AUTHENTICATED
U.S. GOVERNMENT
INFORMATION
GPO

TRANSITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM AND THE DISABLED TRANSITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

HEARING

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON BENEFITS

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ONE HUNDRED SEVENTH CONGRESS

SECOND SESSION

JULY 18, 2002

Printed for the use of the Committee on Veterans' Affairs

Serial No. 107–37

U.S. GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE

89–314PDF WASHINGTON : 2004

For sale by the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office
Internet: bookstore.gpo.gov Phone: toll free (866) 512–1800; DC area (202) 512–1800
Fax: (202) 512–2250 Mail: Stop SSOP, Washington, DC 20402–0001

COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS

CHRISTOPHER H. SMITH, New Jersey, *Chairman*

BOB STUMP, Arizona
MICHAEL BILIRAKIS, Florida
TERRY EVERETT, Alabama
STEVE BUYER, Indiana
JACK QUINN, New York
CLIFF STEARNS, Florida
JERRY MORAN, Kansas
HOWARD P. (BUCK) McKEON, California
JIM GIBBONS, Nevada
MICHAEL K. SIMPSON, Idaho
RICHARD H. BAKER, Louisiana
ROB SIMMONS, Connecticut
ANDER CRENSHAW, Florida
HENRY E. BROWN, JR., South Carolina
JEFF MILLER, Florida
JOHN BOOZMAN, Arkansas

LANE EVANS, Illinois
BOB FILNER, California
LUIS V. GUTIERREZ, Illinois
CORRINE BROWN, Florida
JULIA CARSON, Indiana
SILVESTRE REYES, Texas
VIC SNYDER, Arkansas
CIRO D. RODRIGUEZ, Texas
STEPHEN F. LYNCH, Massachusetts
RONNIE SHOWS, Mississippi
SHELLEY BERKLEY, Nevada
BARON P. HILL, Indiana
TOM UDALL, New Mexico
SUSAN A. DAVIS, California

PATRICK E. RYAN, *Chief Counsel and Staff Director*

SUBCOMMITTEE ON BENEFITS

MICHAEL K. SIMPSON, Idaho, *Chairman*

JACK QUINN, New York
ANDER CRENSHAW, Florida
CHRISTOPHER H. SMITH, New Jersey
JEFF MILLER, Florida

SILVESTRE REYES, Texas
CORRINE BROWN, Florida
LANE EVANS, Illinois
SUSAN A. DAVIS, California

CONTENTS

July 18, 2002

Page

Transition Assistance Program and the Disabled Transition Assistance Program 1

OPENING STATEMENTS

Chairman Simpson 1
Prepared statement of Chairman Simpson 37
Hon. Susan A. Davis 2
Hon. Lane Evans 3
Hon. Steve buyer 7
Hon. Corrine Brown 25

WITNESSES

Bascetta, Cynthia, Director for Health Education, Workforce, and Income Security, General Accounting Office; accompanied by Ms. Shelia Drake, Assistant Director 4
Prepared statement of Ms. Bascetta 39
Blair, Anita, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Personnel Programs, Department of the Navy 16
Prepared statement of Ms. Blair 70
Craven, Kelly, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Force Management Integration, Department of the Air Force 19
Prepared statement of Ms. Craven 83
Epley, Robert, Associate Deputy Under Secretary for Policy and Program Management, Veterans Benefits Administration 30
Prepared statement of Mr. Epley 90
Johnson, Rear Admiral Joyce, Director, Directorate of Health and Safety, U.S. Coast Guard 15
Prepared statement of Admiral Johnson 68
Juarbe, Jr., Frederico, Assistant Secretary of Labor, Veterans' Employment and Training Service; accompanied by Charles S. Ciccolella, Deputy Assistant of Labor, Veterans' Employment and Training Service 31
Prepared statement of Mr. Juarbe 99
McLaurin, John, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Human Resources, Department of the Army 13
Prepared statement of Mr. McLaurin 60
Molino, John M., Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense, Military, Community and Family Policy 11
Prepared statement of Mr. Molino 50

MATERIAL SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD

Statements:
Air Force Sergeants Association 103
The American Legion 108
Thomas M. Hale, Senior Vice President, Resource Consultants, Inc. 112
James N. Magill, Chairman, Secretary of Labor's Advisory Committee on Veterans' Employment and Training 115
Mortgage Bankers of America 116
Michael D. Murphy, President, National Association of County Veterans Service Officers 123

Page

Statements—Continued
Wade Delk, Executive Director, National Organization for Competency Assurance 126
Veterans of Foreign Wars 136

TRANSITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM AND THE DISABLED TRANSITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

THURSDAY, JULY 18, 2002

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON BENEFITS,
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS,
Washington, DC

The subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 10 a.m., in room 334, Cannon House Office Building, Hon. Michael K. Simpson (chairman of the subcommittee) presiding.

Present: Representatives Simpson, Brown, Evans, and Davis.

Also Present: Hon. Steve Buyer; Mary Ellen McCarthy, Minority Staff Director

OPENING STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN SIMPSON

Mr. SIMPSON. Good morning. The hearing will come to order. While we are at war today with terrorists and rogue nations, and I suspect we may be for some time to come, this hearing is about the transition services that the Departments of Defense, Veterans Affairs and Labor furnish to the selfless members of our all-voluntary military, many of whom are, as we meet, fighting the war on terror.

As many of our witnesses pointed out in their testimony, transition assistance is not nice to have, it is the law. This subcommittee indeed is proud to have authored the most recent changes to the Transition Assistance Program, as embodied in the Veterans Benefit Expansion Act of 2001.

About 226,000 servicemembers separate from our military each year. Many are married. The last thing many of them and their spouses remember is how their government treated them in making the transition to civilian life.

The ultimate measure of a successful transition is long-term sustainable employment. That is the objective of our national economy too, as hiring veterans indeed is a good business decision. It is that simple.

The reliability, initiative, and leadership qualities of our servicemembers possess are the best that you will find anywhere. They truly are a unique national resource.

I would ask Ms. Davis if she has an opening statement to make. And thank you for being here today, Ms. Davis. I appreciate that very much.

[The prepared statement of Chairman Simpson appears on p. 37.]

OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. SUSAN A. DAVIS

Mrs. DAVIS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I am delighted to be here. And I do want to read an opening statement, first from Honorable Corrine Brown, who is the vice chair of the committee. And she has been delayed, but requested that I go ahead and read her statement, in that she is welcoming all of our witnesses here, as I do as well.

"I am looking forward to hearing how the Transition Assistance Program and the Disabled Transition Assistance Program are working to serve our nation's servicemembers. I am pleased that these programs seem to generally be working well to assist servicemembers, identify the skills they gained during military service, which will aid them in transitioning to civilian life.

Given the present downturn in the national economy, I am concerned that the recent reports of TAP success is measured by reductions in unemployment compensation payments will not be sustained. GAO has noted that difficulty in obtaining adequate data to effectively measuring the success of the program.

I hope that the military services will be able to better standardize data collection, so that more meaning evaluations can be made. I am concerned that the reported decrease in funding for this program may be adversely impacting its effectiveness.

I hope that the witnesses will explain how the programs are funded, and what level of funding is needed to assure timely access by separating servicemembers. I hope that the witnesses from the Department of Veterans Affairs, and the Department of Labor will indicate how their present funding level for providing these services has increased or decreased over the years, what level of funding would be needed by these departments to provide services at overseas locations.

We have a large number of veterans who reside in my district. I will be interested in hearing how information concerning the new requirement for veterans preference and new transportation security jobs is being disseminated to separating servicemembers through these programs.

I am also interested in the manner in which the Transition Assistance Program appears to be aiding the military's efforts at retention of needed personnel."

Mr. Chairman, that is the statement of Congress member, Corrine Brown. And, again, I am pleased to have that opportunity to read it on her behalf.

If I may just continue for one second—and I apologize that I will need to leave also because there is a markup in Armed Services this morning. But I also wanted to just make a few very brief comments. And I have an interest as well in seeing that we investigate some very creative models for this program.

The importance of a strong Transition Assistance Program was clearly highlighted for me, as I attended probably for the eighth year, Stand Down in San Diego. As many of you may know, the community of San Diego began this program about 15 years ago, assisting veterans.

We hope to assist them all year long. But this is one very big program where people come together with all of the services needed to celebrate at one time the veterans, but also to help them, and

to help them in their transition, as well as over some very great hurdles that they have been experiencing. And it was heartening for me to see, once again, many people come forward.

But I think that it also brings out the fact that we have many people who are not making that transition, and we need to do a better job. I know that today's witnesses will probably agree that providing our servicemembers with information and access to resources early on prepares them for a successful reentry to the private sector.

And, unfortunately, many of our servicemembers do fall through the cracks. In San Diego, the VA has increased its outreach efforts, so that instead of having servicemembers journeying to their office, the VA did establish an outstation at Camp Pendleton to facilitate communication. And those kind of outreach efforts I think are very important.

What I wanted to mention briefly is the possibility—and I would certainly appreciate if the witnesses could address this as well—of having a partnership really with the veterans community in our communities, and perhaps we could do some model projects where they would actually be helping, and assisting, and following through with those who are leaving the service, and who requests those kind of services.

We know that in education and many other labor markets, where we can have mentors who actually are willing and able to follow through and to be that support, especially somebody, a mentor who has maybe had a tough time in his—certainly navigated those obstacles could be helpful.

And, to my knowledge, we don't have that kind of mentoring program now connected to this program. And I certainly would like to look into the possibilities of beginning something like that, if there aren't any out there. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. SIMPSON. Thank you, Ms. Davis. And, again, I appreciate your being here today. As many of you know, we have multiple committees meeting at the same time all of the time, and today there is an Armed Services Committee markup.

Generally, markups takes precedence over hearings because they actually are marking up the legislation. But members do take the testimony, and read it, and study it. So I do appreciate you being here.

Mrs. DAVIS. I was just handed a note that I have to go. Thank you very much.

Mr. SIMPSON. Mr. Evans.

Mr. EVANS. Mr. Chairman, thank you for holding this hearing. It is an important one. And now we will leave, unfortunately, the Democratic side here without an advocate or ally. But I am sure we can count on you to help us here without too many controversies.

Mr. SIMPSON. I am very non-partisan, as you know.

Mr. EVANS. Yes, sir. But like Ms. Davis, I also am part of that Armed Services VA committee "cabal," you might say. We have got several other members that are probably at the important markup before the Armed Services Committee.

Mr. SIMPSON. Right.

Mr. EVANS. One just quick thought is that a number of people were talking before we started. It really does seem like the VA and related armed forces are working very hard. From my experience, I think this is a major step forward, and want to thank those people that have been part of this effort. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. SIMPSON. Thank you, Mr. Evans.

Will the first panel please approach the table? Ms. Cynthia Bascetta, of the General Accounting Office, is accompanied by Ms. Sheila Drake.

Ms. Bascetta, you may begin when you are ready. Thank you for being here today.

STATEMENT OF CYNTHIA BASCETTA, DIRECTOR FOR HEALTH EDUCATION, WORKFORCE, AND INCOME SECURITY, GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE; ACCOMPANIED BY MS. SHELIA DRAKE, ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

STATEMENT OF CYNTHIA BASCETTA

Ms. BASCETTA. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I am pleased to be here to discuss our work on TAP and D–TAP, which has served over one million separating and retiring military personnel since its inception.

As you know, three departments in addition to VA—DOD, DOT, and the Department of Labor—are responsible for coordinating transition services to help ensure that servicemembers make a smooth transition back to civilian life.

My testimony today describes the differences in assistance offered by the military branches, and assesses what is known about the effectiveness of TAP. To do our work, we conducted structured group interviews with about 70 servicemembers during field work at five locations, one at each military branch.

We also obtained the views of commanding officers, supervisors, and program staff, in addition to analyzing administrative data. I would like to make two points today:

First, transition assistance varies in key ways across the military branches. Their data show that not all servicemembers receive transition assistance, although the military does provide required pre-separation counseling and offers TAP workshops. In addition, transition assistance varies, both in content and delivery across the military branches, reflecting the flexibility they have in designing their programs.

Second, while servicemembers appear satisfied with transition assistance, little information is available on the impact of TAP on employment or other potential outcomes.

Regarding the receipt of services, we found that the percentage of servicemembers receiving pre-separation counseling ranges from 51 percent to 91 percent, while participation in TAP workshops ranges from about 30 to almost 70 percent. Disaggregated numbers from D–TAP recipients were not available.

The military branches offered several reasons why these numbers may not adequately capture participation rates. Nevertheless, the ranges they report show that, particularly for the workshops, participation rates vary widely. This may partly reflect

servicemembers' decisions not to participate for a variety of reasons in the voluntary TAP workshops.

Varying levels of participation could also reflect differences in access to services. For example, servicemembers who are stationed in remote locations due to their military mission may be offered modified versions of TAP depending on their specific circumstances. The Coast Guard sends a videotape and the DOL workbook used in its workshops to accommodate the transition needs of servicemembers in remote areas.

We also found that the support of military commanders and supervisors can affect access. The Marines have addressed this by making participation in their TAP workshop mandatory, because they realized that servicemembers were having difficulty being released from their military duties to attend.

The military branches have the flexibility to tailor the content and the delivery of services to meet unique needs of their servicemembers. The Army, concerned that combat-related jobs may have limited transferability to the civilian labor force, supplements funding to provide extra one-on-one counseling.

The Air Force and the Navy are trying to provide transition services earlier, as a part of a comprehensive approach to career planning. This could reduce the potential conflicts commanders face between mission needs and transition assistance, as well as benefit servicemembers.

But what is known about the ultimate benefit of TAP for servicemembers? Several factors complicate evaluating the impact of such interventions. Data limitations such as incomplete information on what services are actually received preclude comparing the effects of different interventions.

Virtually no longitudinal data are collected on how servicemembers fare after leaving the military, in part, because of the challenges of the task. One TAP facilitator told us, for example, that he was able to follow up with only 20 percent of workshop participants.

Only two program evaluations from the early 1990's evaluated the effectiveness of TAP on employment, but provided limited information. Moreover, they did not evaluate the impact of transition assistance on other potential goals like recruitment and retention, which could have growing importance now that the military is no longer downsizing.

Coming to consensus on which goals to evaluate, and collecting the data necessary to track long-term outcomes would help better position the departments to assess the value of TAP, as well as to determine ways to improve it.

This concludes my remarks, and I would be happy to answer any questions that you might have.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Bascetta appears on p. 39.]

Mr. SIMPSON. Thank you, Ms. Bascetta. I appreciate and applaud your testimony. It gives the subcommittee an initial baseline of data as we work on this issue and try to decide if there are some factors which could make the program better; things that we could do to improve the program.

I appreciate the fact that the different services are actually approaching this from different angles and trying to implement it

how best they see fit. From that, we may get the ability to look at what the different services are doing that are successful in their particular area, and be able to work those between the services, and have the different services take advantage of the experience of each other in this area. So I do appreciate that.

The Department of Defense reports that we have 118,000 servicemembers stationed in Europe; 90,000 in East Asia and the Pacific, mostly in Japan and Korea; 26,000 in North Africa, and Near East, and South Asia, most of whom are in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia.

My comment to you deals with access to TAP and D–TAP services by our servicemembers stationed in these overseas places as their last assignment prior to separation. More specifically, it just seems to me that the Department of Labor should have a presence overseas just as VA does.

If they are going to be separating while overseas and take advantage of these types of services, it seems that there ought to be a presence there for them to take advantage of. I do not think that service branches should bear the responsibility for furnishing employment assistance to transition servicemembers.

I note the Army, especially, has been very aggressive in this way and I applaud them. Unfortunately, Assistant Secretary Juarbe says in his written statement that the Labor Department indeed is looking—or, fortunately—I didn't mean to say unfortunately—is looking into furnishing employment and training services overseas.

I certainly would do so, because it is where a lot of our labor's future customers are. Would you wish to comment on that, and the advisability of the Department of Labor furnishing these services overseas?

Ms. BASCETTA. Sure. First of all, VA does have counselors assigned both to European and Asian countries. And they also provide what they call circuit services periodically in both Europe and Asia.

I think your point is well-taken that, to the extent that in the U.S., the decision has been made that people with the skills and expertise in the Labor Department need to be providing these employment services. The same would hold in overseas locations.

It does raise an interesting question though about the difference between where someone is separated, and where they will ultimately seek their employment. And, perhaps, what makes the most sense, since the job markets are quite variable, is to provide the actual job assistance where the person is going to be residing and actually making the transition back into civilian life.

Mr. SIMPSON. Do we have any statistics or figures that would indicate how many of the servicemembers that leave the service actually have jobs when they leave?

Ms. BASCETTA. I don't have that information, no.

Mr. SIMPSON. I am wondering if part of the reason that some of the people don't participate in the TAP program is because they actually have jobs waiting for them when they—when my brother left the service, he had his employment all established and ready to go when he left, and so forth.

Ms. BASCETTA. That could be exactly right. As you pointed out in your opening statement, the work that we did raises a lot of

questions that are worth exploring further. And that is one of them. Some of the lower participation rates may not be indicative of a problem in the program.

And, in fact, what you really want to do I think is look at the individuals when they separate and their employment status, and then from that work backwards to look at what package of services they got, not just TAP. Because it does seem, you know, the right thing to do to provide this minimal amount of service.

What you know want to know is what else did they get? What other kinds of optional workshops were provided?

What, perhaps, did they get on their own that really facilitated their ability to maximize their productive capacity in the civilian labor force?

Mr. SIMPSON. How much—sounds bad—but how much tracking do we do of servicemembers once they leave? I know most Americans don't like to be tracked. But how much tracking do to get information as to the success of our programs once people leave?

Ms. BASCETTA. We took the word "tracking" out of our statement. We used follow up. It is an evaluation term. I agree with you completely. Tracking had sort of a nasty connotation. That is our problem. We don't do much follow up.

And, frankly, not in this program, but in all kinds of programs it is very difficult to really stay with people through the course of their careers, especially younger populations, who are going to perhaps move quite often, and who don't want to be bothered anymore, and don't want to participate in research.

So it is a difficult challenge that the service branches and the departments face in doing this kind of study.

Mr. SIMPSON. Well, you are right. It is a difficult thing in trying to do that. But, unfortunately, when we are going to design a program and try to make it successful, some of that follow up, if you will, is necessary to find out how successful a program is, and where you might be able to improve it, and things you might be able to do to make it better.

Ms. BASCETTA. Well, the Transition Commission in its report in 1999, noted that in fact the departments could and should do a better job coordinating their data collection efforts. And we agree with that.

Mr. SIMPSON. I appreciate that, and thank you for your testimony. Mr. Buyer.

OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. STEVE BUYER

Mr. BUYER. Thank you. Thanks for letting me participate in the hearing today.

Mr. SIMPSON. Sure.

Mr. BUYER. The TAP program is something that has been meaningful to me. I used to chair this subcommittee, and I have chaired the Personnel Subcommittee on the Armed Services Committee. So I am not foreign to this program, but I also recognize that we put a lot of stress on our military services.

And, especially at a time of war, a lot of people don't perhaps see it because it is fought out of the public eye. It is sometimes easy to lose focus because we place a lot of pressure on other missions, and they have got to be here, and do this, and do that.

It was a little easier to focus on this program because we were downsizing the military. And can you comment on the present environment, and the services, and how they keep the focus on the TAP program, while in fact they also have some time of the essence missions?

Ms. BASCETTA. I wish I had more on that because that is a very important point. One comment that I would make is that some of the services told us that actually retention as an outcome is becoming a much more important part of the TAP program, now that downsizing is not occurring.

You are exactly right about the tension between mission conflict and transition assistance. And the Department's own regulations note that this is a balance that commanders need to strike.

One thing that I think is very positive in this note is that helping servicemembers throughout their careers in thinking about transition, or in thinking about how they want their military career to evolve can help a lot, in terms of reducing the pressure that happens if you wait until the last minute when someone is separating.

If you provide the transition services earlier, it not only could be more beneficial to the servicemember in his career planning, but could help alleviate to a great extent the mission conflict that commanders face.

Mr. BUYER. How do you grade the services with regard to the program? Some pushing it downline too far, letting commanders do it, has it sort of lost the focus in Washington, DC?

Ms. BASCETTA. We didn't grade them. I would say that——

Mr. BUYER. Oh, I know you didn't. I am just asking you, now.

Ms. BASCETTA. Well, what I would say is that the Marines seem to have taken it very seriously with the recent action to have the workshops be mandatory. And the Navy, and I believe the Air Force, are trying to do a better job in what I Just described, that is providing the transition services earlier.

So they all do better on different dimensions. The Army is paying more attention to focusing the content of the workshops on employability and helping develop soldiers who are trained in combat-related skills, or who are younger and have less civilian experience in making a smoother transition by giving them more skills that would be relevant in the civilian labor force.

Mr. BUYER. Well, I am the parent, and you are the teacher, and I didn't understand your grading system.

Ms. BASCETTA. Well, I am really not comfortable.

Mr. BUYER. It sounds like you said the Marine Corps is doing better. The Air Force is just—and the Navy are getting with it? And the Army does well in one area? I don't understand your grading system.

