents reported that they found the learning resources useful, including notes, handouts, and audio-visuals. Finally, it is important to note that Service members intend to revisit the materials provided during Transition GPS. Eighty-one percent of respondents reported that they now know how to access the necessary resources to find answers to transition questions that may arise in the next several months. We are pleased with this customer and program feedback, but we know that much work remains to be done.

SITE VISITS AND VIEWS FROM THE FIELD

As with the implementation of any large-scale program redesign, especially one requiring a significant culture shift, the biggest challenge to success is the effective communication of program changes and shifts required to adopt these changes and to make them work. DoD has made a concerted effort with our partners to solicit feedback from the field and staff to monitor this cultural shift.

We have conducted interviews, traveled as observation teams during Staff Assistance Visits (SAV), interviewed Commanders, and convened Service member, staff, and Senior Enlisted Advisor and Commander focus groups. We also receive regular feedback from TAP staff in the United States and overseas.

We have learned that Service members are aware of the redesigned TAP workshops and are eager to participate. Those who have attended the workshops serve as “champions,” encouraging their peers to attend the Transition GPS modules and tracks.

Commanders at installations with high throughput of transitioning Service members are putting forth their best efforts to meet new, tough standards, such as the limit of 50 students per TAP class. At some installations, this might mean offering five or six Transition GPS classes a week, concurrently, at various locations across the installation. For some installations, finding adequate class space can be a challenge, as is access to sufficient numbers of individual laptops and enough bandwidth to ensure continuous internet access for all participating Service members. We will continue to address these important issues throughout 2015.

The field’s input also conveyed a recurring lesson: one of relationships. The ultimate success of the TAP redesign will depend upon a high level of meaningful interaction between Commanders, the chain of command, and their TAP staffs. Commanders must understand their responsibility to ensure that Service members meet CRS and how the TAP staff is integral to fulfilling that responsibility. The TAP staff must embrace increased coordination, counseling, and training responsibilities, as well as their consultative role to Commanders in reviewing CRS in anticipation of “Capstone.” Most importantly, Service members need to understand and act on their responsibility to meet CRS and the availability of TAP to maximize their own preparation for transition. The TAP Executive Council will continue to engage the Services to ensure military leadership, TAP staff, and individual Service members are equipped with the knowledge and information to succeed.

The DoD Transition to Veterans Program Office (TVPO) has initiated regular and recurring meetings with representatives of Veterans Service Organizations (VSOs). The first

such meeting was on May 5, 2014 and featured an update on the re-designed TAP. The VSOs have agreed to meet quarterly with us. As we continue to implement the MLC transition model and collect lessons learned at each stage, the perspectives of the VSOs will be beneficial in so many ways.

PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT

A mandate of the TAP evaluation strategy is outcome measures, beginning with VOW Act compliance and CRS requirements. For this world-wide program, the data flow to the Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC), to document compliance for every eligible Service member, must be flawless. The Department is working expeditiously and diligently to overcome the delays associated with sequestration on our data collection process. Our “Get-Well Plan” to facilitate the accurate reporting of VOW Act compliance and the attainment of CRS goals is to continue engaging senior DoD leaders, who are actively overseeing and monitoring monthly VOW Act compliance, while our data capturing efforts continue to improve.

Based upon DMDC verified data for Fiscal Year to Date 2015 the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, and Air Force verified VOW Act compliance for their Active Duty Service members was 91.2 percent, 92.2 percent, 94.0 percent, and 97.5 percent, respectively. The results account for three quarters of the separating members. We realize we must work hard to close the remaining reporting gap. Achieving VOW Act compliance for the members of the Reserve Components (RCs) presents unique challenges. A dedicated “RC Team” is meeting to assess the extant processes and procedures, identify gaps and anomalies, and determine if the current system effectively meets the needs of the transitioning RC members. These meetings may result in specific legislative proposals and policy changes focused on RC TAP requirements.

DoD will use a new web service to make data available to our partner agencies and allow them to measure program outcomes in the longer-term, as Service members shift into Veteran status. These proposed outcomes include successful use of the Post-9/11 GI Bill for certifications and completion of a college degree. Our partners are currently building their business cases and Information Technology (IT) infrastructure to access and analyze the data we will make available.

For the purpose of monitoring a driver of the re-designed TAP program success (i.e., culture change), the Department inserted TAP-related questions in the 2014 Status of Forces Survey. These questions are designed to assess Service members' attitudes towards post-military career planning and leadership support for such planning across the Military Life Cycle. These questions will serve as a "baseline" for understanding Service members' views prior to the Department's full execution of transition preparation across the touch points of the MLC model. This annual survey will enable us to gauge Service member awareness of the TAP and their individual transition responsibilities, as well as the support they receive from their leadership and peers in preparing for transition. This survey was launched in September 2014, and results will be provided by DMDC to TVPO in spring 2015.

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY OFFICE REPORT

In March 2014, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) released its report entitled, "Transitioning Veterans – Improved Oversight Needed to Enhance Implementation of Transition Assistance Program." This report included three recommendations for executive action. The first recommendation directed the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness (USD(P&R)) to require that all Services provide unit Commanders and their leaders with

information on the TAP participation levels of Service members under their command. The report recognized that Army and Air Force are already doing this; thus, the way forward on this recommendation will focus predominantly on the Navy and Marine Corps. DoD non-concurred with this requirement and recommendation, as it pertained to the USD(P&R) issuing a directive, because the Services were already putting accountability systems in place.