Ms. BASCETTA. Well, they are all doing things that are different. And so, it is hard to make a clear comparison about who is doing better. If they all had a consistent goal, and I could tell you that we looked at how they achieved a particular goal, then I could do some kind of ranking. But that is not the situation that we face.

Mr. BUYER. The motivation for question, we spend a lot of money. We spend a lot of money recruiting for an All-Volunteer force; then we spend a lot of money retaining, trying to retain that All-Volunteer force; and then we work cooperatively between the

Department of Labor, the VA, and DOD to make sure that when they leave that they don't end up on the unemployment lines, because we think these are individuals whom are precious to our society.

So I think the chairman is right to continue looking at this particular program. But I just asked a very simple question about how do you grade them?

That is what a taxpayer asks. Is this a good program? And if it is a good program, has it got the right intent, is it being followed through? I don't want an answer that goes, they did well here, but they didn't do well there, they all do it a little bit different.

How are they doing? If they are doing it great, tell me they are doing it great. If they are not doing it great, tell me the Marine Corps is doing it great, but the Navy is not, and here is where they need room for improvement. It is a very simple question.

Ms. BASCETTA. Well, let me answer it very directly then. We don't have the data to answer that question. And the reason we don't have the data is that they are not collecting long-term data, and they are not collecting enough data that would allow you to make a connection between TAP, and all of the other interventions that they may be getting.

And that is a very difficult thing to do. But we believe they need to do a much better job on that, so that they can answer your question:

Is this investment worth it? And how can we improve it, if it is not doing as well as want, in either getting people the best employment they can get, or in reducing unemployment insurance?

Mr. BUYER. So the chairman's question about the Department of Labor participating outside of CONUS, has there been any movement by anyone to make recommendations to amend the Memorandum of Understanding?

Ms. BASCETTA. Not that I am aware of, no.

Mr. BUYER. So this is something that may have to take prodding from the chairman in order to do something like this?

Ms. BASCETTA. Perhaps.

Mr. BUYER. Uh-huh. I yield back.

Mr. SIMPSON. Thank you, Mr. Buyer. Ms. McCarthy.

Ms. MCCARTHY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Has GAO identified any common data elements that the military services should be collecting in order to better monitor the program process?

Recognizing there are some differences, are there some commonalities that they should all be doing?

Ms. BASCETTA. Well, they should definitely do a better job in documenting what services people actually received. And, by that, I mean the content and the depth of the services. Because if you want to evaluate whether a particular intervention had an effect, you absolutely need to be able to assure yourself that you are not comparing apples and oranges.

Ms. MCCARTHY. And also, has GAO made any determination as to the appropriate goal for the level of participation in TAP workshops and pre-separation counseling? And have the services established particular goals?

Ms. BASCETTA. Well, the law requires pre-separation counseling. So 100 percent, or very close to it, ought to be what we are seeing

there. And, as far as the TAP workshops, which are voluntary, I think that that would depend on what other kinds of optional services may be provided. And that is where it seems to me really appropriate to start tailoring what is offered to the specific needs of the military branches.

Ms. MCCARTHY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. SIMPSON. Thank you. I appreciate your testimony here today. And we will continue to look at this program, I am sure, as we move forward. Thank you.

Ms. BASCETTA. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. SIMPSON. Panel two, if Panel two would come forward. It is made up of representatives of our military services: the Honorable John Molino, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense, Military, Community and Family Policy; Honorable John McLaurin, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Human Resources, Department of the Army; the Honorable Anita Blair, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Personnel Programs, Department of the Navy; the Honorable Kelly Craven, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Force Management Integration, Department of the Air Force; and Rear Admiral Joyce Johnson, Director, Directorate of Health and Safety, the U.S. Coast Guard.

Thank you all for being with us today, though I suspect your morning started much earlier than ours did. If I could ask the participants to indulge me for just a second, I would like to make a very brief observation to this panel before Secretary Molino testifies.

The last time this subcommittee had the good fortune to receive testimony from the service branches was on May 24 of last year. The issue was H.R. 1291, the proposed 21st Century Montgomery GI Bill Enhancement Act. Representative J.D. Hayworth of Arizona was chairman of the subcommittee at that time.

The first witness that day was the late Lieutenant General Timothy J. Maude, U.S. Army. He was a forceful advocate for an improved Montgomery GI Bill. At the subcommittee's request, General Maude shared with Chairman Hayworth, Ranking Member Reyes, Mr. Smith, Mr. Evans, Mrs. Brown, and the late Floyd Spence the data on how few 17 to 21-year-old males the service branches actually have to recruit.

This is because so many go to college right out of high school. What struck me in reading the transcript of that hearing was that General Maude was unwilling simply to give up—to give, if you will, college bound students to the colleges. He wanted the youth of America to go to college. That was very clear. He just wanted them in the Army first.

And if a young person went to college right out of high school and decided to stop out, he wanted them back in college while in the Army. Why, I suspect, because of what the Army had to offer them, real life experiences, perhaps, more noble than an 18-year-old might be able to imagine.

As you know, General Maude died in the Pentagon on the morning of September 11, at the age of 53, while doing what he liked doing best, looking after the interests of soldiers; not surprising for an individual who rose from the rank of private to General Officer;

not surprising for a man who was a Vietnam veteran and a Bronze Star winner.

I attended the memorial service for General Maude and the other selfless Americans who died at the Pentagon on September 11. I respectfully pay tribute to this man by noting that H.R. 1291, the bill on which he persuasively testified, is now the law of the land, and contains the largest increase ever in the Montgomery GI Bill.

And to General Maude, I would say the youth of America had a wonderful friend. I thank everyone for indulging me. Mr. Molino.

STATEMENTS OF JOHN M. MOLINO, DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE, MILITARY, COMMUNITY AND FAMILY POLICY; JOHN MCLAURIN, DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY FOR HUMAN RESOURCES, DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY; ANITA BLAIR, DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY FOR PERSONNEL PROGRAMS, DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY; KELLY CRAVEN, DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY FOR FORCE MANAGEMENT INTEGRATION, DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE; AND REAR ADMIRAL JOYCE JOHNSON, DIRECTOR, DIRECTORATE OF HEALTH AND SAFETY, U.S. COAST GUARD

STATEMENT OF JOHN M. MOLINO

Mr. MOLINO. Good morning, Mr. Chairman, and thank you. And I would like to begin by associating myself with those remarks. General Maude was a friend, and I know the Army and Department misses him.

I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you this morning to discuss the Department's Transition Assistance Program, and to talk about other topics you have asked us to address, which effects separating servicemembers.

I have submitted a written statement reporting the Department's Transition Assistance Program, and I ask that that statement be made part of the record.

Mr. SIMPSON. All of your statements, full written statements, will be made part of the record.

Mr. MOLINO. Thank you, sir. First, I would like to restate our commitment to our departing servicemembers. The Department remains steadfast in its commitment to offer separating servicemembers, their families, and eligible DOD civilians, transition services well into the future.

It is more important than ever that we take care of our military personnel as they enter and leave active duty. Secondly, we recognize the importance of transitioning our servicemembers in a manner that encourages them to be positive spokespersons for the military.

For these and other reasons, transition is a top priority in our human resources strategic plan. We are most appreciative of the outstanding cooperation we receive from the Departments of Labor and Veterans' Affairs, and the state employment agencies, and our own military services.

We have also received valuable assistance from the veterans' service organizations and I know they are represented here today. The Department has funding and policy oversight responsibility for

the program, while operational responsibility rests within the military departments.

About 226,000 people separate from the military each year. Less than 10,000 military personnel separate directly from overseas locations, and most of these are Army personnel. It is appropriate to thank the subcommittee and Congress for passing the Veterans Education and Benefits Expansion Act for 2001.

This legislation allows our separating servicemembers to start the transition process 12 months before separation and 2 years before retirement. In fact, last fiscal year, approximately 12,000 servicemembers started the transition process earlier than 90 days before separation.

We have found that the earlier we get our servicemembers into the transition and pre-separation counseling process, the more likely they are in fact to reenlist. The Navy and Army are prepared to discuss this positive result in more detail when they address you.

Our pre-separating counseling process is mandatory for all departing servicemembers. Next fiscal year, we plan to automate our pre-separation counseling checklist Department-wide.

By automating the checklist, we will be in a better position to address the concern of this subcommittee regarding the high unemployment rate of those recently discharged military members in the age group 20 to 24.

I also want to tell you that in the last 5 years, the Department's contribution to the unemployment compensation has decreased by $55 million. Last fiscal year, we conducted more than 7,700 overseas Transition Assistance Program seminars.

More than 115,000 departing servicemembers, and 15,000 spouses attended these seminars. In order to conduct this training, our overseas transition managers were trained at the National Veterans Employment Services Institute.

The committee was concerned about whether we allowed spouses to attend and participate in our transition programs. I want to assure you of the fact that we have an open door policy for all spouses regardless of whether their military member is leaving the service, or whether they are staying on active duty.

The subcommittee has also expressed interest in how we market the program, and whether officers seem to have more access to the program than enlisted members. I am pleased to tell you that we do not think this appears to be so.

In the last fiscal year, we provided over 30,000 transition assistance briefings to senior enlisted personnel, over 11,000 to our junior officers and senior officers, and more than 1,300 briefings to flag level officers.

Based on the number of transition briefings that we have given this past fiscal year, commanders have a greater understanding about the program. We believe our transition program is effective.

We have many other ongoing partnerships and planned initiatives that will further enhance our program, and these are addressed in detail in my written statement. Our transition services are vital to ensuring that quality of life remains high for our military personnel, even as they prepare to leave military service, and embark on new civilian careers.

Just as we place great emphasis on recruiting and retention, we believe we must place just as much emphasis on military separation. We realize the importance of transitioning our members in a manner that encourages them to be positive spokespersons for the military.

To quote Secretary Rumsfeld, "Without the ability to attract and retain the best men and women, the armed forces will not be able to do their job."

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my statement. I want to thank you and the members of this subcommittee for your continuing support for the men and women of the armed forces who have served this country honorably. And I will be happy to answer any questions you may have.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Molino appears on p. 50.]

Mr. SIMPSON. Thank you, Mr. Molino. We will keep our questions until all of you have testified. Mr. McLaurin.

STATEMENT OF JOHN MCLAURIN

Mr. MCLAURIN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Good morning. First, I would like to express my appreciation for your comments about Tim Maude, he was not just a colleague, but a personal friend, since we served together in the Second Infantry Division. And I know that Terry, his widow, will be very pleased to see those comments in the record.

We appreciate the opportunity to discuss the Army's Transition Assistance Program, known as ACAP in the Army. The Army has made a significant commitment and investment to institutionalize and continuously improve ACAP over the past 11 years.

Many soldiers join the Army immediately after high school, and have little or no experience in finding civilian employment. In addition, a high percentage of soldiers possess military occupational specialties that are not always thought to be readily transferrable to civilian occupations.

ACAP services are especially critical to these individuals to ensure they can civilianize their military skills and experience to successfully compete in the private sector. The Army consistently augments DOD funding in its efforts to provide transition assistance programs and services.

Seeking an efficient economical solution for consistent delivery of quality, standardized transition services, the Army outsourced ACAP services in 1996, after results of a comparative cost analysis concluded that a centrally managed Army-wide contract was more cost-effective for the Army.

During fiscal year 2001, the average ACAP cost-per-client was $166 compared to private sector, where the costs for similar levels of service range between $1,200 and $1,800 dollars per individual.

This structure provides the Army with great flexibility in responding to changing requirements and providing transition services on an "as-needed" basis at worldwide locations.

Further program enhancements have been implemented with the creation of ACAP XXI, the Army state-of-the-art system offering fully automated pre-separation counseling, interactive video workshops, and research tools to assist individuals in marketing their unique military skills and experiences in the private sector.

ACAP XXI was created with the expertise of a leading career transition consulting firm, which currently serves 300 of the world's 500 largest corporations. The Army also has two related initiatives focused on improving post-military employment opportunities for soldiers: the Army's new credentialing program, GI to Jobs, and a Partnership for Youth Success, or the PAYS Program.

Aimed at non-degree seeking soldiers, GI to Jobs offers expanding opportunities for soldiers to earn civilian credentials related to their Army military occupational specialties.

PAYS offers recruits post-military employment opportunities with specific partner companies prior to joining the Army. After successfully completing their enlistments, soldiers transition directly to employment with the pre-selected PAYS employers.

To-date, almost 7,000 soldiers have signed agreements with 24 industry partners including Lockheed Martin, General Dynamics, Pepsi Bottling Company, Goodyear, State Farm Insurance, and Bell South.

ACAP also has a significant impact on the Army's retention efforts. Soldiers who are considering separation need to make educated realistic decisions on the value of reenlisting in order to obtain additional military civilian education, professional certification licensure, and military job experience, which can significantly improve their marketability before they separate.

Last fiscal year, 3,906 soldiers, who initiated the transition process, decided to reenlist instead. Through May of this fiscal year, 2,559 soldiers have reversed their initial decision to separate. These reenlistments represent not only a significant cost savings, but also a clear win-win for the soldiers, their families, and the Army.

Leveraging a wide variety of marketing venues and strong Army command support, ACAP offices ensure all eligible individuals, regardless of grade, are not only afforded the opportunity, but are strongly encouraged to participate in what is you know a voluntary process.

Recognizing the impact of the current high optempo on separating soldiers, ACAP services are also provided to soldiers in forward deployed areas. ACAP professionals have traveled on 108 occasions this fiscal year including visits to the deployed soldiers in Saudi Arabia, Kosovo, and Kuwait.

Transition services are also a subject of pre-deployment processing as well. The effective partnership between the Departments of Defense, Labor, and Veterans' Affairs ensures soldiers have access to quality transition information and services.

The Army also partners successfully with federal agencies, major corporations, and local companies to connect them to potential employees. During the past year, ACAP has worked with representatives from the Office of Personnel Management, the U.S. Marshals Service, the U.S. Border Patrol, the Transportation Security Administration, and most recently, the Federal Aviation Agency.

I appreciate the opportunity to come before this subcommittee to provide an update of the Army's Transition Assistance Program. And I, likewise, would like to thank this subcommittee for its efforts on the current legislation which allows us an expanded time period to address these all important services.

The Army is fully committed to providing quality transition assistance to departing soldiers, their family members, and displaced DA civilians as well. I look forward to your questions, sir.

[The prepared statement of Mr. McLaurin appears on p. 60.]

Mr. SIMPSON. Thank you, Mr. McLaurin. Admiral Johnson.

STATEMENT OF REAR ADMIRAL JOYCE M. JOHNSON

Admiral JOHNSON. Good morning, Mr. Chairman, distinguished members of the subcommittee. It is a pleasure to appear before you today to discuss the Coast Guard's Transition Assistance Program.

Let me begin with just telling you a little bit about the Coast Guard, to provide a context for some of the differences our programs has from our other military services.

As you know, we are military, multi-mission, and a maritime service. We have about 36,000 active duty members, and about 7,800 as an authorized reserve strength. We have about 4,000 separations and retirements per year.

About half of our units have less than 30 persons. We are extremely geographically disbursed. We don't have large bases that can readily have large transition seminars. So one of the goals of our program is to try to make certain that each of our members who is leaving the service has access to that program.

There is a number of things that we do. One of the things that we do is we provide travel and per diem, so that people don't have a financial barrier from attending programs. The Coast Guard is organized into 12 integrated support commands, as well as headquarters command.

We have a work life supervisor, who manages the Transition Assistance Program in each of those areas, and also a transition relocation manager, who actually coordinates the actual program, usually for a multi-state region.

Each of the transition relocation managers are certified international job and career coaches. They are also responsible for the Transition Assistance Program, the Relocation Assistance Program, and the Spouse Employment Assistance Program, so that we can try to provide a coordinated approach for our members.

The overall goal of the program is to provide members and families the opportunity to make an informed and effective transition from military service to civilian employment. We also take extreme efforts to make certain that all of our members are aware of the program, and try to give them access to it.

Our unit commanding officers also have a major responsibility. They are responsible for assuring that each separating or retiring member receives appropriate transition assistance, and is informed of the benefits at least 180 days before separation, or 15 days after notification of separation.

The command meets with the member, and then again at least 90 days before separation has pre-separation counseling. Members who may be separated due to medical conditions also receive counseling from the Veterans' Administration, and are referred to the Department of Defense Disabled Transition Assistance Program seminars.

Each of our transition seminars has four program elements: pre-separation counseling, employment assistance, relocation assist-

ance for our overseas members, and benefits for involuntarily separated members.

We utilize the workshops of the Department of Defense, the Department of Labor, and also we have special Coast Guard workshops, again, to try to assure geographic accessibility to all of our members.

The Coast Guard workshops are usually 4 days: 3 days involving the job search, and one day teaching our members about the overall benefits that they will have access to. The workshops include: skills identification, interview techniques, resume preparation, and veterans entitlements.

Also, our Coast Guard transition relocation managers work cooperatively with the Department of Defense, Department of Labor, VA, our contractors, state and community organizations, non-profit service organizations, and local businesses to try to make certain that we can utilize as many of the community resources as possible.

We are also trying to do additional things. For example, in August of this year, we will have our first pilot of a transition assistance strike team, in which our transition relocation managers will actually go to remote areas to hold transition assistance seminars for people who might otherwise find it difficult to go to the regularly scheduled seminars.

In terms of trying to evaluate a program's effectiveness though, we don't have a specific report card. I would like to say that two-thirds of those taking the course rated them excellent, which I would equate to an "A"; 22 percent, very good; and 12 percent, good. So everyone found them to be at least good.

There is generally a reported increased significant knowledge and understanding in the whole transition process. One of the things is that members say that they wish that they had had them earlier in their career. And we are trying to accommodate that. If people want to take the course early, we try to be as flexible as possible on that.

As the Department of Transition—or the Coast Guard made transition to the new Department of Homeland Security, we anticipate that we will remain a military services with our current relationships with the Department of Defense. And we anticipate that we will continue to maintain our quality program, as we have it today.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify here before you today. And I will be happy to answer any questions you may have.

[The prepared statement of Admiral Johnson appears on p. 68.]

Mr. SIMPSON. Thank you, Admiral Johnson. Ms. Blair.

STATEMENT OF ANITA BLAIR

Ms. BLAIR. Mr. Chairman, good morning. And thank you very much for the opportunity to speak at this hearing today.

At the outset, I want to emphasize that the Transition Assistance Program for the Department of the Navy is one of the most important benefits offered to our sailors and Marines.

It should not be considered a relic of drawdown history, but instead is a vital element and expression of the mutual loyalty between Americans and those who volunteer to serve. We must con-

tinue to provide our servicemembers with the information, assistance, and skills needed to make informed decisions about how best to navigate their careers.

Our Transition Assistance Program is a tremendous success. We are extremely appreciative of the outstanding cooperation and efforts of the Congress, the Departments of Labor and Veteran's Affairs, state employment agencies, veterans' service organizations, and our entire Department of Defense transition assistance team.

This is a team in which every member has a distinct role to play, and we must continue to exert our efforts. I want to talk about the particular characteristics of both the Navy and the Marine Corps Transition Assistance Programs, and then summarize from a Department of the Navy point of view.

In the Navy, the Transition Assistance Program has evolved into an extremely important and valuable benefit for our sailors. It not only assists them in making critical life decisions, but it also assists the Navy as an effective recruiting and retention tool.

Instead of only targeting job placement, our transition program focuses on the sailor's career life cycle. Navy provides a variety of transition services for military members, their spouses, and family members.

The transition assistance package is a complete package that enables our transitioning sailors to learn how best to compare opportunities and formulate an educated career change decision.

How do we know whether the Transition Assistance Program is successful?

The authorizing legislation specifies one goal, and that is to provide assistance to each departing servicemember. But, in fact, there may be no single definition or measure of a successful transition.

The TAP serves a broad variety of personnel in a wide range of circumstances. Perhaps the most important measure of success is customer satisfaction, the enhanced ability of each program participant to meet his or her own needs, expectations, or post-military career goals.

Statistics from the U.S. Department of Labor and Veterans Employment Training Service indicate TAP workshop participants find employment on average 3 weeks sooner than non-workshop participants.

Other possible indicators of successful program could include retention rates following attendance at transition workshops, or unemployment compensation trends for recently separated veterans.

In that regard, data show a significant decline in unemployment compensation cost reimbursements paid by Navy since the implementation of TAP in the early 1990s. Navy realizes we must continue to integrate the transition process into a sailor's complete military life cycle.

To ensure that each of these transitions from civilian to recruit to career military and back to civilian run smoothly, we are developing the Career Options and Navy Skills Evaluation Program or CONSEP.

This newest initiative is the first holistic approach to transition education undertaken within the Department of Defense. Details about the CONSEP program are provided in my written statement. I would be glad to answer other questions about it.

Our command leaders aggressively support the overall mission of the Transition Assistance Program. Every effort is made to ensure all anticipated separations scheduled to occur through an extended deployment have full access to programs and assistance prior to deployment.

Navy policy dictates that every transitioning sailor must attend a TAP workshop no later than 90 days prior to separation, unless specifically declined in writing.

In fulfilling our responsibilities and obligations to our Navy members, we want to continue to enhance our transition services in a number of ways. We must improve access to TAP service for sailors, who may be deployed on ships or assigned to isolated or remote areas.

Navy has the perhaps unique circumstance of having at any given time about 50 percent of its force somewhere else. To meet these needs, our active duty command career counselors need a solid foundation of training in pre-separation counseling, as well as better tools to aid and support separating sailors career decision processes.

Along the same lines, we need to explore every option to facilitate the full-time presence of Department of Labor TAP workshop facilitators, which will eliminate a lot of stress on our Navy personnel.

We want to enhance access to continuing educational opportunities, and ensure we are meeting the needs of our 21st Century customer base. One size fits all approach may not be working.

I do not want to omit the Marine Corps, obviously, but it in some ways is a very different service from the Navy. The Marine Corps has the unique mission and an expeditionary nature, largely a young, first term force, with the youngest average age, and the smallest number of married personnel of any of the services.

Each year, the Marine Corps turns over about 20 percent of its in-strength. And a typical year is 2001, which we recruited over 30,000 civilians, and separated about 31,000 enlisted members, of whom about 82 percent were in their first term.

What this means is that the Corps remains closely and constantly in tune to the relationship between Marines and the larger American society they defend. The Marine Corps published a new order in early 2002, which make TAP workshops mandatory.

It is too soon to tell the actual effect of this brand new order, but we believe it will have a definite result of encouraging many more marines to attend our programs.

As Ms. Davis mentioned earlier, that she is interested in possible ideas for mentorships and coordination with veterans organizations, I would like to take a moment if I may to introduce a new program of the Marine Corps called "Marine For Life."

It is essentially an alumni networking organization, which the commandant has required to be instituted. The groundbreaking element is a network of Marine alumni, who will provide assistance to civilians who may want to become marines, marines, and former marines.

Many marines who receive transition of services are leaving at the end of their first term. They tend to be young men, including minorities, who may face greater challenges in returning to civilian

employment. The Marine For Life Program has the program to provide a special network of support for young people such as these.

In closing, I want you to know we are very proud of our transition program, which is tailored to meet the unique needs of our sailors and marines, both ashore and afloat, and improve on our transition services.

This may be in fact the very most important veterans benefit that we provide. And it certainly is an essential factor in our ability to attract sufficient numbers of recruits into the All-Volunteer force.

On behalf of the Department of the Navy, we thank you and look forward to working with you and your staff.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Blair appears on p. 70.]

Mr. SIMPSON. Thank you. I appreciate your testimony. Ms. Craven.

STATEMENT OF KELLY CRAVEN

Ms. CRAVEN. Thank you. Good morning, Mr. Chairman, and distinguished members of the subcommittee. Thank you for the opportunity to update you on the Air Force's Transition Assistance Program, and to explain how we prepare our members and their families for post-military life.

Thank you for your interest in this program, and for seeking our input. I represent nearly 542,000 men and women in the active duty reserve and Air National Guard components of the U.S. Air Force, our people, our most precious asset.

I consider this an honor and a great responsibility. I am proud to be their advocate, and humble to serve those who embody the verse, "There is no greater sacrifice than to lay down one's life for one's friend."

Permit me to be brief. I would like to just hit some highlights. In preparing for this hearing, some key points emerged. First, is the need for measurement to ensure we are offering the best quality product to our airmen and their families.

Customer satisfaction is always at the top of our priority list, and our customer feedback supports that. I thought I would bring you one airmen's words regarding this program.

One Air Force officer effected by the 1992 drawdown, a husband, and a father of two, said this of the TAP services that he received:

"In my case, spending an entire professional life to that point in the military services until separating in 1992 from an overseas base, provided an excellent education and experience base for civilian employment. However, the typical military member has no idea how to access the job market, or accomplish basic job search tasks and skills such as resume preparation, interviewing, and business dress and appearance. The program provided a solid basic skills foundation to build upon. Further, many of the referral services and counseling provided by other agencies were invaluable. Finally, the opportunity to network and compare notes was an added benefit of the program. In retrospect, transition services were key to accomplishing a difficult career transition to civilian employment."

We currently acquire member feedback through the use of exit surveys, personal inquiry by our family support center staff, and close coordination with unit leadership. The results are extremely

favorable, and reflect highly in the quality and dedication of our TAP professionals.

We are exploring the possibility of surveying Air Force members after their separation to more fully determine the impact of TAP on their goal attainment, as a further measurement of the program's effectiveness.

They will have had the opportunity to use the tools that we provided, and their post-military experience will likely provide valuable insight in what other services we might be able to offer. Understanding their job search and life transition experiences, post-separation may be of added value to what we obtain prior to their leaving.

Second, is the need to inject more focused attention on the life cycle of an airmen into the early stages of career development. The Air Force instituted a re-recruiting program last year focusing on those career fields that were most in need of assistance.

The purpose of this program was to provide one-on-one career counseling and mentoring between a senior officer and a company or field grade officer in the same functional community. Our initial focus has been on engineers.

Results of this effort show that of the 420 engineers who were initially on the fence, are leaning toward staying in the Air Force, or definitely getting out. The counselors believe 42 percent were influenced to stay in the Air Force after the one-on-one sessions.

The Secretary's goal is for this program to be instituted across the Air Force, somewhat similar to the Navy's program that compliments this pre-separation counseling process. We fully support this initiative.

And, lastly, you asked about the need for a Department of Labor to service our overseas workshops similar to their functions stateside. This would be a benefit to us. Currently, we use our family support center staff to perform this function.

By utilizing Department of Labor support, this would free up our staff to support our personnel in other ways. I have further information should you desire to go into details.

Mr. Chairman, and members of this subcommittee, the TAP program is one of the greatest gifts that we give our hardworking airmen. The military's job has always been to serve America, and this program allows us to serve America, even after the military member separates.

I would be pleased to respond to any questions you might have. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Craven appears on p. 83.]

Mr. SIMPSON. Thank you all for your testimony. As I said earlier, the TAP legislation gives the different branches of the service great flexibility in designing their own program which best suits them, and I think that's a good idea because it allows experimentation, different ideas to be tried, and to see what is successful, or what is most successful, and what fits each branch of the service.

Do you all get together and talk about how your different programs work, and what aspects of it may be successful, what aspects maybe you need help with, or be able to take advantage of what some other branches of the service are doing?

Do you exchange ideas? Do you have a free flow of information here?

Mr. MOLINO. Mr. Chairman, I suspect sometimes it is a freer flow than we would like. But the people who work in this business know each other well, talk to each other probably on a daily basis.

The nature of their duties tend to overlap. It is not just the transition program, it is other quality of life programs that help our transitioning soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines.

So I think, speaking for the Department overall, my sense of it is that there is a lot of talk, there is a lot of cross-fertilization, there is a lot of, "Hey, that's a good idea. How would we do it in our Service?" Or, "Although that's a good idea for your Service, it just won't work in ours." At least that is my sense of it.

Mr. SIMPSON. I appreciate that, and I hope that continues.

During your testimony, Ms. Blair, you talked about really the difficulty of a goal, setting a goal in this. And I am kind of a goal-oriented sort of man. I like to say this is what I am going to do and, you know, see if I can do that.

With a program like this, it is kind of difficult when the objective of the program is to provide a service. But, obviously, if we don't have some type of goals out there, then you are never going to know whether you are successful, whether you are doing a good job, a bad job, or whatever. Are you?

And I noticed, Ms. Craven, you mentioned in your testimony that you are going to start surveying members that have left the service.

Ms. CRAVEN. Well, we are going to begin examining that because we think that could be very helpful.

Mr. SIMPSON. Are all of the services going to do that, start collecting additional data on people as they leave service, and really—I won't use the word "tracking" again—follow up—that was a good word—doing the follow up necessary to find out if this is successful?

Because sometimes the impression someone has 30 days after they leave the service may not be the same impression they have 365 days after they leave the service.

I think it would be very vital to the continuation and improvement of this program to be able to do the necessary follow up, and get the input from those individuals that have used the services, even those that didn't use the services, "If they could go back and do it again would they?" that type of thing.

To the extent that we can do better follow up and get the information necessary to improve the program, I would certainly encourage that among all of you. Would any of you would care to respond to that?

Mr. MCLAURIN. Yes, Mr. Chairman. I think that is a good idea. I think that I would like to work with the Air Force to investigate the possibilities here. Currently, the Army does not do that exactly.

Certainly, we have surveys of folks who participate in the program. And in my written testimony, we have already indicated that this is highly successful. We also encourage participants to provide us information once they depart, and each one of the ACAP centers actually post their success stories.

And if you would like, I can certainly provide you a sampling of those, either to the committee, or for the record.

Mr. SIMPSON. Certainly.

Mr. MCLAURIN. Because those actually are very meaningful and encouraging to people who come to pre-separation counseling to actually take advantage of the transition assistance services that are available.

Mr. SIMPSON. I appreciate that. Do all of you feel that a greater presence of the Department of Labor at the overseas facilities would be advantageous?

Mr. MOLINO. I was going to say, Mr. Chairman, I think I could speak for the group that we would welcome that increased level of participation, whether it be direct or through contract. But we would certainly welcome that increased level of service.

As you know, the Services go the extra step to ensure that just because a servicemember is separating overseas, they do not get cheated of the service. They send their own people to get qualified to provide that instruction, and they are as qualified as the Labor Department people.

So, to the extent Labor would be able to provide that service, we would certainly welcome it.

Mr. SIMPSON. I appreciate that. Admiral Johnson, you mentioned that you have special difficulties, if you want to call them that, in that you don't have the large classes to be able to offer the same services that the other branches do. But, yet, you offer per diem and travel for your separating individuals to be able to travel to these classes.

Do they take classes from the other branches?

Admiral JOHNSON. Yes, sir. They take them from the other military services, and the program that the Department of Labor participates in. And we very much appreciate the cooperative relationships that we have with the other services. And we utilize a lot of the same resources. We share materials with them. And our staffs are very, very actively involved at their unit level, as well as at the headquarters level.

Mr. SIMPSON. I appreciate that. And thank you all for being here. Mr. Buyer.

Mr. BUYER. I am going to go right down the line. Do you think your mission is to get somebody a job? Is that your mission at DOD? What do you think?

Mr. MOLINO. It is a very simple question that requires a very complex answer, I am afraid. I don't think our mission is to be a job search organization.

However, when a young man or a young woman volunteers to come on active duty to serve their nation, I do think there is some obligation that we not leave them in a disadvantageous position where they are immediately, the day they are discharged, left with a firm handshake, and a pat on the back, and no other ability to get a job.

Because they lived in South Bend before they came in the Army, and then when they separated they happened to be somewhere in Europe, but they want to go back to South Bend, I think we need to ensure that they have some skills about what it takes to get an interview, what it takes to perhaps get a job.

I think we owe it to them as a way of fulfilling our share of what we have come to call in the Department, the social compact, this reciprocal arrangement we have with these people who have volunteered to serve.

Mr. BUYER. The Army, do you think it is your mission here to get them a job?

Mr. MCLAURIN. Specifically, I don't think it is our mission to actually give them a job. If we could, I think it would greatly enhance our ability to recruit the personnel that we need for the services.

Mr. BUYER. Coast Guard?

Admiral JOHNSON. I don't believe they all want a job afterwards. I think it depends upon the reason why a member is leaving. Women may leave to take care of their children. I don't think helping them get a job is necessarily in their—I think what our responsibility is is to help them understand what they want in their post-service life whether it be a job or not a job, and help them to fulfill those ideals.

Mr. BUYER. Ms. Blair.

Ms. BLAIR. Our mission is to provide the nation's defense. As a practical matter, that takes people, and people of whom we ask some very special and difficult things, laying their lives on the line.

And so, we need to do what we have to do in order to persuade people that we care as much about them as they care about themselves. So a job may be a small piece of evidence of that concern about the people whom we are asking to serve.

Mr. BUYER. Ms. Craven.

Ms. CRAVEN. Our goal is to assist them in prioritizing their goals in the transition, and to provide them the resources to achieve those goals.

Mr. BUYER. I think you all gave the right answer. That is why it means nothing for me for you to give testimony that a measurement of the success of your program is whether someone is—how much you pay out in unemployment insurance.

How can you give me that answer, and then provide testimony that, "Well, we think it's effective because this is what we are giving out in unemployment?"

I don't think that matches. It doesn't resonate with me. It doesn't mean much to me. This is my personal opinion.

I have some questions about skill sets, and whether you see any cooperation from corporate leaders. So what immediately comes to my mind would be some of the jobs, specific jobs within the Navy, perhaps, the air component of the Marine Corps, it is very easy for the Air Force because you have got maintenance, you have got pilots that you can place immediately—industry understands that.

So I don't know all of the difference between your military specialties. I am Army, so I just call them MOS's. But, as I understand it, we don't match very well to industries skill sets.

Can you provide some testimony here about whether we need more participation from industry leaders, or is there something that is already being taken care of that I don't know about?

Ms. BLAIR. Mr. Buyer, if I may, in the Navy, our education and training command has actually revamped itself. And we are revising our ratings with MOS's to make sure that if we are asking

somebody to be a cook, that person is qualified to be a cook in a hotel, and has the appropriate kinds of civilian certifications.

We are trying to line ourselves up with the civilian job market believing that it not only may enhance some of our certifications, but it also provides our people different options.

In the Marine Corps, we have lots of folks who are rifleman. They carry a gun all day. And I would suggest that having attended a TAP program yesterday, at which the opportunity for security jobs was presented, that is a tremendous benefit for the United States of America today, that we may draw upon veterans to fulfill a lot of these security requirements, rather than folks off the street, who may not have any kind of specialized training in that area.

So, even some of the less obvious jobs, such as trained killer, could actually have plenty of relevance to today's economy.

Mr. BUYER. Ms. Craven.

Ms. CRAVEN. In answer to your question, I know that we certify for some of the top occupations in the Air Force, like you said, whether that is air traffic controllers, pair rescue, vehicle maintenance, fire protection, et cetera. But I like your question, as far as, do we partner with corporate—in the business world?

I would like to go back and find some more information on that and get you better answer on that.

Mr. BUYER. Army.

Mr. MCLAURIN. Yes, sir. We would always welcome more participation by private industry leaders. They have been most forthcoming with us in our initial development of the Partnership for Youth Success program.

As I mentioned earlier, we have 24 companies already participating in that. And I think you are absolutely right, in that there is sometimes perceived not to be a direct correlation between many MOS's and civilian job skills.

When we were working on the development of the GI to Jobs program, we basically found that about 70 percent of our MOS's had some type of direct correlation to private certification licensure. That leaves out quite a number of MOS's, not to mention the ones surrounding the combat arms, which cover a great number of people.

We, however, do believe that those soldiers possess many skills and attributes, obviously, duty to their country, but leadership skills, work ethic, that are in fact important to employment in the private sector. And we are trying to work our GI to Jobs program to in fact develop those into possibilities for them in the future, and to help them in seeking employment.

Mr. BUYER. Mr. Chairman, two things have struck me here. I would welcome DOD to have a conference with some corporate leaders. I don't know if you would do that or not. But, boy, that would be wonderful. I think it would pay great dividends.

And the other thing, Mr. Chairman, in the GAO report that sort of struck me was, back in 1996—in a bipartisan fashion, this committee created the Commission that took a look at the TAP program, and despite Ms. Blair's testimony about the Marine Corps, there must have been a reason why the commandant of the Marine Corps didn't give, as you indicated, great encouragement.

The last time I checked a Marine order, there isn't much about encouragement there in a Marine order. Either you do it, or it is bad dire consequences. So when the commandant of the Marine Corps has now ordered mandatory appearance, he must have done that because something wasn't working out there.

And what I do know about the services in my years of working with them, the Marine Corps takes the lead a lot. They really do. And I am just telling you, that is telegraphing something to me. And I just wanted to share that with you.

To close, since I have history with Ms. Blair and Ms. Craven, publicly, here from a Congressional setting, congratulations to both of you for your service to the country.

Ms. CRAVEN. Thank you.

Ms. BLAIR. Thank you.

Mr. BUYER. I yield back.

Mr. SIMPSON. Thank you. Ms. Brown.

Ms. BROWN. Thank you. In your presentation, you indicated that the Department of Defense planned to modify policies to require each military service branch to track the impact of the early interest into pre-separation counseling has on retention.

According to the GAO, one of the difficulties in evaluating the effectiveness of the TAP program is the lack of common data, definition, and collection. Does the Department of Defense plan to develop a common database to obtain and maintain TAP-related information?

Mr. MOLINO. Ms. Brown, you have hit the nail on the head. We not only see the need to develop information and maintain it in an automated fashion, but we do recognize the need to have common data elements, so that we can make comparisons among the Services.

Ms. BROWN. Are you developing a common tool? Or, I mean, what is the status of it?

Mr. MOLINO. Yes, ma'am. We are hoping to do it in the next fiscal year, in fact, as I stated in my testimony.

Ms. BROWN. Can you discuss what are the costs relating to develop this program? And what do you need to do to maintain the 1990 availability of money, keeping it at the same level?

Mr. MOLINO. I don't believe cost is a limiting factor in this regard. But I can certainly provide that in detail for the record, if that would suit you.

Ms. BROWN. Okay, thank you.

Mr. MOLINO. Thank you, ma'am.

Ms. BROWN. I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. SIMPSON. Thank you, Ms. Brown. I appreciate the questions. And I do thank the panel. I do have just a couple of things. First of all, contrary to Mr. Buyer, I do think that a little bit saved in the amount paid in unemployment is a reflection of whether people are finding jobs.

And part of your job is not necessarily to find them a job, but it is to make them as prepared as possible, so that should they choose to find a job, they have that—the skills to do so.

And so, things like unemployment benefits, as well as many other measures, come into are these being success—are we being successful at what we are doing?

I am not saying it is the measure of whether you are successful by any means. So I appreciate what you were saying.

Mr. BUYER. I don't want to quibble with the chairman. A job is a job. Does it fit? Does it fit them—have we prepared them for that life cycle? And does that job fit their skill? I don't know.

Mr. SIMPSON. The gentleman brings up a really interesting question, which I have wondered about for years and years, and that is in the area of education.

We go out and we look at how many of these people go to college, and we assume that that is a success if they go to college; whereas, maybe what they wanted to do is actually get a job. And the goal of education is to prepare a student that when they leave school, they are able to find a job that makes them happy.

I mean that is the goal of all of this, that they are happy in life, whether that is being an auto mechanic, or being an admiral in the Navy, or being a physician, or whatever they are, that they are happy at what they do.

Was their education a limiting factor in not being able to achieve that happiness?

That is one of the things that I don't know how you do it, but we don't know whether that is—you know, we could have 100 percent employment in this country, and have everyone very unhappy because they are not doing what they would like to be able to do.

Those types of things, we need to be able to measure better. I don't know how to get there. I am not smart enough to be able to do that.

Do you keep track of any statistics about how many members when they leave the service go to college, go to a job that is ready for them, have a job that is ready for them, that they are, you know, transitioning into, or actually go into unemployment?

How many take off for a few months because that is what they want to do?

Do we keep track of any of those statistics? Because my goal is to have a servicemember, when he leaves the service, be able to do what he wants to do.

Mr. MOLINO. Sir, I am not aware of any Department-wide data that we keep in that regard. We have talked about the unemployment figures, and whether or not that is reflective of a servicemember who enlisted during the summer, and therefore separates during the summer months, and has decided to take a few months off before going to college, and is eligible for unemployment compensation, is that skewing the figures any, probably is.

Mr. SIMPSON. Yes.

Mr. MOLINO. If someone does separate, and as was stated before by the admiral, decides that he or she wants to go to do full-time family support work rather than go into the job market, what does that tell us? Does everybody want to get job?

We really don't have a handle on that. And, to the extent we can get a handle on that, that will be how we judge the effectiveness I think of this program. You know, intuitively, we all think this is a good idea. And I think everybody in this room would agree with that.

And we have the sense I think uniformly that we are doing a good job, or at least we are putting out a degree of effort headed

to the direction of doing a good job. All of the feedback we get from surveys is positive.

However, that feedback could be just as easily twisted if we didn't have good donuts at the session, or if the coffee was cold.

Mr. SIMPSON. That is right.

Mr. MOLINO. So what we do need to do before we grade these things, is to look at what the outcomes are in real terms.

One of the witnesses said we are looking—I think Ms. Craven said, they are looking to go a little bit beyond when the person gets out, to then poll them and see in fact are they doing what it is they wanted to do when they separated? Are they in fact working?

And, frankly, without that, we look at the amount of money we contribute to the unemployment compensation, frankly, because that is one of the only few hard numbers we have. I think we need more hard numbers and more outcomes to make a better evaluation.

But I think, intuitively, there is no argument. We all think this is really the right thing to do. And we can't do enough for these servicemembers.

Mr. SIMPSON. Well, I appreciate that. And I will tell you that I appreciate the dilemma you face in trying to really measure success in this. But this committee is committed to working with you to do whatever we can to help determine that success and make this as successful a program as possible.

Mr. BUYER. May I ask a——

Mr. SIMPSON. Sure.

Mr. BUYER. I apologize—that we invest a lot of money on the education piece. So we say to that soldier, sailor, admiral, and marine, when you come in, we will also give you the opportunity while in service to obtain your college degree, or an associate's degree, or further schooling.

Are we able to measure—now when they are prepared to transition out after maybe one enlistment, or two enlistments, or an officer after 3 years, how well did we do in that?