DoD has developed and deployed the necessary IT infrastructure to support the Services transition programs. The Navy is now funding Information Technology system upgrades that will enable analysis of program compliance down to the Unit Identification Code level (unit level). Meanwhile, the Marine Corps has mandated TAP participation since the program's inception and Commanders leverage the capabilities of the personnel system to identify eligible Marines and schedule their TAP attendance. The Marine Corps, too, is exploring which personnel systems and processes are most appropriate to facilitate commander notification. Business processes for collecting data resulting from documentation are in the final stages of refinement. As the DoD and our inter-agency partners execute the MLC in 2015, we will gather and analyze lessons learned with a view to improving further our ability to address accountability requirements.

The second recommendation directed the USD(P&R) to work with our partner agencies to develop a written strategy for determining which components and tracks to evaluate, and the most appropriate evaluation methods. The DoD concurred with this recommendation and, in response, developed an Inter-agency TAP Evaluation Strategy, in full collaboration with VA, DOL, and SBA. The TVPO briefed this strategy to the Office of Management and Budget and the White House staff in May 2014. Based on our progress to date with participant assessments

and visits to the field, we are confident that this strategy will enable us to improve accountability, VOW Act compliance, and the attainment of CRS.

The third recommendation required the Secretary of Defense to direct the USD(P&R) to systematically collect information on any challenges facing demobilizing members of the National Guard and Reserves regarding the logistics of the timing and location at which to attend TAP. The Department understands that the National Guard and Reserves operate under different logistical constraints and schedules than does the Active Component. Several processes are already in place to identify and rectify misalignments, to include Executive Council working groups with representation from both the Reserve Components and the pool of TAP managers with large Reserve populations to serve. A dedicated Reserve Component Team routinely meets to assess processes and determine if current requirements are meeting the transition needs of Reserve Component Service members. During Fiscal Year 2015, the Reserve Component Team will focus on lessons learned from RC implementation of the TAP redesign and make recommendations for improvement as we move to implement the MLC fully across the RCs. At our request, the National Guard Bureau assigned Command Sergeant Major Clements, from the great State of Illinois, to the Transition to Veterans Program Office in order to strengthen the voice of our National Guard Service members in these deliberations. The Transition GPS participant assessment also provides an opportunity for RC Service members to voice concerns regarding their ability to participate in TAP. Additionally, the DMDC Status of Forces Survey will provide us the ability to assess the MLC touch points associated with Reserve and Guard participation in the TAP. Our objective is to ensure a full commitment to this culture change across all components for the long-term.

WAY FORWARD

Fiscal Year 2014 was an exciting and challenging year for DoD, our inter-agency partners, the Military Services, and the U.S. Coast Guard, as we implemented the Transition GPS curriculum and planned for the MLC model. We made great strides and will continue to aggressively monitor our progress as we move forward to implement the MLC model.

We are also very pleased by the standup of the Veterans Employment Center (VEC) under the auspices of the VA, and with the help of DOL. One cannot overstate the value of a single portal to which all federal partners can direct Service members for skills translation, resume building, and connection to employers. We are confident that the VEC will provide our Service members and employers across the government and the private sector with high quality tools that are easy to use and effective in achieving our objectives.

The Department's priority focus on transition assistance is being acknowledged, and acted on at the highest levels of the military Services. In fact, many now acknowledge that preparing Service members for transition is an imperative for the All-Volunteer Force. The 2014 Quadrennial Defense Review noted that the strength of the All-Volunteer Force would be maintained by providing the best possible assistance to Service members transitioning into civilian life.

In September of 2014, we conducted a comprehensive TAP communications campaign to reinforce key program messages, generate awareness and understanding, and strengthen the message of the cultural change required to inculcate TAP across the Military Life Cycle, at every level of the Military. The campaign consisted of a combination of print, digital, and social media, with a view to reaching Service members, their Commanders, and other leaders, in both

the Active and Reserve Components, across the globe. A package of our campaign materials has been provided to each member of the Subcommittee.

During Fiscal Year 2015, we will continue to assess the needs and requirements of our Reserve Component Service members; work to improve system integration, data sharing, and reporting; and strengthen relationships with our partners across the inter-agency and with other stakeholders and contributors, including the VSOs, employers, and other non-federal entities.

It is estimated that approximately 250,000 Service members will transition annually from Military Service to civilian employment over each of the next few years. In Fiscal Year 2014, 249,161 Service members transitioned from Active duty. Thus far, in Fiscal Year 2015 (between October 2014 and November 2014), more than 37,000 Service members have transitioned.

Our Service members are a vital component of our Nation's employment and talent pipeline. We are working harder to encourage employers to recognize the unique and valued skill sets that Service members departing the military will bring to every industry and sector. We encourage employers to continue the offerings of training, credentialing, and career pathways that create viable post-service options for Service members who have given so much to our Nation, and who have much to contribute in their civilian capacities.

The Department acknowledges the requirements in section 557, "*Enhancement of Information Provided to Members of the Armed Forces and Veterans regarding use of Post-9/11 Educational Assistance and Federal Financial Aid through the TAP,*" and section 558 "*Procedures for Provisions of Certain Information to State Veterans Agencies to Facilitate the Transition of Members of the Armed Forces from Military Services to Civilian Life*" of the FY15 National Defense Authorization Act. We are currently evaluating strategies that will address these requirements.

The Department appreciates the stalwart commitment by all of our inter-agency partners to the TAP redesign. This is an unprecedented effort and our collective dedication has never wavered. As thousands of our men and women return from service on the ground in contingency operations, separate from Active Duty, and go home to their communities, holding to this steadfast commitment will become all the more important.

Likewise, your continued support is greatly appreciated as we continue to roll out and deliver the redesigned TAP to our men and women in uniform undergoing transition. They are most deserving of our best efforts to make them career-ready and to enable them to achieve their aspirations.