Did we give them the opportunities? Did we give them the time? Do they get many courses in? Are we able to measure that success? Is that in there?

Mr. MOLINO. I don't think it is, sir. I can give you two examples that give you both ends of the spectrum.

I was at Mildenhall, England, which is a somewhat remote location about 200 miles north of London. An enlisted soldier at one of the sensing sessions we held complained that he had nothing to do.

And the thing he was worried about the most was that in his time at that station, be it remote, that he would turn to alcohol, or just play video games. When that session was over, one of the field grade officers come up to me and said, "I have got more youth programs to keep this guy busy than he knows about. And I'll make contact with him and see how interested he is in getting involved."

Likewise, I was recently in Sinai, and talked to a young Guardsman, who had been there for the Arkansas Guard for her 6 months. And she had consistently taken college level courses, and had amassed more credits than I could believe anybody could amass in a 6-month period.

It has a lot to do with the individual's motivation. The programs are out there, and it is a case of perhaps putting the right bait on it. But, for some soldiers, who are in similar situations, although in different parts of the world, they bite right at that hook and they run with every opportunity we give them. And for some I think you can sweeten the water to the point of making it unhealthy, and they probably wouldn't take a drink.

Mr. BUYER. I think that is why, Mr. Chairman, this ends up also being a retention program because some of these servicemembers get scared to death. And the GAO is accurate. It says, "Gees, I am not prepared for the outside world. And that is why the investments we are making in long distance learning is so extremely important."

Do you also bring up their continued participation in the Guard or the Reserves that is being done with great success?

Ms. BLAIR. Yes.

Mr. BUYER. That is all in the affirmative? Thank you.

And the last question I have, it is a bigger question out there. But I thought about this as I listened to your answers earlier. World War II, we are a country of about 120-some million people with 10 million in uniform.

Today, we have a little over 1.2 million, and we are a country of 280-plus million. And not everybody understands the military dimension out there today.

Is there any evidence of any kind of bias out there in the workplace with regard to veterans? Are you seeing any of it?

Ms. BLAIR. We receive anecdotally, and through media clippings, and so forth, a lot of evidence that—particularly, in the last year, to the extent that there were any lingering biases against veterans, it has very much turned around.

And I think the American people are very grateful to anybody in uniform, and particularly, the military services. But, as you know, that has not always been the case and it could change. And I totally agree with you that having more opportunities for America-at-large to interface with military people can only be good for both sides.

Ms. CRAVEN. I think the only evidence I have as anecdotal, but it is that they want our airmen. It is not just because they are qualified in what they do, but it is because of the—some of the intangibles that they bring, the integrity, and their work ethic, and those kinds of things.

So I think if there is a bias that I have heard, it goes that way. They want them.

Mr. BUYER. Great. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. SIMPSON. Ms. Brown.

Ms. BROWN. Yes, just on that last remark, I do know in my area, Jacksonville, Florida, it goes the other way because we are always looking for qualified retirees, and they go into companies because of their background, and training, and they get very good jobs.

And I think one of the indications is whether or not the service personnel decide to stay in that area. Even though they go other places, they come back.

But my question I guess go to lifelong learning. And do we keep data, as to how many personnel choose that period to upgrade, or enhance their degree?

Because I was—in reviewing it, I thought it was very interesting that when people go through the RAP program—TAP program, they decide to stay I guess because they evaluate what's the conditions on the outside, and they think that, you know, maybe it is a pretty good deal.

When you look at health benefits, and we are trying to upgrade housing, and other benefits, they decide to stay, which is good. Will you respond to that?

Ms. BLAIR. I have one experience from just yesterday. We have been over the last few years encouraging people to take the TAP preparation well in advance of their retirement. And one of the marines who was participating in a program yesterday told me that he is 2 years from retirement, but he wanted to ensure that for whatever he wants to do 2 years from now he is able now to pursue whatever education he might need in the meantime when he has many programs that will assist him with that.

So we do know while people are in the service what they are doing, whether they are taking college courses, and we offer numerous programs. But the bottom line is what the chairman has said. We have very poor information about what happens once they are no longer with the service.

And just about every day, I bemoan the fact that we lack that information. So we are definitely interested in being able to follow the lives of people who have left the service, so that we can evaluate whether what we are doing now is actually effective.

Ms. BROWN. I wonder is there any way that we could maybe get the college to help us with the follow up placement because so many of the colleges in my area also offer the distant learning and other training programs. So maybe that is something we should think about.

Mr. SIMPSON. I appreciate the panel's testimony today. Thank you all very much. This committee looks forward to working with you to make sure that this remains a viable program and improves in any way necessary. Thank you.

Our final panel this morning is Mr. Robert Epley, Associate Deputy Under Secretary for Policy and Program Management, Veterans Benefits Administration, and the Honorable Frederico Juarbe, Jr., the Assistant Secretary of Labor, Veterans' Employment and Training Service.

Welcome to the committee this morning. We thank you for attending. Mr. Epley, when you are ready.

STATEMENTS OF ROBERT EPLEY, ASSOCIATE DEPUTY UNDER SECRETARY FOR POLICY AND PROGRAM MANAGEMENT, VETERANS BENEFITS ADMINISTRATION; AND FREDERICO JUARBE, JR., ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF LABOR, VETERANS' EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING SERVICE; ACCOMPANIED BY CHARLES S. CICCOLELLA, DEPUTY ASSISTANT OF LABOR, VETERANS' EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING SERVICE

STATEMENT OF ROBERT EPLEY

Mr. EPLEY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and members of the subcommittee. I appreciate the opportunity to testify today on the VA's role in the Transition Assistance Program and request that my formal statement be accepted for the record.

Mr. SIMPSON. Yes.

Mr. EPLEY. The Department of Veterans Affairs believes strongly in the concept of transition assistance for our separating servicemembers. And we have supported this program since its enactment. Indeed, we see the transition assistance process as an important component of a comprehensive outreach effort.

Since the implementation of the VA Transition Assistance Program, we have had military service coordinators assigned at each of our VA regional offices. They have been responsible for disseminating information on a wide range of benefits and medical care offered by VA, and in explaining how to apply for these benefits and services.

This function, information dissemination, remains our primary focus within the transition assistance process. Over time, we have worked to expand and improve the program. In 1993, VA expanded its military service program overseas.

We continue to work cooperatively with DOD in that effort, providing three to 5 month rotational tours with employees who have been selected from our regional offices. In 2001, we held 574 overseas briefings for audiences of over 13,000 personnel.

In the early 1990s, we also established a National Records Management Center, and negotiated agreements with the military service branches, so that VA could store service medical records. This has facilitated our benefits determination and supported service delivery for all veterans and separating servicemembers.

Another enhancement to our program has been the Benefits Delivery at Discharge (BDD) program sponsored jointly by VA and DOD. This initiative has taken our military services briefing one step further by allowing us to take and process claims for service connected compensation prior to the discharge of the servicemember.

We currently have 47 VA regional offices, and over 120 military installations involved in Benefits Delivery at Discharge. Almost 23,000 claims were finalized through this program in fiscal year 2001.

Our goal with transition assistance is to provide high quality, uniform presentations to all separating servicemembers. To help assure this, we have standardized the briefing package for our transition presentations. And we recently offered training nationwide for all of our military service coordinators.

As new legislation has been enacted, we have tried to incorporate the changes into our presentations. For example, we have just developed an outreach publication on the recently enacted licensing and certification test benefit. We will advise future audiences of this important GI Bill benefit.

We recognize that some participants may have different needs, and we try to adapt to their needs. For example, we explain our vocational rehabilitation program to all of the participants at the general audience briefings. Then we offer more detailed one-on-one assistance to those who feel that they may need counseling to be eligible for vocational training in our vocational rehabilitation program.

We have also made our benefits information available through an internet page. We will continue to expand the use of the internet, so that we can be more accessible to transitioning servicemembers and anyone who is interested in the VA programs.

In summary, we support the TAP program. We feel it has been successful for us. We are continuing to improve our process, so that we can reach out and provide appropriate assistance to every separating servicemember.

That concludes my statement. I would be happy to address any of your questions.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Epley appears on p. 90.]

Mr. SIMPSON. Thanks, Mr. Epley. Mr. Juarbe.

STATEMENT OF FREDERICO JUARBE, JR.

Mr. JUARBE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I welcome the opportunity to be before this committee to testify concerning the Transition Assistance Program. I have prepared a statement, and I ask that it be submitted for the record please.

Mr. SIMPSON. It will be.

Mr. JUARBE. Thank you. The Transition Assistance Program encompasses a decade of cooperative effort between the Departments of Defense, Veterans' Affairs, Transportation, and Labor. Top workshops are tailored to meet the specific needs of each of 170 military installations, at which TAP is offered.

Participants receive a vast array of both practical advice and useful tools for obtaining employment in the civilian marketplace. The success of TAP workshops in providing the needed skills for enhancing employment opportunities for separating servicemembers is well-documented, and has been evaluated regularly.

VETS conducted focus groups at 21 installations in 2000, which echoed earlier findings of the TAP participants, and that they found employment approximately 3 weeks sooner than their nonparticipant counterparts.

I would like to read to you some excerpts from an e-mail received in our Clarksville, Tennessee, office last week sent by Sergeant Major Duane Sumas to the senior enlisted personnel at Fort Campbell, Kentucky:

"I am now a true believer in the TAP system. I am also one of those who felt that the job requirements were more employment than attending TAP. I am now enlightened. Assistance in all areas of TAP is outstanding. Bottom line, don't procrastinate. If you plan on retiring, or even thinking about making that decision, go to

TAP. Wish I would have gone earlier and used their services. Sergeant Major Sumas."

We believe veterans like Sergeant Major Sumas provide employers with the best talent pool of even transitioning population. And it is our aim to equip them for the civilian workforce with the same level of quality training that prepares them to effectively serve our country.

I believe the key to continuing the superior performance experienced by the sergeant major and his many counterparts rests in our excellent interagency relationships. The recent completion of the TAP reengineering project, when representatives from the Departments of Defense, Labor, Veterans' Affairs, and Transportation met together to make decisions on how to improve the overall programs proves the value of a strong partnership.

The Reengineering Committee identified several areas for improving the effectiveness of TAP workshops including: the standardization of presentations and materials; overcoming barriers such as classroom availability, access to bases, and a limited number of qualified facilitators; managing costs and maintaining the relevance of course materials; increasing participation, especially among military spouses; and, of course, measuring the success and the outcomes of the participation in TAP.

All four agencies combine resources to work with the Reeingineering Committee to address these and other issues. The initial outcome of our efforts include a redesigned, cutting edge, and user-friendly workshop participant manual, which is also available for download from our website.

I have it with me, and I have made copies available for all of the members of the committee. And I do want to emphasize, Mr. Chairman, user-friendly. We have instituted a 90-day update plan for the time-sensitive content in the manual to ensure the quality of our information and its relevance to participants.

In addition to modernizing the TAP participants manual, we updated the TAP facilitators manual, which is used by the instructors. And we have developed a website to allow the facilitators to electronically communicate best practices, present questions, and receive the most current TAP workshop information.

In order to maintain the forward momentum of the—and positive results of the Reengineering Committee, we intend to carry on their purpose through the formation of a permanent interagency transition assistance program steering committee. And the Department of Labor has the lead on that. And we will be convening a meeting very soon of that steering committee.

We combined and updated all of our web-based resources into a personalized internet tool kit called e-VETS, which was launched on July 4th. It is also referred to as the transition website. And I have a small card that explains some of those programs, which I have provided for the members of the committee also.

I would like to emphasize also that on the right-hand page, every right-hand page of the manual, that website is listed, Mr. Chairman, so that the—I think the important thing, Mr. Chairman, is that—and I hope you will recognize that many of our joint efforts already addressing the desire of the committee to provide one-stop web-based services is called for in H.R. 4015, the Jobs for Veterans

Act jointly introduced by you and the ranking members—ranking member, Congressman Reyes.

In recognition of this growing partnership, we realize that the Department of Defense has expressed its desire that we provide workshops in overseas installations. I think I can make that unanimous. We agree.

In response to this request, we are exploring possibilities such as the outstationing of DVAP, and LVERs, in overseas TAP locations on a rotational basis; or training and contracting out the facilitation of TAP workshops to military spouses, which should enable us to increase military spouse participation in TAP, and provide employment opportunity for spouses overseas.

Realizing that these ideas are still in the working phase, I would like to take this opportunity to announce that VETS will be providing ample supplies of the updated manuals to the Department of Defense for distribution at all overseas top workshops.

As we continue to examine the expansion of TAP to installations overseas, I will keep you and your committee informed of our progress.

Mr. Chairman, that concludes my statement. I want to assure you of my willingness to work with you and members of the subcommittee, as well as our partners in TAP, to ensure the success of every veteran as they transition into the 21st Century workforce. I will be pleased to answer any questions you may have.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Juarbe appears on p. 99.]

Mr. SIMPSON. Thank you. And thank you both for your testimony here today.

Any idea when Secretary Chao might make that decision about actually establishing a presence overseas, as we have talked about here today?

Mr. JUARBE. The first thing that needs to be done, Mr. Chairman, is to address all of the issues related to that. And the most effective way of doing—the most cost-effective way of doing it.

And that is one of the top agendas that the steering committee will be addressing, so that we can receive the benefit of the input of all of our partners and make the best possible recommendations to the Secretary.

Mr. SIMPSON. Appreciate that. I note the absence of any data in the DOL or VA statements on D–TAP. How many disabled servicemen do we actually serve through D–TAP?

Mr. EPLEY. Mr. Chairman, in the last year, we provided overall briefings to about 187,000 personnel through the TAP process last year. And, if I could, I would like to explain the way we open people up to D–TAP.

We have found over time that it is preferable, and most expedient for the servicemembers, if we offer them the overall presentation first on all benefits, including a fairly comprehensive explanation of our vocational rehabilitation program. We do this for a couple of reasons. If we had held TAP and D–TAP simultaneously, they would miss that overall briefing.

Secondly, it had been our experience that not many of them understood what they might be eligible for. So we give them the general presentation first, then we offer a more detailed one-on-one

presentation to members who think they might be eligible or who have a particular interest in the rehabilitation program.

I don't have the numbers with me on that, but I can certainly provide you exact numbers for the record.

Mr. SIMPSON. I appreciate that. Ms. Brown.

Ms. BROWN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. First of all, let me commend the VA for their Benefit Delivery Program. A lot of times you don't get credit for something that, you know, you are doing a good job on. And for us, as Members of Congress, for our older veterans, if that was in place we would not have some of the problems that we have locating records and other information.

And I guess my question is: What kind of resources would be needed to appropriately staff the Benefit Delivery Programs overseas? Have you looked at that?

Mr. EPLEY. Ma'am, thank you very much for your comment. We appreciate that. It has been an intense effort over the last couple of years to expand BDD to over 120 installations within CONUS, and to open up two overseas sites, one in Korea and one in Germany.

It has been our plan to staff those sites in Korea and in Germany with about 7 to 10 full-time VA employees. We are also talking with national service organizations who have expressed interest in perhaps having them be on site with us. So 7 to 10 people at each of those sites are mentioned in my testimony.

We also do rotational tours in Europe and Asia; three to 5 months tours. These involve about a dozen FTEs from regional offices. We are discussing whether those people, or their equivalents in different resources, might better be attached permanently and directly to the overseas sites in Korea and Germany, and then do their outbased tours. That would be a new resource.

Ms. BROWN. The difference between the D–TAP program and the TAP program, I know you discussed it a little bit, but can you—who determines who goes into the D–TAP program?

Mr. EPLEY. Two basic ways: one, after the——

Ms. BROWN. I guess I want to know is it an add-on program, or how do you determine who is——

Mr. EPLEY. The D–TAP sessions are done in a either small audience or one-on-one after providing the general audience presentation, which explains our vocational rehabilitation program to them.

So, if you had heard the overall presentation and said "I think I may be entitled or I certainly am interested in vocational training," then we would set up an appointment to talk with you one-on-one, and give you much more detail on the counseling and job placement services that might be available to you.

We would also, if appropriate, let you know how to get in touch with the regional office when you got back to your home state. Another way that we select people is through regular communications with DOD. They let us know if a servicemember is hospitalized or preparing for a medical discharge. And we make contact with those people individually and set up D–TAP briefings.

Ms. BROWN. That is very good. Just one question for the person from Labor.

I know you are looking into going overseas. But have you done any assessment as to the costs involved, or the resources that is needed to expand this program overseas?

Mr. JUARBE. I think it was a number of years ago. I don't remember the exact date. Back in the mid-1990s, there was an estimate made that ranged quite widely I believe it was from—anywhere from $400,000 to over a million-and-a-half.

So I think, given the time that has transpired since then, we need to look at it again. And that is what we are hoping to be able to identify, how the VA is doing it, and the support that can be provided by the military branches to facilitate that.

Ms. BROWN. Maybe we can look at doing something jointly together, VA and Labor.

Mr. JUARBE. Yes, it would be——

Mr. EPLEY. We would certainly welcome that, ma'am. And, as a comment, Mr. Juarbe invited me and Julius Williams, head of our Vocation and Rehabilitation Program, to his recent national conference, and he attended Mr. Williams' Vocational Rehabilitation Conference. We do want to work together.

Ms. BROWN. Thank you very much. Mr. Chairman, I have some additional questions that I am going to put in the record, and also have Mr. Keeves statement at the appropriate time.

Mr. SIMPSON. Those will be added. Those will be included in the record. Appreciate it.

Mr. SIMPSON. Well, if there are no other questions, I do thank both of you for the work you are doing and look forward to working with you to try to improve this program as much as we can possible to make sure that our servicemembers, when they leave the service, have the best opportunity to find a job, or whatever they want to do, when they leave, and that we have those job opportunities available.

Thank you all very much for being here. I will also say that we have received testimony from the VSOs, which will be made part of the permanent record. We appreciate all of them for their input and their testimony on this subject. Thank you. This hearing is adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 11:54 a.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

APPENDIX

PREPARED STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN SIMPSON

Good morning. The hearing will come to order.

We are at war with terrorists and rogue nations and I suspect we may be for some time to come. This hearing is about the transition services the Departments of Defense, Veterans Affairs, and Labor furnish to the selfless members of our All-Volunteer military, many of whom are, as we meet, fighting this war.

As many of our witnesses point out in their testimony, transition assistance is not ″nice-to-have″—it's the law. This Subcommittee indeed is proud to have authored the most recent changes to the Transition Assistance Program as embodied in Veterans Benefits Expansion Act of 2001.

About 226,000 servicemembers separate from our military each year. Many are married. The last thing many of them, and their spouses, remember is how their Government treated them in making the transition to civilian live. The ultimate measure of a successful transition is long-term, sustained employment. That's the objective for employers and also our economy, as hiring veterans indeed is a good business decision. It's that simple. The reliability, initiative, and leadership qualities our servicemembers possess are the best we'll find anywhere. They truly are a unique national resource.

I am very grateful to my friend and ranking member, Silvestre Reyes, for suggesting today's hearing. I now turn to him for any opening statement he may have.

Will the first panel please approach the table. Ms. Cynthia Bascetta [Ba set ah], of the General Accounting Office, is accompanied by Ms. Sheila Drake. Ms. Bascetta, welcome. You may begin when you are ready. [Sheila Drake is not testifying]

[questions]

Panel two is made up of representatives of our military services. Honorable John Molino, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense, Military Community and Family Policy; Honorable John McLaurin, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Human Resources, Department of the Army; Honorable Anita Blair, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Personnel Programs, Department of the Navy; Honorable Kelly Craven, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Force Management Integration, Department of the Air Force; and Rear Admiral Joyce Johnson, Director, Directorate of Health and Safety, U.S. Coast Guard. Thank you all for beginning your day with us.

[After Panel 2 witnesses are at the table]

The last time this subcommittee had the good fortune to receive testimony from the service branches was on May 24 of last year. The issue was H.R. 1291, the proposed 21st Century Montgomery GI Bill Enhancement Act.

J. D. Hayworth of Arizona was chairman of the subcommittee at that time. The first witness that day was the late Lt. General Timothy J. Maude, United States Army. He was a forceful advocate for an improved Montgomery GI Bill. At the Subcommittee's request, General Maude shared with Chairman Hayworth, ranking member Reyes, Mr. Smith, Mr. Evans, Ms. Brown and the late Floyd Spence, the data on how few 17–21 year old males the service branches actually get to recruit. This is because so many go to college right out of high school.

What struck me in reading the transcript of that hearing was that General Maude was unwilling simply to give college students to the colleges. He wanted them in the Army. I suspect because of what the Army had to offer them—something that extended well beyond the classroom.

As you all know, General Maude died on September 11th while doing what he liked doing best—looking after the interests of soldiers. Not surprising for an individual who rose from the rank of private to General officer. Not surprising from a man who was a Vietnam veteran and a bronze star winner.

I attended the memorial service for General Maude and other selfless Americans who died at the Pentagon on September 11. I pay tribute to this man by noting that

H.R. 1291, the bill on which he testified, is now the law of the land and contains the largest increases ever in the Montgomery GI Bill.

We'll hold our questions until the entire panel has testified. I would ask that you limit your oral testimony to five minutes; we have received your written testimony and it will be included in the hearing record in full.

[questions]

Our final panel this morning is Mr. Robert Epley, Associate Deputy Under Secretary for Policy and Program Management, Veterans Benefits Administration; and Honorable Frederico Juarbe [Ja Warby], Jr., Assistant Secretary of Labor, Veterans' Employment and Training Service.

Thank you both for being here. Bob, we'll begin with you, please.

United States General Accounting Office

GAO

Testimony

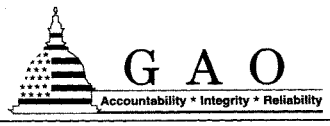
Before the Subcommittee on Benefits, Committee on Veterans' Affairs, House of Representatives

For Release on Delivery
Expected at 10:00 a.m. EST,
Thursday, July 18, 2002

MILITARY AND VETERANS' BENEFITS

Observations on the Transition Assistance Program

Statement of Cynthia A. Bascetta, Director
Education, Workforce, and Income Security Issues



GAO-02-914T

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for inviting me to discuss the military's transition assistance program, which the Congress established in 1990 during a time of military downsizing to help service men and women return to civilian life. Since its inception, the program has served over one million separating and retiring military personnel and has been administered through the coordinated efforts of the Departments of Defense (DOD), Transportation (DOT), Labor (DOL), and Veterans Affairs (VA). In fiscal year 2001, the military branches and DOL spent approximately $47.5 million to provide transition assistance to about 222,000 separating and retiring service members.

Today, I will describe the transition assistance offered by each military branch and how their transition assistance programs and services differ. I will also discuss what is known about how well program objectives, such as transitioning to civilian employment, have been met. To conduct our work, we analyzed program descriptions and administrative data from documentation provided by DOD, DOT, DOL, and VA. We also conducted structured group interviews during fieldwork at five locations, one at each military branch—the Army, Air Force, Navy, Marines, and Coast Guard.[1] We talked to about 70 service members, including separatees and retirees as well as members expected to separate with a disability, who had participated in the transition assistance workshop. At each location, we also interviewed commanding officers, supervisors, and transition assistance program staff. While all military branches were represented, we cannot generalize from this information. In addition, we did not interview service members who did not receive transition assistance services. Finally, we reviewed existing studies of the transition assistance program. Our work was conducted from March 2002 through July 2002, in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

In summary, while each branch of the military provides required pre-separation counseling and offers transition assistance workshops to help service members transition to civilian life, not all eligible service members receive transition assistance. Because the military branches have considerable flexibility in designing their programs to address the perceived needs of their service members, transition assistance varies in content and delivery across the military branches. For example, the Army uses contract staff and interactive job assistance tools to provide the level of employment-related assistance it believes many of its service members need. In addition, service members experience differences in access to transition assistance depending on their unique circumstances. For example, service members who receive transition assistance while stationed at remote locations often receive less extensive transition assistance than what is available at other locations. Service members we talked to liked the services they received, and several studies confirm participant satisfaction with transition assistance. However, isolating the impact of transition assistance on employment, education, and other outcomes is difficult because of data inadequacies and methodological challenges. Only two program evaluations from the early 1990s evaluated the effectiveness of transition assistance on employment and provided

[1] We conducted structured group interviews at Camp LeJeune, North Carolina; Andrews Air Force Base, Maryland; Fort Stewart, Georgia; Naval Air Station in Jacksonville, Florida; and U.S. Coast Guard Integrated Support Command Miami, Florida. We observed a transition assistance program workshop at Andrews Air Force Base, Maryland. We also observed disabled transition assistance program workshops at the National Naval Medical Center in Bethesda, Maryland and at the Walter Reed Army Medical Center in the District of Columbia.

limited information. Moreover, they did not evaluate the impact of transition assistance on other potential goals, including recruitment and retention, which could have growing importance now that the military is no longer downsizing.

Background

When the Congress established the transition assistance program in 1990,[2] significant reductions in military force levels were expected. The law noted that many of these service personnel specialized in critical skills, such as combat arms, which would not transfer to the civilian workforce. Transition assistance, including employment and job training services, was established to help such service members make suitable educational and career choices as they readjusted to civilian life.

The law directed DOL, DOD, and VA to jointly administer the program. To do so, the agencies entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), which spelled out each agency's role in the provision of services to members of the Army, Navy, Air Force and Marines. When the Coast Guard started to operate the transition assistance program in 1994, DOT entered into a similar agreement with VA and DOL.

Each branch of the military is required to provide pre-separation counseling to all military personnel no later than 90 days prior to their separation from the military. Pre-separation counseling, according to the law, shall include information about education and vocational rehabilitation benefits, selective reserve options, job counseling and job search and placement information, relocation assistance services, medical and dental benefits, counseling on the effects of career change, and financial planning. The military branches are to provide space for the provision of transition services at locations with more than 500 active duty personnel. Separating service members must complete a pre-separation counseling checklist indicating that they have been informed of the services available to them and, on this checklist, they are to indicate the services they wish to receive, including if they wish to participate in the transition assistance workshop.

For locations in the United States, DOL is responsible for providing transition assistance workshops, which are generally 3-day training sessions focusing primarily on resume writing and job search strategies and includes a manual with basic information on the material covered in the workshop.[3] The MOU identifies specific workshop objectives, including preventing and reducing long-term unemployment, reducing unemployment compensation paid to veterans, and improving retention.

DOL spent about $5 million in fiscal year 2001 to provide about 3,200 workshops, in addition to the funding spent on transition assistance by the military branches shown in table 1. The workshop and other transition services are to be accessible to service members two years prior to

[2] National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 1991, P.L. 101-510, November 5, 1990.

[3] When available these seminars are facilitated by Local Veterans Employment Representatives (LVER) or Disabled Veterans Outreach Program (DVOP) specialists, federally funded staff, who are part of states' employment service systems and provide direct employment services to eligible veterans. If they are unavailable, federal DOL staff or a DOL contractor facilitates the transition assistance workshop. At overseas locations, the workshops are facilitated by DOD.

retirement and one year prior to separation.[4] As part of the transition assistance workshop, VA is responsible for providing information on veterans' benefits, including information on disability benefits. VA is also responsible for providing more detailed information and assistance to those service members separating or retiring due to a disability.

Table 1: Transition Assistance Funding by Military Branch, Fiscal Year 2001

	Army	Air Force	Marine	Navy	Coast Guard	Total
Funding (in millions)[a]						
DOD	13.5	8.9	4.0	10.3	0.0	**36.7**
Other	5.3[b]	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.5[c]	**5.8**
Total	**18.8**	**8.9**	**4.0**	**10.3**	**0.5**	**42.5**
Transition Assistance Workshops[d]						
Number held	1,207	1,115	520	1,075	33	**3,950**
Length (in days)	2-3	3	3-4	4	4	**N/A**
Average class size	24	25	41	38	35	**N/A**

[a] These amounts do not include DOL or VA funding, DOD overhead expenditures or any resources contributed by local installations.

[b] The Army provides funds to supplement transition assistance.

[c] This amount includes funds from both Coast Guard Headquarters and local Coast Guard installations.

[d] These numbers include both DOL facilitated and contractor facilitated workshops in the U.S. and DOD facilitated workshops overseas.

Source: DOD and DOT.

In 1996, Congress established the Commission on Servicemembers and Veterans Transition Assistance and directed it to review programs that provide benefits and services to veterans and service members making the transition to civilian life. The Transition Commission examined pre-separation counseling and transition assistance program workshops as part of its work.[5]

Transition Assistance Varies in Key Ways Across the Military Branches

Each branch of the military provides the required pre-separation counseling and offers workshops focusing on employment assistance and veterans' benefits, although not all service members participate. In addition, disabled service members are provided detailed information on benefits and services available to service members with disabilities as well as assistance in accessing these services. The military branches have considerable flexibility in designing their programs, allowing them to vary the content as well as the delivery of their programs. Moreover, the priorities of the military mission can also affect delivery and access to transition assistance.

Military Branches Provide Required Services, but Participation Varies

All military branches provide pre-separation counseling and offer transition workshops that include employment assistance and information on veterans' benefits. However, military branch data indicate that not all service members receive the required pre-separation counseling or participate in the workshops. As shown in table 2, in fiscal year 2001, 81

[4] Veterans Education and Benefits Expansion Act of 2001, P.L. 107-103, Dec. 27, 2001, extended from 6 months to 1 year for separatees and from 1 year to 2 years for retirees, the time prior to separation that service members may access transition assistance.

[5] Report of the Congressional Commission on Servicemembers and Veterans Transition Assistance (Washington, D.C.: 1999).

percent of service members received pre-separation counseling,[6] and 53 percent attended a transition workshop. The transition workshop participation rates for each branch ranged from 29 percent for the Coast Guard to 72 percent for the Navy. These participation rates may not be reliable because some branches' data include service members who participated but did not separate. To the extent that this is occurring, the percentages on participation are overstated.

Table 2: Participation in Pre-Separation Counseling and Transition Assistance Workshops by Military Branch, Fiscal Year 2001

Participation	Air Force	Army	Marines	Navy	Coast Guard	Total or Average
Total Separated/Retired	**43,756**	**85,190**	**31,319**	**57,452[a]**	**4,037**	**221,754**
Number of pre-separation counselings	39,375	77,146	27,849	30,508	N/A[b]	**174,878**
Percent receiving pre-separation counseling	90%[c]	91%	89%	53%	N/A[b]	**81%**
Number attending transition assistance workshop[d]	27,815	28,464	21,397	41,181	1,155[e]	**120,012**
Percent attending workshop	64%	33%	68%	72%	29%	**53%**

[a] According to the Navy, this total includes 8,387 service members in training who were not required to receive pre-separation counseling because they had less than 180 days of active duty.

[b] The Coast Guard does not have an automated system to collect these data.

[c] Air Force officials told us that a record audit conducted in 2000 indicated that 97 percent of its separating and retiring service members received pre-separation counseling in 1999. However, they did not provide more current audit results.

[d] We are not reporting participation in disabled transition assistance workshops because VA does not collect this information.

[e] This number represents Coast Guard service members who attended Coast Guard facilitated workshops.

Source: GAO analyses of data provided by the military branches.

In addition to pre-separation counseling and the transition assistance workshops, the military branches may provide optional services such as (1) help with resume writing, (2) career counseling, (3) training in job interview skills and strategies, (4) stress management, (5) job fairs, and (6) access to automated job listings.

Service members separating with a disability are offered more detailed information relevant to their unique needs. For these service members, VA offers detailed information on VA disability-related benefits such as disability compensation, health care and vocational rehabilitation, as well as assistance in accessing them.[7] These efforts are considered to be a part of the disability transition assistance program.

Service Members Experience Differences in Content, Delivery, and Access to Transition Services

Because the military experiences of the members in each branch are different, some branches tailor the content of transition services to better meet the needs of their service members. For example, the Army believes that many of its separating soldiers need additional employment-related assistance and more individualized attention. A large number of the Army's separating service members have held combat-related jobs, which provide skills that have limited transferability to jobs in the civilian labor market. Further, many of these soldiers are young and have little civilian work experience. Therefore, the Army supplements DOD transition

[6] This does not include the percentage of Coast Guard service members who received pre-separation counseling.

[7] VA compensates veterans who are disabled by injury or disease incurred or aggravated during active military service.

assistance funds to provide additional one-on-one counseling and interactive job training and assistance.

The Coast Guard also tailors the content of its program to meet what it believes are the unique needs of its service members. According to the program manager, many separating members of the Coast Guard have unique classifications like Marine Science Technician, a job category not easily transferable to the civilian labor market. In an attempt to provide their members with transition assistance workshops that will help them find appropriate civilian employment, the Coast Guard hires contractors to facilitate its transition assistance workshops. The contractor staff is trained along with the Coast Guard's transition assistance coordinators to help service members identify their most marketable skills and communicate them in a way that will make them successful in the civilian labor market.

The military branches also have different methods of delivering both pre-separation counseling and workshops. For example, some military branches provide pre-separation counseling in individual sessions prior to attendance at a transition workshop, while others may provide group counseling. In addition, the length of transition workshops can vary by location. While the transition assistance workshop was designed to take 3 days, the schedule of workshops for fiscal year 2002 shows the actual time ranges from 1 day to 5 days depending on the local arrangements between military installations and DOL. For example, according to the program manager, the Navy added a day to the 3-day workshop to provide more detailed information on military benefits. Further, program officials told us that at some locations different transition assistance workshops are provided to separating and retiring military members. For example, at one location we visited the separatees had a 2-day transition assistance workshop and the retirees had a 3-day workshop. Transition assistance program managers told us that workshops can be offered in a variety of settings. For example, at one location, the workshop was offered in a religious education building. At another, it was offered in space rented at a nearby hotel. At several locations we visited, class size greatly exceeded the maximum of 50, recommended in the MOU. At one location, to accommodate large numbers of service members separating with the number of workshops scheduled, the workshop had 300 participants.

Other adjustments to the delivery of transition assistance are potentially more far-reaching. For example, to create a more comprehensive approach to career planning, the Air Force is integrating transition assistance into the role of a work life consultant who works with airmen throughout their military career. This individual serves as a focal point for information on all personnel matters and helps with paperwork for anticipated separations and retirements. The Navy is providing transition assistance services earlier in a sailor's military career than the law requires to help them more easily translate their military experience into the civilian labor force when they do separate. The Navy has also broadened the mission of its transition assistance program to increase retention by providing professional career development resources throughout the service member's military career. Providing earlier services responds to comments from service members that they would benefit from beginning the transition process sooner than 90 days before separation.

The delivery of transition assistance for disabled service members appears to be more consistent across the branches. In the past, disabled service members were primarily offered separate disability transition assistance briefings supplemented by individualized assistance upon request. The

current practice is generally to provide a basic discussion of disability benefits and services as part of the transition assistance workshop provided to all participants, supplemented by one-on-one sessions with disabled service members, upon request. However, some locations still offer a separate disability transition assistance briefing. In addition, as part of an initiative in two regions, VA provides special 3-5 day workshops focusing on the unique needs of disabled veterans seeking employment.

Service members also experience variation in access to transition assistance based on specific circumstances. Service members who are deployed, stationed in remote locations, or engaged in essential military duties may access a modified version of transition assistance services. For example, the Marines place a transition assistance specialist on some ships and give priority to those who will be separating from the military within 90 days or less. The specialist offers a condensed version of the transition assistance workshop and will meet with Marines during their free time, which could be anytime of the day or night.

Service members stationed in remote locations also received modified versions of transition assistance. For example, a significant percent of service members in the Coast Guard tend to be stationed in remote areas far from where the transition assistance workshops are offered. To address their needs for transition assistance, the Coast Guard sends a videotape accompanied by the DOL workbook. The videotape presents general information on how to conduct a job search and the workbook covers the topics offered in the transition assistance workshops. The Army also mails materials to soldiers in remote locations and follows up with distance counseling by telephone, fax, or e-mail. In addition, the Army will send transition assistance specialists periodically to remote sites with small populations of soldiers.

Even when service members are in locations where a range of transition services can be offered on site, military mission and the support that supervisors have for transition services may determine the degree to which they have access to the services. Because the military mission is always the top priority, it can be difficult for service members to be released from military duties to receive services. Service members, supervisors, commanders, and transition assistance program staff at the locations we visited told us that because of mission-related work priorities, service members may receive transition assistance later than is optimal. Several service members told us that they had to delay attending the transition workshop because of their military duties, thereby limiting their ability to utilize other transition services.[8]

In addition, if supervisors are not supportive of the transition assistance, or if they feel that mission needs are too pressing, they may be reluctant to allow service members under them to access services offered. In 1994, we reported that lack of support from military commanders was one of the most frequently cited reasons for not using transition assistance.[9] In response, the Secretary of Defense issued a memorandum to the secretaries of the military departments and other key DOD officials underscoring the need for commander support of transition assistance for all service members. The Marines recently made participation in a

[8] Although they are allowed to access these services after separation, many members return to areas that do not have these services.

[9] U.S. General Accounting Office, *Military Downsizing: Persons Returning to Civilian Life Need More Help from DOD*, GAO/HEHS-94-39 (Washington, D.C.: Jan. 21, 1994).

transition assistance workshop a mandatory activity for all Marines because they recognized that service members were having difficulty being released from their military duties to attend the workshops. The Transition Commission noted that starting transition assistance earlier could provide commanders more flexibility to meet mission needs, because many service members are deployed during the last 6 months of their active duty. Reducing potential mission conflicts in this way could help increase commander support of the program, thereby resulting in increased participation.

Studies Provide Limited Information on the Effectiveness of the Transition Assistance Program

Several studies confirm participant satisfaction with transition assistance, but limited information is available about the overall effectiveness of the transition assistance program. Evaluating the effectiveness of these services is complicated by data inadequacies and methodological difficulties. For example, most of the data currently available are collected for purposes of program monitoring and are not comparable across the branches. Also, following up with service members who have separated is challenging. Moreover, the changing nature of transition assistance could result in a shift in emphasis on different goals, including recruitment and retention, in addition to civilian employment.

Studies Indicate Participant Satisfaction with Services, but Less Is Known about Effectiveness

In 1994, we reported that service members and spouses we surveyed found seminars and employment assistance centers were beneficial in readjusting to civilian life. They said that they learned about individualized job search techniques and other benefits available to them. They also reported that their confidence had increased as a result of receiving these services, especially in the areas of resume preparation and job search and interview techniques.

During our interviews, service members told us that the transition assistance workshop either met or exceeded their expectations. Many service members told us that they thought the resume preparation and job search and interview techniques would be the most helpful in their transition. However, some felt that the workshop was not long enough for them to complete preparing their resumes and develop their job interviewing skills. Several service members told us that they had pursued or planned to pursue additional job-related transition assistance offered at their locations. Some service members also found other transition assistance informative, such as financial planning, stress management, and VA benefit information. Service members told us, however, that earlier access to this assistance would enable them to better utilize it and smaller class sizes would allow them adequate time for questions and answers.

In 1999, DOL sponsored a study to assess the attitudes and opinions of participants in the transition assistance workshop.[10] Twenty-one focus groups of persons who had attended a transition assistance workshop in the prior month were asked about the structure and content of the workshops and the extent to which they felt their participation helped prepare them to find civilian employment. Participants generally agreed that the services they received contributed to their knowledge and confidence about transitioning to civilian life. Many participants felt that attendance in the workshop should be mandatory and that receiving the service earlier in an individual's military career would be beneficial.

[10] U.S. Department of Labor/Veterans' Employment and Training, *TAP Focus Group Evaluation Final Report* (Washington, D.C.: 2000).

While participants generally appear to find assistance helpful, much less is known about the ultimate impact of transition services on employment or other outcomes, such as education and retention. Two studies conducted about 10 years ago found limited impact of transition assistance on employment. An early DOL evaluation required by the Congress assessed the impact of the pilot transition assistance program on service members who transitioned to civilian life in 1992.[11] This study compared a sample of those who had attended a transition assistance workshop with those who had not to analyze whether transition assistance had any effect on post military job search and employment. Although both groups were found to have similar aspirations for jobs, careers and salaries, the results indicated little difference between the employability of those who had taken the workshop and those who had not. However, the study noted that service members who received transition assistance found jobs 3 to 7 weeks earlier than those who had not.

The Army sponsored an evaluation of its Job Assistance Centers to determine whether services provided at these centers affect soldiers' employment outcomes.[12] A group of ex-service members who separated between October 1, 1992, and September 30, 1993 were interviewed to determine whether the job assistance services they received affected their post-transition earnings, receipt of unemployment compensation, and ratings of preparedness for the job market. The study reported that individuals who said they had received more job search assistance services, and those who indicated a greater degree of satisfaction with the services, were more likely to feel prepared for the civilian labor market and were also more likely to have some increase in earnings. However, because this study did not verify the self reported information, the conclusions cannot be validated.

Currently at least two branches of the military, the Army and Navy, track the amount of unemployment compensation paid to separating service members as an indicator of program effectiveness. For example, the Army reports that the amount of unemployment compensation benefits paid to soldiers separating in fiscal year 2001 was about half that paid out in fiscal year 1994. However, Army officials concede that it would be difficult to attribute these changes to transition assistance services alone.

Evaluating Effectiveness of Transition Assistance is Challenging

Several factors complicate evaluating the effectiveness of human resource interventions, including the transition assistance program. First, achieving consensus on program goals is necessary to develop measurement and data collection strategies. Second, service branch data on what specific assistance service members received is necessary to compare the effects of different interventions. Third, following up periodically after separation with those who received services as well as those who did not is necessary to try to isolate the impact of transition assistance.

Assessing overall effectiveness of the transition assistance program would require agreement on what the program is trying to accomplish. When first piloted, the objectives of the program included helping the military meet its personnel needs as well as helping separating service members meet

[11] U.S. Department of Labor/Veterans' Employment and Tranining, *Transition Assistance Program: Phase III Impact Analysis* (Washington, D.C.: 1995).

[12] Human Resources Research Organization/U.S. Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences, *Final Report: Outcome Evaluation of the Army Career and Alumni Program's Job Assistance Centers* (Alexandria, Va.: 1995).

their needs. However, since that time, the goals have expanded as a result of changing military needs and service member expectations. When the program was fully implemented, it dropped the retention goal and focused on providing transition assistance, coinciding with the downsizing of the military. During this time, the program focused on employment-related transition assistance. The Transition Commission noted that transition assistance needs to continually evolve to remain capable of bridging the ever-changing military and civilian environments.

Service members also seek assistance with furthering their education or obtaining vocational rehabilitation in addition to employment-related transition assistance. For example, some service members enlisted with the specific intention of returning to school at the completion of their military service rather than working right away. Moreover, the military's personnel needs have changed from downsizing to recruiting and retaining service members. The Transition Commission reported, for example, that retention was positively affected by transition assistance because it offers a realistic view of civilian job market prospects. This may lead some service members to conclude that they need more preparation to reenter the civilian workforce and to postpone separation to gain additional skills, education, or income.

Data limitations also make transition assistance program evaluations difficult. There is limited data on the services individual service members actually receive and virtually no data collected on how they fare after leaving the military. DOL is required to collect participant data for the transition assistance workshops it provides, and although not required, the military branches collect data to monitor program participation. However, these data are often not comparable, and service members may also obtain military branch-sponsored assistance at locations where they are stationed. In addition, service members may obtain assistance from VA or community sources that might not be documented in DOL's or the military branches' records. This makes valid comparisons across branches very complicated.

Finally, following up periodically with individuals once they leave the military to assess how they are faring in civilian life is difficult. In its 1995 study of the transition assistance program, DOL reported the difficulty it experienced trying to follow up with separated service members. Officials we interviewed told us about similar experiences. For example, one transition assistance workshop facilitator told us that he was able to follow up with only about 20 percent of workshop participants. The Transition Commission noted that DOD, VA, and DOL each have separate data collection systems with their own information that could help determine the usefulness of transition assistance, but little has been accomplished to coordinate information requirements between the departments. Collecting the data necessary to track long-term usage and outcomes would help better position the departments to assess the value of transition assistance as well as determine ways to improve it.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my prepared remarks. I would be happy to answer any questions that you or the other subcommittee members might have.

Contact and Acknowledgments

For further information regarding this testimony, please contact me at (202) 512-7101 or Shelia Drake at (202) 512-7172. Margaret Boeckmann,

William R. Chatlos, Corinna Nicolaou, Linda Stokes, and Paul Wright also contributed to this statement.

(130125)

STATEMENT

OF

MR. JOHN M. MOLINO

DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
(MILITARY COMMUNITY AND FAMILY POLICY)

BEFORE THE

COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON BENEFITS

OVERSIGHT HEARING

ON

TRANSITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM AND THE DISABLED

TRANSITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

JULY 18, 2002

Not for publication until released by the Subcommittee

Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee on Benefits, thank you for inviting me to talk about the Department of Defense (DoD) Transition Assistance Program (TAP). At the outset, thank you for your interest in and support of our efforts on behalf of the patriotic men and women who serve in our country's Armed Forces.

First, let me restate our commitment to our departing Service members. It is more important today than ever, that we take care of our military personnel as they enter and leave active duty. We provide transition services to our departing Service members because it is the right thing to do and the smart thing to do.

I know that you share our pride in the professionalism and dedication of today's Armed Forces. In today's environment, we ask and require a great deal of our Armed Forces. We therefore, recognize that we must reciprocate by providing earned benefits to our military personnel. One major way to honor their service is by caring for them and their families when they leave the military. The TAP allows us to meet the needs and expectations of departing Service members and their families as they face the challenges of starting new careers as civilians.

We very much appreciate the positive cooperation and support that we receive from the Departments of Veterans Affairs and Labor, and State employment agencies and our own Military Services. We also receive valuable assistance from the Veterans Service Organizations (VSOs). We have established close working relationships with these

agencies and the VSOs. Each has a distinct role to play in the transition process. It has taken the combined efforts of all to affect a smooth transition for all our departing military personnel. Everyone associated with this program continues to go the extra mile to make it successful.

The DoD has policy and oversight responsibility for the TAP. In addition, the Military Departments have their own policies and regulations that provide for the execution of the operational aspects of the program. The Military Departments' witnesses will speak about the operational aspects of the Transition Assistance Program when they address you.

Allow me to summarize where we are today in providing transition services to our separating personnel and to discuss the other topics you have asked us to address.

On average, about 226,000 active duty personnel separate from the military each year. The Military Services in conjunction with DoD, and the Departments of Veterans Affairs and Labor have transition programs in place to fit the needs of our separating military members, their families, and eligible DoD civilians. Our transition services include preseparation counseling, automated employment assistance, local job fairs, and career assessment workshops and classes. For our overseas installations we conduct the Department of Labor workshops.

It's appropriate at this point to thank the Subcommittee and the Congress for passing legislation last year that allowed our separating

Service members to start the transition process 12 months before discharge and two years prior to retirement. We have known for sometime that our members wanted to begin the process much earlier than 90 days before separating. In fact, aware of their desire to begin the transition process earlier, we have never turned anyone away regardless of the planned departure date. Even though the legislation didn't become effective until this fiscal year, last fiscal year we had approximately 12,000 Service members who started the transition process earlier than 90 days before separation. Our policies now reflect the longer transition period and we are optimistic the number will increase dramatically for this fiscal year.

We have also found that the earlier we get our Service members into the transition program and start them through the preseparation counseling process the more likely they are to reenlist. The Navy has been tracking this correlation for a couple years and has developed a program that compliments the preseparation counseling process. The Army has also started tracking the connection between preseparation counseling and retention. The Navy and the Army will discuss this positive result in more detail when Service witnesses address you later. Because of this positive impact on retention, we plan to modify our policies to require each Military service to track the impact that early entry into preseparation counseling has on retention. Next fiscal year we also plan to implement the Navy's training program Department-wide.

This Subcommittee has asked that we address the effectiveness and the success of our transition program and we will be better able to do that after we measure the correlation between our transition program and retention.

All departing Service members go through the preseparation counseling process and sign a standard preseparation counseling form covering the items identified in section 1142 of title 10 United States Code. The form is retained in their permanent personnel file.

We plan to automate our preseparation counseling form Department wide in fiscal year 2003. We want to gather information regarding the high unemployment rate of those recently discharged military members in the age group-20 to 24. We will work with the Department of Labor to conduct further analysis to get a better picture of why the unemployment rate is so high for this segment of the population. While the unemployment rate may appear high for this age group, the unemployment rate for separated military personnel has decrease significantly. This is indicated by the fact that the Department's contribution to unemployment compensation has decreased by 55 million dollars during the past five years.

In fiscal year 2001, separating Service members visited our transition sites more than 617,000 times for employment assistance. Military spouses made approximately 5,900 similar visits. Additionally, we conducted more than 7,700 overseas transition seminars. These

overseas seminars were attended by approximately 115,000 departing Service members and 15,000 spouses.

In response to your concern about whether we allow spouses to attend and participate in transition assistance, I am happy to report that we have an open door policy for all spouses, regardless of the Service member's reenlistment plans. Spouses may participate and take advantage of every aspect of our transition process. Additionally, DoD civilians affected by Reductions in Force (RIFs) are welcomed at the transition assistance offices.

The Subcommittee expressed interest in how we market the program and concern that officers may have more access than enlisted members to the transition program. Our approach to marketing the program is to provide transition assistance briefings to our senior enlisted and officer personnel who are responsible for ensuring that departing Service members participate in the TAP. I am pleased to tell you today that last fiscal year we provided in excess of 30,000 transition assistance briefings to our senior enlisted personnel, more than 11,000 to junior officers and senior officers, and roughly 1,300 briefings to flag level officers. These statistics refute that concern and demonstrate that commanders have an ever-increasing understanding about the program. Again, the DoD is committed to this program and I am convinced this is true of each Military Department. A soon-to-be-issued policy

memorandum will express the Department's unequivocal support for the Transition Assistance Program.

We provide all separating Service members with a Verification of Military Experience and Training document (VMET). This document verifies a member's military experience, training history, associated civilian equivalent job title(s) and recommended education credit information. The document is helpful in preparing resumes. It also serves as a valuable tool as boards, organizations, and companies determine an individual's qualifications for credentialing. The Department has also developed a web site that allows Service members to retrieve their VMET document while they are on active duty and after they leave active duty.

We have worked closely with the Departments of Veterans Affairs and Labor to provide employment and job training assistance seminars. These seminars, normally given over a three-day period, comprise one segment of the transition services provided by our Military Departments.

We have worked with the Department of Labor to initiate an associate web site from the America's Job Bank for departing Service members. That web site is called DoDJobSearch.org. We are working with DoL to develop a Military Resume Writer for the site.

We have worked diligently with the Departments of Veterans Affairs and Labor Interagency Task Force on Certification and Licensing of Transitioning Military Personnel. The mission of the Task

Force is to serve as a catalyst for obtaining recognition of military training and experience by civilian credentialing entities. The Office of the Secretary of Defense and all Military Departments were active participants on this Task Force. You will hear more of the details of this Task Force later from our partners at VA and DoL. With DoL, we have redesigned and updated the transition assistance participant and facilitator manuals, which are used in the Labor Department seminar. Our DoL partners will address the details of this effort, as well.

We have worked very effectively with our partners in the VA to provide essential veterans' benefits information to transitioning Service members in Europe and the Far East. Veterans Affairs counselors serve on a nine-month rotational cycle. Our overseas installations provide office facilities, housing, and other administrative assistance. The arrangement has been in effect since 1993. Transition managers and Service members are unanimous in their praise for this effort. We are seeking a similar arrangement with DoL for the three-day TAP seminar.

This fiscal year we have worked closely with the VA and the Veterans Corporation in establishing a partnership that will help departing Service members who are interested in going into business for themselves. I sit on the advisory board of the Veterans Corporation. We are working with the corporation to make appropriate information and training curriculum available to our transitioning Service members.

We have an established partnership with the United States Marshals Service. This partnership has helped the agency reach its hiring goal for U. S. Marshals. We have also established new partnerships with the Office of Personnel Management, the Department of State and the Transportation Security Administration (TSA). The Office of Personnel Management seeks to promote Federal employment as a viable civilian career for transitioning members. The Department of State sees future Foreign Service Officers among departing Service members, and TSA hopes its 60,000 openings for screeners and security personnel will be attractive to soon-to-be military veterans. We have organized briefings and job fairs for these agencies at our military installations and are confident great success will be realized.

CONCLUSION

The Department of Defense transition program is effective. Our policies are standard across the Military Departments, while permitting service flexibility in the program's deliverance. It is important that departing Service members have adequate time and assistance to prepare for future employment, upon leaving the military. Research has shown that those who are better prepared are more likely to find a job quickly and to have positive feelings for their military service. Thus, transition assistance is in the mutual best interest of the individual, the Department and, by extension, the United States. Just as

we place great emphasis on recruiting and retention, we must place similar emphasis on military separation.

We must treat transitioning military personnel with equity and fairness, because people are the key to attracting and maintaining a high caliber force. Secretary Rumsfeld summarized it best, when he said, "Without the ability to attract and retain the best men and women the Armed Forces will not be able to do their job."

STATEMENT BY

MR. JOHN P. MCLAURIN
DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF THE ARMY
FOR HUMAN RESOURCES

BEFORE

BENEFITS SUBCOMMITTEE

COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AFFAIRS

UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SECOND SESSION, 107TH CONGRESS

TRANSITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM AND
DISABLED TRANSITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

JULY 18, 2002

NOT FOR PUBLICATION
UNTIL RELEASED BY THE
HOUSE VETERAN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee, on behalf of the Soldiers and Civilians of the United States Army, I appreciate the opportunity to discuss the Army's Transition Assistance Program. The primary objective of The Army's program is to assist soldiers and their family members in transitioning successfully to the civilian community when soldiers leave military service. Displaced Department of Army (DA) civilians are also eligible for job assistance services. Many soldiers join the Army immediately after high school and have little or no experience in finding civilian employment. Recognizing the intrinsic value of transition assistance, The Army has made a significant commitment to institutionalize and continuously improve the program over the past 11 years. The Army provides soldiers with tools and training to assist them in marketing their unique military skills and experiences successfully in the civilian sector. The transition information, benefits, and employment assistance provided through the Army Career and Alumni Program (ACAP) is recognized as an integral element of the Army's personnel readiness life-cycle functions.

Since the program's inception in 1991, ACAP has provided services to over one million eligible individuals - 944,000 enlisted soldiers; 88,000 officers; and 68,000 family members and displaced DA civilians. This fiscal year (through June) transition services have been provided to over 57,000 soldiers (51,000 enlisted and 5,000 officers) and over 1,000 family members and displaced DA civilians. With 44 government employees and 204 contractors, there are full service ACAP centers in 50 worldwide locations to include 15 in Europe and two in Korea. In addition, regional and remote ACAP services are provided on a routine basis at 35 more locations.

Consisting of three primary components, ACAP is specifically designed to efficiently and effectively provide consistent delivery of professional transition services regardless of location. Preseparation Counseling is first provided to all separating soldiers to ensure a full understanding of transition benefits and available services. Mandatory for these soldiers, Preseparation Counseling must be accomplished no later than 90 days prior to separation or retirement. In the event of expeditiously processed separations, Preseparation Counseling is completed as soon as possible but not later than the date that the soldier is separated.

Preseparation Counseling leads directly into the second program component, Transition Assistance Referral. Eligible individuals are referred to a wide network of Army installation service providers, targeting specific needs identified during the preseparation counseling process. Two examples of these service providers include the Army Continuing Education System for education benefits counseling and college admissions and Army Community Services for relocation and financial management assistance.

The third program component involves Employment Assistance Training for individuals who seek specific job assistance. Professional counselors first provide an overview of the job search services and tools available. Stateside individuals are next scheduled to attend the two or three day Department of Labor Transition Assistance Program (DoL TAP) workshop. While overseas, transitioners attend job assistance workshops taught by ACAP Center counselors using DoL TAP materials. The ACAP professional staff follow up with one-on-one counseling and access to skill building tools enabling the production of high quality resumes and cover letters and exploration of career alternatives and occupations. Finally, the ACAP Home Page (www.acap.army.mil) serves as the customized portal for direct access to carefully selected job search and transition-related information as well as links to the most relevant web sites created by the government and private sector.

While 100 percent of all soldiers receive preseparation counseling, the employment assistance portion of ACAP is voluntary. ACAP counselors do however strongly encourage soldiers and family members to take full advantage of all available employment tools in ACAP Centers to include participation in employment workshops. This fiscal year (through June 30), 55 percent of separating soldiers have participated in these workshops. Recognizing the critical value of the employment assistance services in successful transitions, The Army has established additional performance goals: 62 percent separating soldier participation in employment assistance services with at least three visits to the ACAP center. Individual user satisfaction is extremely important and is monitored closely. All individuals participating in ACAP services are asked to complete satisfaction surveys at the end of the transition process. The program has

consistently received high marks, averaging four plus (4+) on a scale of zero to five with five representing the highest satisfaction.

Seeking an efficient, economical solution for consistent delivery of quality, standardized transition services, The Army conducted a comparative cost analysis in 1996 to ascertain whether it was more cost effective to provide preseparation counseling and job assistance training with the use of Department of Army civilians or with contractors. The study concluded that a centrally managed, Army-wide contract was more cost effective. Subsequently, the ACAP contract was competed and awarded in accordance with Federal acquisition regulations. Outsourcing has an added benefit that allows The Army to respond to changing requirements with greater flexibility by providing transition services on an "as needed" basis at worldwide locations.

Further enhancing efficient program operation and deployment, The Army has leveraged automation to ensure a consistent, cost-effective delivery of standardized transition services. Allowing individuals to work at their own pace and schedule, the ACAP XXI system provides state-of-the-art, fully automated, preseparation counseling; interactive, engaging video workshops; and research tools. An especially effective tool, the "interview" module offers individuals the opportunity to film themselves while participating in simulated job interview scenarios. This interactive tool allows them to build confidence by practicing and refining their interviewing skills.

The Army augments DoD transition assistance funding in order to successfully meet Army demographic demands. A high percentage of soldiers possess military occupational specialties that are not always thought to be readily transferable to civilian occupations. ACAP services are especially critical to individuals in these military specialties to ensure they can "civilianize" their military skills and experience to successfully compete in the private sector. In a related effort aimed at improving post-military employment opportunities for soldiers, the Army launched a new credentialing initiative, GI to Jobs, in April 2002. Aimed at non-degree seeking soldiers, GI to Jobs offers expanded opportunities for soldiers to earn civilian credentials related to their Army Military Occupational Specialties (MOS). The Credentialing Opportunities On-Line (COOL) web site identifies the education, experience, and testing needed to earn

professional certification or licenses for hundreds of civilian jobs related to specific military occupations. The COOL website provides counselors, soldiers, family members, and employers with information on Federal, State and proprietary certification and licensing requirements for each MOS. The GI to Jobs initiative is also being integrated with another initiative focused on post-military employment - the Partnership for Youth Success (PaYS) program.

In June 2000, the U. S. Army Recruiting Command (USAREC) and ACAP established PaYS, an Army initiative to partner with industry. The PaYS program offers recruits a non-binding employment agreement with a specific company prior to joining The Army. After successfully completing their tour of enlistment, PaYS participants transition directly to employment with the pre-selected PaYS employers. The employers who participate in the PaYS program know the value of Army training as well as the value of the dedicated service experiences of The Army's soldiers. USAREC and ACAP manage the program through web-based technology to maintain visibility of both the soldiers and companies participating in PaYS. Current partnerships include Lockheed Martin, General Dynamics, the Pepsi Bottling Group, Goodyear, State Farm Insurance and Bellsouth. To date the number of soldiers enlisting with the PaYS option is 6,792.

Recognized as a Personnel Readiness Program, ACAP not only supports retirements and separations but also has a significant impact on The Army's recruiting and retention efforts. Well versed on ACAP services, recruiters are able to tell potential recruits and their families that The Army will provide them with tools and assistance at the proper time to assist them in successfully transitioning to civilian careers. The Army also recognizes the importance of ensuring that soldiers who are considering separation make educated, realistic decisions on the value of reenlisting to obtain additional military and civilian education, professional certification/licensure and military job experience which can significantly improve their marketability before they separate. Last fiscal year, 3,906 soldiers who initiated the transition process decided to reenlist instead. Through May of this fiscal year, 2,559 soldiers have reversed their initial decision to separate. These reenlistments represent not only a significant cost savings

for the Army, but a clear WIN-WIN for the soldiers, families, and The Army.

The program receives strong command support to encourage soldier, family member, and displaced DA civilian participation. All eligible individuals regardless of grade are afforded the opportunity to participate, based on unit mission requirements and individual desires. Although the current high OPTEMPO makes finding time for transition services more difficult, installation ACAP managers make every effort to be an integral piece of commanders' training schedules and pre-deployment processing. They also adjust ACAP work schedules to eliminate any conflict with unit operational requirements where possible. The recent action by Congress to allow earlier preseparation counseling enables soldiers and commanders to schedule ACAP participation around mission requirements. Before units deploy, ACAP staff provides pertinent transition assistance information to soldiers and supervisors, responding to questions and proactively managing concerns about the impact of deployment on transition preparation. During deployment, ACAP Centers also provide assistance by using email, fax, and telephone communications as necessary. Services are also provided to soldiers in forward-deployed areas. Responding to commander requests, ACAP professionals have traveled on 108 occasions this fiscal year, including visits to deployed soldiers in Saudi Arabia, Kosovo, and Kuwait. Soldiers were provided the full menu of ACAP services, allowing them to initiate their transition process as daily mission requirements permit. The benefits of ACAP are fully reinforced through leadership development opportunities, to include informational briefings for all newly assigned installation Commanders and Senior Non-Commissioned Officers.

Statistics indicating how many soldiers actually found employment as a result of ACAP assistance prior to or just after departing the Army are not available. However, the Department of Labor has reported that Army unemployment insurance costs decreased by 48% (or $82.4 million) from fiscal year 1994 to fiscal year 2001. During this same period, United States unemployment level decreased only 25% and Army end strength decreased only 11%. One conclusion to be drawn from these statistics is that the decrease is in large part a result of those soldiers who fully utilize ACAP employment services and require less unemployment compensation benefits by

obtaining employment faster. During fiscal year 2001, the average ACAP cost-per-client was $166.

In 1995, the Army Research Institute (ARI) conducted a study of the effectiveness of ACAP employment services, e.g., resume/ cover letter preparation, interviewing skills, career planning, individual job search. Their conclusion indicated that ACAP did benefit both the Army and separating soldiers. ARI specifically cited that the estimated average difference in yearly earnings between separating soldiers who attended an ACAP workshop and all of the 12 job assistance services and those who did not attend an ACAP workshop and received only two job assistance services was about $7,300.

The Transition Assistance Program is the result of a strategic partnership between the Departments of Defense, Labor, and Veterans Affairs. Detailed in a Memorandum of Understanding, this partnership provides comprehensive informational workshops that broaden Army's capabilities to provide a truly comprehensive program. Army is also fortunate to have representatives from the local State Workforce Agency and Veterans Affairs located on many of our installations. Utilizing local Memoranda of Understanding, the representatives of these organizations work together to create and deliver a meaningful and informative program for soldiers, modifying delivery of services as necessary to eliminate duplication.

On a routine basis, ACAP receives numerous inquiries from Federal agencies, major corporations, and local companies that seek to communicate employment opportunities to veterans. These employers recognize Army soldiers demonstrate a strong work ethic and possess critical leadership and management skills as well as the self-confidence and motivation necessary to be exemplary assets. Employers often advertise these job opportunities on the ACAP Home Page. Each ACAP center also markets and sponsors job fairs and career days where soldiers can talk directly to prospective employers. On an average annual basis, ACAP hosts 370 job fairs/career days with over 5,366 employers and 68,857 participants. This environment is ideal for soldiers to experience first hand the tasks of researching employers, validating resumes, and interviewing. During the past year, ACAP has worked with

representatives from the Office of Personnel Management, the United States Marshals Service, the United States Border Patrol, the Transportation Security Administration, and most recently, the Federal Aviation Agency, in their efforts to recruit employees.

In closing, I thank you for the opportunity to come before this subcommittee to provide an update of the Army's Transition Program. I would also like to thank this subcommittee for their work on the Veterans Education and Benefits Expansion Act of 2001. Provisions of this act allow soldiers to initiate transition processing up to two years prior if retiring and one year for those separating. This extended window will assist supervisors in balancing mission requirements with the need to provide transitioning soldiers adequate time to capitalize on the professional transition services that are available in ACAP. The Army is fully committed to providing quality transition assistance to departing soldiers, their family members, and displaced DA civilians. When America invests in its soldiers, their families and Army civilians, we invest not only in Army readiness but also in the future of a stronger, more productive Nation. Thank you for your continuing support.

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
UNITED STATES COAST GUARD
STATEMENT OF REAR ADMIRAL JOYCE M. JOHNSON
ON
TRANSITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM AND THE DISABLED
TRANSITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM
BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON BENEFITS
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS
UNITED STATES SENATE
JULY 18, 2002

Good morning Mr. Chairman and distinguished members of the Subcommittee. It is a pleasure to appear before you today to discuss the Coast Guard's Transition Assistance Program.

Transition assistance was established for Coast Guard personnel in October 1994, to comply with the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal year 1995 (Public Law 103-337). As you may know, this law mandated that all separating and retiring service members have access to transition assistance services and that members who are involuntarily separated receive specific benefits. Coast Guard policy for transition assistance is similar to DoD. The primary differences between Coast Guard and Department of Defense programs are in the manner in which the program is implemented and delivered, and are due in large part to the geographic dispersion and the small size of Coast Guard units.

Coast Guard transition assistance is delivered at each of our twelve Integrated Support Commands and our Headquarters Support Command in Washington, DC. Each of these designated transition sites features a Work-Life Supervisor who is responsible for managing the Transition Assistance Program, and a Transition Relocation Manager who coordinates the program for their area of responsibility. A typical area of responsibility encompasses several states. Each Transition Relocation Manager is a certified International Job and Career Coach and is responsible for the area Transition Assistance Program, the Relocation Assistance Program, and Spouse Employment Assistance Program. Unlike the Department of Defense, where Family Service Centers are located on major installations, Coast Guard units are smaller and members are more geographically dispersed. Delivery of Coast Guard transition services therefore encounters many of the service delivery logistics problems that the Department of Defense faces with its reserve personnel, such as travel and per diem costs and scheduling problems.

The goal of the Coast Guard's transition assistance program is to provide members and their families the opportunity to make an informed and effective transition from military service to civilian employment. An integral aspect is to ensure that separating members are made aware of, and have access to, the numerous programs and services that are available to assist them in the transition process.

Each unit commanding officer has the responsibility to ensure separating and retiring members and their family members receive the transition benefits and services to which they are entitled. To meet this requirement, each command is required to identify all prospective separating and retiring members and advise them of locally available transition programs and services. Each command coordinates a member's transition with the appropriate administrative support and Work-Life staffs.

A command representative is required to meet with all members separating, retiring or entering the Disability Evaluation System (officers and enlisted) approximately 180 days before separation and not later than 15 days after official notification of separation. As directed under Coast Guard policy, pre-separation counseling must occur at least 90 days prior to separation. Depending on the requested counseling, the command will either direct the member to the appropriate office for delivery of services, or provide the necessary counseling. During pre-separation counseling, the command representative is also required to assist members in achieving educational, training and employment objectives, as well as those of the spouse, if applicable.

As with the Department of Defense transition assistance program, there are four elements to the Coast Guard's transition assistance program: pre-separation counseling, employment assistance, relocation assistance for separating members stationed overseas, and benefits for involuntarily separated members.

To assist commands in providing employment assistance and pre-separation counseling, Coast Guard Transition Assistance Program seminars have been developed in cooperation with the Department of Defense, the Department of Labor, and the Department of Veterans Affairs. These workshops provide instruction on skills identification, resumé preparation, interview techniques, and veteran entitlements. Coast Guard sponsored seminars are typically four days in length, with three days for the job search process and one day to discuss benefits.

Commands are also responsible for ensuring separating and retiring Coast Guard members and their family members stationed overseas are provided information and assistance to help them in the unique task of preparing for re-entry into civilian life while outside the continental U.S. This program focuses on the special needs and requirements of such members and family members due to their overseas locations and includes computerized job relocation assistance and job search information.

To maximize the Coast Guard's ability to provide transition services, Coast Guard Transition Relocation Managers work cooperatively with Department of Defense, Labor, and Veterans Affairs staffs, contractors, state and community organizations, and non-profit service organizations. Using these options allows us to maximize the flexibility of available programs and schedules to accommodate the member's individual needs. In addition, Coast Guard members who are separating due to medical conditions are referred to the Department of Veterans Affairs and Department of Defense Disabled Transition Assistance Program seminars, since we are not able to offer this service.

The Coast Guard will be testing an additional method of delivering transition services in August 2002 - a Transition Assistance Strike Team. This is an internal team of Coast Guard Transition Relocation Managers who have been trained to travel to remote locations, or locations where small groups of separating and or retiring members are stationed, to conduct a Transition Assistance Seminar.

Evaluation of our transition assistance program effectiveness is subjective. During Coast Guard sponsored seminars, each participant is given a seminar critique to complete. Critiques evaluate the relevance, length, and content of the seminar, solicit ideas for improvement, and rate overall effectiveness. At a recent seminar, participant evaluations revealed what are typically favorable ratings; specifically these surveys showed a 66% excellent, 22% very good, and 12% good rating of overall seminar effectiveness. It is rare that any of the approximately 35 seminars conducted each year contain ratings of fair or poor.

As part of the critique, participants are also asked to rate their level of understanding of transition and job search techniques before and after attending a seminar. The majority of participants indicated a significant increase in their knowledge and understanding of the process.

The coordinating Transition Relocation Manager also completes a critique that evaluates the knowledge, preparation, and effectiveness of the instructor to ensure quality control of the program. All critiques are also reviewed by our Headquarters Transition Assistance Program Manager to ensure service quality, and conformance with contract provisions regarding performance by contractors.

In an effort to continually improve our transition assistance program, we look forward to continuing the positive working relationship with the Department of Defense in sharing new ideas and tools. For example, our Transition Relocation Managers will attend the Department Of Defense Worldwide TAP Conference that is scheduled for the end of July 2002.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. I will be happy to answer any questions you may have.

NOT FOR PUBLICATION UNTIL RELEASED BY
THE COMMITTEE ON VETERAN'S AFFAIRS

STATEMENT OF

MS. ANITA K. BLAIR

DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF THE NAVY

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON BENEFITS

OF THE

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS

ON

MILITARY TRANSITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

18 JULY 2002

NOT FOR PUBLICATION UNTIL RELEASED
BY THE COMMITTEE ON VETERAN'S AFFAIRS

The important work and innovative approaches the members of Congress have devoted to assisting transitioning service members is extremely noteworthy and very much appreciated by every man and woman who has or will wear a military uniform in service to our Nation. We look forward to working with the committee and the Congress in improving upon the existing transition services and benefits.

Navy Transition Assistance Program

The Navy's Transition Assistance Program (TAP) is an extremely valuable benefit for our sailors. Not only does it assist them in making critical decisions and, when applicable, an effective transition to civilian life, it is also a recruiting and retention tool. The TAP program provides a variety of transition services for military members and their spouses, including, computerized job banks, resume writing assistance, and help with the employment interviewing process. All transition services are made available to military spouses and family members, without restriction. By virtue of their voluntary military service, our people have earned our long-term support. We have an inherent responsibility to provide them with the information, assistance, and skills needed to make informed decisions about their futures.

The core of the program is the TAP Seminar, a three to five day workshop that provides material on Reserve affiliation, extended medical and dental coverage, educational compensation, vocational benefits, and relevant job search materials. TAP also provides attendees with detailed information about available benefits in terms of educational opportunities, both while continuing their Navy career and upon leaving the Service.

In addition to the seminar, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) provides individualized counseling to all participants in the Transition Assistance Program. The VA Military Services Coordinator conducts briefings at our transition sites located across the country and around the world. These briefings provide information on the full range of VA benefits, to include but not limited to, disability compensation, education, the home loan program, insurance, vocational rehabilitation, and burial benefits. Disabled transition (DTAP) is an integral part of the transition program focusing on those service members being separated due to a disability incurred while on active duty. Benefits information is not only provided at separation and pre-retirement briefings but at other information dissemination events such as General Military Training.

Because DoL does not have representatives overseas, the Navy has trained Transition program managers as DoL TAP facilitators via the National Veterans Training Institute. All transition staff members overseas facilitate the identical TAP workshop provided by DoL/VA at stateside locations. The DoL employment function does not shift to the Navy, but rather only the preparatory educational phase of the process. In delivering the TAP workshops overseas, the Navy utilizes the same DoL TAP workbooks as used in the United States. Navy has historically procured these student workbooks directly from DoL at an approximate cost of $20,000 annually.

Since its inception in 1992, under Public Law 101-510, TAP has been subject to continual congressional review. Contrary to the intent of the legislation, TAP has been frequently perceived as a program specifically intended to provide service members and their families with separation assistance resulting from the draw down. As you know, the program was initiated prior to the draw down, and the law established three permanent transition services: pre-separation counseling, employment assistance, and relocation assistance for members stationed overseas. Although the draw down was essentially complete at the end of FY99, for reasons wholly unrelated to the draw down, we anticipate separating approximately 40,000 to 50,000 sailors, annually. Causes for these separations are varied but integral to the structure of the Navy: retirements, resignations and other transitions to the civilian sector. Consequently, we still have a significant need for the services offered through TAP. We must continue to provide and to improve upon these services for our people.

To meet the challenges of the 21st Century, we need to adjust the structure of the program to better address the needs of today's sailors. Our challenge is to revitalize the TAP program through innovative solutions, taking into consideration the complexity of our world and ever-tightening fiscal resources.

Along with the challenge of program restructuring, Navy's TAP has had to meet the challenge of increasing demand for its services with a diminishing number of staff. The TAP budget has been reduced 20 percent since its inception, resulting in elimination of 22 percent of our field staff. In spite of these funding and staffing reductions, we have continued to provide a quality program that fulfills the requirements of the Public Law. As evidenced by the overwhelming popularity of TAP, sailors view the services provided as an integral part of their quality of life benefits. Accordingly, we are shifting our emphasis solely from sailors leaving the Navy to all sailors, educating and assisting them at various

stages of their careers. Recognizing that all members of the Navy will ultimately return to civilian life, we are creating exciting new avenues to integrate the transition process into a sailor's complete military life cycle. The Navy's transition program is designed to be a career-long process.

In order to provide these comprehensive services, we must identify those quantitative factors that are indicative of a successful transition. This endeavor has proved difficult, as the legislative authority for the Transition Assistance Program contained no anticipated benchmark or desired measures of effectiveness.

While we have come to realize that there may be no single definition or measure of a successful transition we have settled on some indicators and guidelines for successful participation. The best definition of success may be the individual program participant's ability to meet his or her own needs, expectations, and post-military career goals. Simple statistics on post-military employment may provide a limited picture of a well-defined and successful transition program. Other prime indicators of a successful transition program could be: retention rates following attendance at TAP workshops, unemployment compensation trends for recently separated veterans, and participant satisfaction with a program that helps them achieve an individual goal. Simply focusing effectiveness measures toward post-military employment may provide an inaccurate picture of a well-defined and successful transition program. A successful transition program focuses on the career life cycle, not just targeting job placement opportunities.

In January 2000, the Navy began a project to examine the correlation between TAP workshop attendance and retention. Initially believing all TAP workshop participants would separate, we examined workshop participant rosters from various field sites to validate this belief. The review provided eye-opening results. In FY-99, a review of only 15 transition sites indicated 6,486 personnel identified as "retention eligible" attended our workshops more than 90 days prior to separation. Of that number, 20 percent, or 1, 282 continued their Navy careers beyond the expiration of their military contract following TAP workshop attendance. Conversely, 3,296 "retention eligible" personnel attended less than 90 days prior to separation. Only 4 percent or 138 remained on active duty. Retention eligible was defined as those personnel who were not attending the TAP workshop as a result of retirement or unanticipated loss due to medical or administrative separation. An expanded examination of FY-00 TAP workshop

participants, encompassing 41 transition sites validated the early indications of the FY-99 review.

The latest examination of FY-01 participants supports the conclusion that early participation in TAP workshops increases the probability of retention. Of the 25 transition sites reviewed, 2,360 attended more than 90 days prior to separation. Today, 37 percent or 878, continue to serve beyond their expiration of enlistment date. A total of 607 attended the workshops less than 90 days prior to separation, resulting in the only 87 individuals opting for continuation on active duty.

Sailors need to explore "all" employment options before making a decision to reenlist. TAP workshop participants are seeing that their best employment option may be with their current employer.

To ensure that all of these "transitions" are smooth, we are developing the Career Options and Navy Skills Evaluation Program (CONSEP). CONSEP will involve three phases of training throughout a Sailor's military life cycle:

- New Accession Course of Instruction (entry into military);
- Mid-Career Course of Instruction (6-12 years); and
- Senior Course of Instruction (17-18 years).

This newest initiative is the first holistic approach to transition education undertaken within the Department of Defense. We completed and delivered the Mid-Career Course of Instruction to 75 percent of our transition sites in FY-01. We will complete delivery to the remaining locations by the end of FY-02. Already, the results are encouraging. Over 250 mid-career petty officers have participated in the workshop since delivery to the Fleet. DoD is exploring adaptability options for further deployment throughout the entire Department of Defense. Work is already underway with the Marine Corps to develop a similar program. Representatives from the Air Force will preview the Navy curriculum later this year.

We have also begun developing the CONSEP New Accession Course of Instruction. The mission of CONSEP is to increase retention and mission readiness by providing professional career development resources to the military community through the career life cycle. Each phase focuses on excellence, personal and professional development, with a strong emphasis on career planning and personal financial management. We will continue to pursue programs that will enhance Navy's recruiting and retention efforts as well as our sailors' quality of life and professional development.

CONSEP will accomplish these goals. The focus on total life cycle management will better prepare sailors for total military career management -- thereby increasing retention. And, in addition to allowing sailors to more effectively navigate their military careers, the information and education provided through CONSEP will help sailors become better ambassadors for the Navy when they eventually leave the service, thus contributing to our recruiting efforts. We look forward to reporting the results of our efforts in more detail following the end of the mid-career pilot curriculum, scheduled for 30 September 2003.

Navy has embarked on a complete review of marketing techniques for many of our quality of life programs. Through the full utilization of technology, many of our programs and services are available on-line through websites, such as: DoD Operation Transition, DoD Transportal, LIFELines, StayNavy, and the Navy Personnel Command homepage. We also publicize individual transition success stories and distribute specific program brochures through a variety of marketing avenues. Our best tool continues to be the satisfied TAP customer. Information about our transition program is provided during each session of Prospective Commanding Officer/Executive Officer indoctrination courses and through the Senior Enlisted Academy.

Command leaders aggressively support the overall mission of the Transition Assistance Program. Every effort is made to ensure all anticipated separations scheduled to occur through an extended deployment have full access to programs and assistance prior to the scheduled deployment. It is Navy policy that every transitioning service member attend a TAP workshop no later than 90 days prior to separation, unless specifically declined in writing. To provide for maximum flexibility at the unit or command level, unanticipated losses are authorized full utilization of transition services for a period of 180 days following separation. During deployments, Commands continually contact TAP centers located overseas to utilize services during limited import periods. Navy no longer flies mobile TAP teams out to returning units. Funding constraints, limited classroom space aboard ship, frequent interruptions due to shipboard routines and lack of Internet connectivity contributed to the decision to discontinue services aboard ship. Full access to all transition services, regardless of pay grade or rank, remains a top priority for Navy leadership. We are committed to offering quality transition services to all the men and women who have served our Nation.

Statistics from the U.S. Department of Labor/Veterans Employment Training Service indicate TAP workshop participants find employment as much as 3 weeks sooner than non-workshop participants. Figures also indicate a significant decline in Unemployment Compensation Cost reimbursements paid by Navy since the implementation of TAP in the early 90's. The Navy's separation rates have decreased over the last few years, but more importantly; our unemployment compensation reimbursements have continued to drop at a more significant rate. For example, separations in 2001 were 45% of what they were in 1993, while the Navy's unemployment compensation costs were only 27% of what they were in 1993.

United States Marine Corps

The Marine Corps has three crucial missions: making Marines, winning the nation's battles, and returning improved citizens to civilian society. The 32nd Commandant, General Jim Jones, clearly stated: "We make a significant investment in our Marines, we need to keep the best of them ... . For those who choose to leave active duty, we can provide assistance in the transition to civilian life ... to be more responsible citizens with an unlimited future and by emphasizing the value of an Honorable Discharge."

Because of the unique mission and expeditionary nature, the Marine Corps is largely a young, first term force. The Marine Corps has the youngest age of all the Services, approximately 16 percent are teenagers. The Marine Corps is the only Service with more active duty personnel than family members. Only 43.4 percent of Marines, approximately 40 percent of enlisted and 70 percent of officers, are married, the lowest of the U.S. Armed Forces. Each year the Marine Corps recruits a large number of young men and women who aspire to be Marines and at the same time returns to American society a significant number who have fulfilled their term as Marines. In 2001, the Marine Corps recruited 30,522 civilians and separated 31, 258 enlisted Marines of whom 82 percent were completing their first term. In 2000, the Marine Corps recruited 31,360 civilians and separated 30,590 enlisted Marines of whom 81 percent were completing their first term. The Corps, therefore, is closely and constantly attuned to the relationship between the Marine and the larger American society they defend.

Equally important is the connection between Marines on active duty and those who have left active duty. "Marines take care of their own" is an ethos we are proud to honor. An outcome of this ethos is the Marine Corps Transition Assistance Management Program (TAMP). It is an essential component in the way we care for our Marines. The transition program enables separating Marines and their families to make a smoother transition to civilian life. The Marine Corps TAMP is fully implemented at 18 Career Resource Management Centers (CRMCs) with a dedicated, professional staff. Marine Corps CRMCs provide: congressionally mandated pre-separation counseling as well as a three to four day Department of Labor Transition Assistance Program (TAP) Workshop. Not mandated by law are workshops including job search and employment assistance; resume writing workshops; career counseling; web-based job search techniques; networking skills and strategies; Veteran's Benefits Eligibility information, resource libraries, federal employment information, local job development, job fairs, pre-retirement seminars, and employer recruitment. Entitlement for services lasts 90 days post service. Most transition assistance managers continue to assist retirees as their schedules allow.

Some barriers to timely TAP attendance are: Lack of command support (primarily due to Operational Tempo), deployments, a pending reenlistment package, an administrative hold, involuntary separation, or a pending medical board.

TAP Workshops are facilitated through the partnership of DoD, DoL, and the VA. The DoL facilitates TAP within the United States. The Veteran's Affairs briefing is an integral part of the TAP Workshops. Marine Corps TAMP Staff, however, facilitates overseas TAP Workshops. In 2000, twenty TAMP personnel attended the Train the Trainer course offered by the National Veteran's Training Institute. Additional training will be provided as needed. The Marine Corps TAMP managers, overseas, procure the TAP workbooks for the classes from DoL.

Because deployment is a way of life for Marines, designated TAMP personnel accompany Marine Expeditionary Units (MEU) afloat to provide transition services. To make certain there are no difficulties with Marines separating immediately upon return from deployment without benefit of TAP, Camp Pendleton and Camp Lejeune provide TAMP services to all returning Marine Expeditionary Units. TAMP personnel fly out to meet the ship at a port visit, and travel with the ship during the remainder of the float.

The Marine Corps published a new Marine Corps Order (MCO) 1700.24B in early 2002, mandating attendance at the DoL TAP Workshops. While insufficient time has passed to accurately gauge the effectiveness of the order, we are confident that mandatory TAP workshop attendance will help Marines. We can report that anecdotal evidence from installations points to improved TAP workshop attendance. We believe strongly that the program is valuable, because it empowers Marines and their families to take a proactive approach to their future, in both career and educational development.

TAP has been successful in helping Marines transition into civilian life. Since October 1990, over 350,000 separating and retiring Marines have benefited from this program. While the evidence is largely anecdotal, we hear good reports from all across the Marine Corps. Consistently, transitioning Marines, both separatees and pre-retirees, communicate with the installation TAMP staff about the success they achieved because of TAMP services. Employers contact Headquarters and TAMP personnel with success stories about their employees who are Marines. They speak of how well prepared Marines are for their transition and how well they integrate themselves within a company. Another measure of success is the decline we have seen in unemployment compensation paid by the Marine Corps since the early 1990s and recent stability in these costs.

In final assessment, however, it is the commander's commitment to the program that is the key to success. Commanders who have had personal exposure to TAMP services and the TAP workshops are consistently the strongest supporters of TAMP.

The 32nd Commandant has stressed in his guidance that every separating Marine is and remains a "Marine For Life." Indeed, transitioning Marines re-entering civilian life, whether after four or 30 years, remain an important part of the Marine Corps family. They represent a considerable investment on the part of the Marine Corps and continue to be a valuable national resource. Many of these Marines, however, have lost formal contact and personal bonds with the Marine Corps. Because Marines represent a special connection to American society, the Marine Corps has developed the "Marine for Life" (M4L) program. The Marine for Life program promotes the beneficial connection between the Corps and the larger American society and acts as a force multiplier to our TAMP. M4L improves assistance to Marines leaving active service, sponsors them on their return to civilian life, keeps them within the Marine Corps family, and re-emphasizes the value of their honorable discharge. While the program includes initiatives involving

commanders and the Marine Corps culture, the groundbreaking element is the creation of an assistance network of Marine Corps "alumni" to provide enhanced transition assistance and support to transitioning Marines. The end state of the M4L program is a nationwide Marine and Marine-friendly network available to all Marines leaving active service. This network will improve their transition to civilian life and make sure that no Marine who honorably wore the eagle, globe, and anchor is lost to the Marine Corps family.

M4L is redefining the perception of "separation" within the Corps. End of Active Service (EAS) no longer means the end of the Marine Corps in a transitioner's life. M4L is building and nurturing a nationwide web-based network that will capture the names and information of transitioning Marines, Reserve Marines, retirees and other Veteran Marines, Marine Corps affiliated organizations, associations, and volunteer groups, and Marine-friendly employers and other useful connections in hometown communities across America. M4L formalizes many functions already performed by Marines. Marines are already connecting with other veterans and Marine-friendly resources across America. Robust community outreach programs allow recruiters to develop relationships with business and community leaders and Marine affiliated organizations. Through TAMP, the Marine Corps interacts with potential employers and provides Marines with valuable transition assistance tools. In coordination with the Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve (ESGR), the Marine Corps develops relationships with businesses, benefiting all Marines. By assembling the existing human networks and making them available via a web-database, M4L is simply offering a formal mechanism for sponsorship assistance to all Marines. No longer will the benefits of the Marine Corps family be available to only the lucky few by virtue of rank or their own personal network.

As noted earlier, unemployment compensation paid by the Marine Corps is an informal indicator of the effectiveness of transition support programs. Given the fact that non-retirement eligible separating Marines tend to be young, and unemployment compensation costs for 20-24 year old males tends to be high, especially for minority males, the Marine for Life program has the potential to be an extremely successful safety net for these individuals, providing the network to help them not only transition into civilian life, but to succeed.

The Marine Corps Transition program is marketed Corps-wide through direct and distribution list email; through installation newspapers, radio and television; through flyers and pamphlets, and web sites; and through briefs and community outreach programs.

The Marine Corps encourages spouses to attend the TAP Workshops, but most Marine spouses work during normal business hours. Almost every installation has tried offering classes at flexible times, but in every case, the installations reported very low attendance and those sessions were curtailed. Additionally, the normal TAP workshop has between 10 and 12 facilitators covering all pertinent topics, including DoL and Veterans Affairs topics. It is extremely difficult to offer full services outside the typical workday and have the necessary subject matter experts available.

There appears to be a perception regarding TAP that separating officers have greater access to programs than separating enlisted. This is not the case in the Marine Corps, where the enlisted to officer ratio is 8:1. Over the past two years, officers have accounted for four percent of total TAP attendance on average across the Corps. We have found that many officers believe they do not need TAP services and therefore waive their right to attend TAP Workshops. Mandatory attendance at the TAP workshops, under the MCO, will increase officer participation.

Transition services are extremely important to our men and women who have worn the uniform. These programs are worthy of the support of Congress and the American people.

Per the Committee's request, the Department of the Navy could use your assistance in the following areas to enhance an already highly successful program and to ensure the future integrity of our Transition Assistance Program.

- To ensure the stability and effectiveness of the program, we would welcome assurances that Congress intends to provide continued long-term support for TAP.
- To ensure future development and innovative approaches to program delivery, we ask for a review of funding levels. Our transition delivery sites are hard pressed to meet the minimum requirements of the legislation under current funding levels mirroring FY-92 levels.
- To review and update the list of Separation Program Designator (SPD) Codes to ensure that transition benefits are more equitably distributed. Many of

those involuntarily separated are separated for cause – failure to comply with established directives -- and should not receive the same post-service transition benefits as those who follow the rules.

- To request the Department of Labor (DoL) redesign and develop a TAP curriculum tailored specifically to separatees and retirees. The current "one" size fits all" design may not be serving the needs of our 21st century customer base.
- To encourage DoL to further expand its role in meeting the legislative requirements of Title 10 of the United States Code by providing employment assistance to transitioning military personnel overseas.
- To establish an awareness campaign, under the oversight of DoL or VA to more effectively raise the knowledge level of employers on the skills, abilities, and attributes today's veteran offers America.
- To establish a national awards recognition program for employers who hire our veterans. A similar program is already fully functional through The American Legion that may be expanded to show our level of commitment as a nation to our veterans.

The Department of the Navy is extremely proud of the transition programs we have today and the programs we are developing for the future. Our ultimate goal is to continue to provide a quality program, tailored to meet the unique needs of our sailors and marines, both ashore and afloat, and to improve upon all our transition services. Transition Assistance, in fact, may be the most important veteran's benefit we provide- both for the individual and society. We owe this to our veterans. Failure to provide this essential assistance may ultimately impact our ability to recruit today's youth into the All-Volunteer Force. Our first President of the United States, George Washington, recognized this tremendous responsibility over 220 years ago when he said, "*The willingness with which our young people are likely to serve in any war, no matter how justified, shall be directly proportional as to how they perceive the veterans of earlier wars were treated and appreciated by their nation.*"

In conclusion, our Secretary of Veterans Affairs, the Honorable Anthony Principi, while serving as the Chairman of the *Commission on Service members and Veterans Transition Assistance*, in June 1997, eloquently and accurately stated that,

"Transitioning service members and veterans represent a national resource and unique talent pool" and that helping these members "…transition successfully into the civilian economy is a win-win situation for America."

STATEMENT

OF

MS. KELLY F. CRAVEN

DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF THE AIR FORCE
(FORCE MANAGEMENT AND PERSONNEL)

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON BENEFITS OVERSIGHT HEARING

ON

TRANSITION ASSISTANCE

UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

18 JULY 2002

EMBARGOED UNTIL
RELEASED BY THE
SUBCOMMITTEE

Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee, I appreciate the opportunity to discuss the ongoing programs of the Air Force in addressing the transition needs of our military members and their families.

The Air Force continues to benefit from the partnership with the Department of Labor and the Department of Veterans' Affairs to equip separating and retiring personnel and their families with the skills and knowledge for reentry into the private sector. We emphasize the "whole concept" transition preparation rather than only job placement. Success occurs when our transitioning service members have identified post-military goals and we have provided them the tools, knowledge and resources to assist in achieving their goals. Throughout the process we emphasize the importance of planning for the change in their financial situation. Transition preparation also includes relocation issues, spouse employment, children's education, and change in the family or personal routine. Our comprehensive approach helps to prepare the transitioner to make this significant career and life change with much less stress and with a spirit of confidence.

The best testament to any program comes from those for whom the service was designed. Here are just a few quotes from our service personnel: "I was ill prepared for my transition...I was extremely anxious for my wife as well as myself. The training your program gave me enabled me to attend my job interviews with a sense of anticipation instead of dread." Another airman stated, "Excellent process that assists individuals and families with making a smooth transition to the civilian community."

Another that typifies what we hear is, "The program is a great 'thank you' to people for serving their country. It provides them opportunities to plan career and life changes...gives them a more positive attitude." Transition Assistance works, as many personnel tell us in their evaluations.

Effectiveness of the Transition Assistance Program (TAP). What measures, if any, do we have?

As I mentioned before, we view success or effectiveness in this program when

separating members set goals and we provide them with the ammunition to assist them in reaching them. Feedback from our major commands tells us that 96 percent of program alumni believed the program assisted them in meeting their transition goals. We exceed or meet program mandates to provide separation counseling not later than 90 days prior to separation/retirement, with the exception of our short notice separations. A recent Air Force audit reflected that 97% of our members received these services.

And thanks to our strong marketing and outreach efforts by the staff, program awareness is also extremely high. Program awareness is 95 percent of junior enlisted/company grade officers, 98 percent of senior enlisted/field grade officers, and 99 percent of base level leadership are familiar with the program. We are successfully informing and supporting our target audience in a proactive, timely manner.

Similarities and differences between the Services

Air Force TAP is provided in our Family Support Centers. Individuals identified as projected losses (normally 12 months prior to retirement or six months prior to separation) receive a mandatory referral to the Family Support Center for TAP counseling. However, they may choose to participate as early as 24 months before retirement or 12 months before separation. Our members receive notification through commanders' calls, the base Community Action Information Board, first sergeants, local media publicity, electronic newsletters, local papers, etc.

The AF provides one-on-one TAP pre-separation counseling. In unique circumstances, major commands approve delivery of pre-separation counseling to groups of up to 10 personnel. However, one-on-one counseling remains the preferred standard, which addresses the unique needs of each individual, resulting in a more informed and prepared member.

The Air Force also provides supplemental pre-separation counseling on topics ranging from Social Security to individual state recruitment incentives. In addition, FSC

personnel spend an average of another 1.3 hrs for members and 1.6 hrs for spouses in one-on-one transition counseling.

Air Force coordinates with Department of Labor (DoL) to conduct TAP Workshops on all AF bases in the U.S. Our Family Support Centers facilitate comparable TAP workshops at our overseas locations. While we continuously strive to ensure our overseas transitioning airmen receive the same level of support as those in CONUS, the additional workload of hosting a first-class TAP Workshop continues to challenge our FSC staff members. Attendance at a DoL workshop is voluntary and commanders consider it official duty. Every effort is made to limit attendance to a class size of 50. In the 1st quarter of FY02, a total of 3,862 personnel attended 207 DoL TAP Workshops. The DoL workshops consistently rated 4 or 5 on a scale of 1 to 5.

Additionally, FSC personnel conduct supplemental workshops to assist members with such tasks as resume writing, interviewing, job search, salary and benefits package negotiations, etc. Over 3,500 personnel attended 417 supplemental workshops in the first quarter of FY02. We encourage our airmen to return for further assistance as they progress through their transition. In the first quarter of FY02—23,007 visits were made by 8,515 members, at a rate of 2.7 visits per member. This not only shows that members are very interested in these services and are willing to return, but it also shows the dedication of the FSC staff to support their customers.

Family Support Center personnel actively market the Transition Assistance Program. FSC staff members conduct community outreach and networking both on and off base. Staff coordinates or collaborate in coordinating job fairs, career days, employer panels, etc. Reaching the right audience is a priority for FSC personnel. They spend a great deal of time contacting key personnel on our installations to maintain high awareness and use of these resources. In fact, we track the number of contacts/briefings by the FSC transition staffs with key base personnel. We are reaching our target audience.

Statistics addressing whether officers have greater access to or participate in the TAP program more than enlisted personnel. If this is true, is it characteristic of only some Services? Some bases? Some commanders?

While we do not have formal statistics, all Air Force members have full access to our Transition Assistance Program. We work to ensure that all airmen have the same opportunity to benefit from this service.

Does the ability to access TAP programs depend on the implementing commander (i.e., personality dependent)?

The ability to access TAP programs in the AF is independent of a commander's personality. We have very strong support from senior Air Force leadership, which has resulted in the successful institutionalization of the program as an integral part of the personnel life cycle.

The Marines mandate TAP for all exiting personnel. Is this true for the other Services?

TAP pre-separation counseling is mandatory for all departing AF members. Utilization of the program's other services is voluntary but highly encouraged. Based on their plans and goals, members are free to choose to participate in voluntary transition services. Fortunately the AF can accommodate all personnel who want to participate in the voluntary transition services.

The March 02 DoL statistics reveal young (20-24) minority veterans have exceptionally high rates of unemployment after discharge. Is this an anomaly or a trend?

We prepare each AF member to be as competitive for private sector employment as possible. Our continued emphasis on education and skills training throughout the military career cycle contributes to our personnel becoming excellent candidates for second careers of their choice.

Are there obstacles in law, which prevent greater program effectiveness? If so, what are they? What does the AF recommend to improve effectiveness of the TAP?

We do not perceive any legal barriers to program effectiveness. In fact, we continue to see proof that TAP is very effective at easing the transition to life after the military. Yet as a Service, we are seeking ways to better measure our effectiveness, and subsequently improve service delivery to our airmen and their families. At the same time, we must continue to ensure the best tools and training possible for our base level FSC transition staff.

As we referenced earlier, our Family Support Centers facilitate comparable TAP workshops at our overseas locations. While we continuously strive to ensure our overseas transitioning airmen receive the same level of support as those in CONUS, the additional workload of hosting a first-class TAP Workshop continues to challenge our FSC staff. A DoL presence overseas would provide valuable support to our FSC staff, enabling them to provide other transition services to our airmen. Until a change is made, Air Force will continue to use Family Support Transition staff at overseas locations to facilitate the workshops.

On a positive note, P.L. 107-103 expanded the pool of eligibles for TAP services by changing the access window from 180 days to 24 months for those contemplating retirement and 12 months for those planning to separate. We believe this law greatly enhanced members' preparation time and thus, increased opportunities and available service for members well in advance of their separation date.

Comment on the flexibility of the class offerings. Weekends? Evenings? Spousal participation?

AF Commanders have the authority and flexibility to offer transition programs that best meet the needs of our personnel and their families.

Comment on Service participation in DTAP.

Disability Transition Assistance Program is available in conjunction with TAP at all AF bases. As a rule, it is an adjunct to the TAP workshop.

What parts of the program are working well? Are not working well?

The Transition Assistance Program remains a major success story! The program has an enviable track record that speaks for itself. The change that allowed access to the TAP program 24 months prior to separation was a great change for our personnel. To take full advantage of program benefits, an individual is well served by availing themselves of transition information several years prior to when they plan to separate or retire. Some of our installations began an initiative, where voluntary "Pre TAP" workshops are provided, with great interest from personnel not yet in the final phase of their military careers. These workshops focus on preparation 3-5 years prior to separation/retirement on the myriad of related transition issues from financial preparation and building networks, to spouse/family support. In this vein, we are actively considering a standardized mid-career counseling program under TAP to expose our Total Force members and their families to realities that transition from the military will involve. We will study the potential of this initiative as a retention tool. Certainly such counseling will highlight the advantages and benefits that come with a long-term military career compared to the private sector and also grow a better informed, better prepared family once the decision to transition is made.

Thank you for your interest in these issues. The Air Force Transition Assistance Program is one of our great success stories and we look forward to continuing this very valuable service. We have many of the country's most motivated, highly skilled, and trained professionals. We take pride in doing our part in preparing them to lead productive post Air Force lives in their newfound neighborhoods and communities. I would be pleased to respond to any questions you may have.

Statement of
Robert J. Epley
Associate Deputy Under Secretary for Policy
And Program Management
Veterans Benefits Administration
Before the
Subcommittee on Benefits
House Committee on Veterans' Affairs
July 18, 2002

*

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for the privilege to appear today before this Subcommittee. I appreciate this opportunity to inform you of the Department of Veterans Affairs' continuing delivery of services and benefits to our military members.

The overall mission of transition services delivery becomes even more important as America's Attack on Terrorism continues. Operation Enduring Freedom brings a new group of veterans – Reservists and Guard members called to active duty. Department of Defense (DoD) reports show that over 85,000 troops are currently activated.

Before I address VA's role in the Transition Assistance Program (TAP) and Disabled Transition Assistance Program (DTAP) as authorized under title 10, chapter 58, United States Code, I would like to summarize what VA is doing to support military members assigned to Operation Enduring Freedom, to help family members of military personnel who die on active duty, and to assist servicemembers that are severely injured in America's Attack on Terrorism.

Beginning with the September 11th attack on the Pentagon, VA has changed its approach to assisting family members of servicemembers who die on active duty. Our goal now is to process each in-service death Disability and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) claim within 48 hours of receipt. To do this, we are centralizing processing of DIC in-service death claims to the Philadelphia Regional Office and Insurance Center. We have been working with the military Casualty Assistance Board and its representatives to streamline the process by using a DIC Worksheet combined with the DD Form 1300,

Report of Casualty, to process the claim. No longer will a surviving spouse or dependent child of an in-service casualty be required to fill out lengthy, cumbersome forms. This new process will be activated in August 2002.

The Washington Regional Office (WRO) has established a strong working relationship with the Walter Reed Army Medical Center, where many of those severely injured in Afghanistan are being returned for continued medical treatment. Under this program, locally known as Operation Early Intervention, a WRO representative visits Walter Reed on a weekly basis to interview patients and discuss VA benefits and services. Particular emphasis is placed on services available through the VA's Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Program.

Regional offices have been reminded of the importance of working with local Reserve and National Guard Units activated in support of Operation Enduring Freedom to ensure these individuals understand the benefits to which they are rightfully entitled under title 38, United States Code.

We are proud of what we are doing and what we have accomplished to assist servicemembers and their families involved in Operation Enduring Freedom.

As in past VA testimony about our role in TAP, we wish to mention the broader efforts of VBA related to our full military services initiatives and programs. Since the enactment of Public Law 101-510, The National Defense Authorization Act of 1991, a full program of military services has been implemented with very positive results.

We have portrayed our efforts – past, present, and future – as broader than TAP/DTAP. Rather, we have defined VBA's "military services program" as encompassing several key outreach efforts: TAP and DTAP jointly sponsored by VA/DOL/DoD, military separation and retirement services programs, military medical facilities and Physical Evaluation Boards, special outreach to Reserve and National

Guard Units, Casualty Assistance Services, and various other military liaison activities. This broader definition was established so that, from a policy and program management standpoint, we recognize the totality of our duties to individual servicemembers and the larger military communities.

Military Services Coordinators are assigned at each VA regional office, and, where the military population dictates, such as in the Virginia Tidewater Area, additional coordinators are in place. During FY 2002 through May, military services coordinators conducted 3,261 briefings attended by 114,352 active duty personnel and their family members, and personally interviewed 60,074 servicemembers in conjunction with these briefings.

In 1993 VBA expanded its military services program overseas. The Overseas Military Services Program operates under a separate Memorandum of Agreement between VA and DoD through which VA provides staff, while DoD provides funding and logistical support. VA military services coordinators are based in Germany, Italy, Korea, Japan, and Okinawa covering military facilities in those countries as well as providing itinerant services to Spain, England, The Azores, and Iceland. These are 3 to 5-month rotational tours with employees selected from regional offices throughout the country. A VA representative also travels quarterly to Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, to brief and assist servicemembers assigned to that facility.

During 11 months of coverage in FY 2001, 574 briefings were conducted for 13, 399 military personnel and 6,395 interviews were conducted through the Overseas Military Services Program. FY 2001 statistics are cited because only limited coverage has been available this fiscal year. VA and DoD jointly agreed that, because of the security and other logistical difficulties following September 11th, deployment of the overseas military services coordinators would be delayed, and the first group did not begin services overseas until late January 2002.

To lend additional strength and quality to our military services efforts, a specially designed training program was held in August 2000 for VBA military services coordinators. The Compensation and Pension Service coordinated this training and presenters included not only VA program representatives but also officials of the Departments of Labor and Defense and the military service departments. Topics covered a wide range of programs including VA benefits and services, Reserve Affairs, Retirement Services, Casualty Assistance, and others. Participants also received training specifically designed to assist them in improving the quality of their public presentations. To support military services coordinators and to keep them fully aware of legislative changes, policy revisions, etc., a Military Services Program Intranet Page has been activated. Military services coordinators must be flexible in their presentations depending on their audience and the time allotted for the presentation. For example, a session conducted for officer retirees probably would focus more on compensation than education; a group of young, first enlistment, separatees are likely to be more interested in education than life insurance. A standardized briefing presentation is available that military services coordinators can use in tailoring the presentation to the audience they are addressing. Standardized Benefits Facts Sheets have also been developed for distribution during military services briefings.

VBA's basic role in TAP is information dissemination: providing servicemembers not only with information on the wide range of benefits offered by the Veterans Benefits Administration, but also on their eligibility for medical care and access to the services of the Veterans Health Administration. But, there are other, equally important, coordinated efforts between VA and DoD that have resulted in more efficient processing of compensation claims generated through TAP and DTAP, thereby providing additional support to transitioning service men and women. The first, and one of the most important efforts, was the transfer of service medical records from the military to the VA initiated in the early 1990s with full implementation through the establishment of the VBA Records Management Center in June 1995.

Another jointly sponsored VA/DOD program, Benefits Delivery at Discharge (BDD), was implemented in 1998. BDD has taken our military services program one step further by processing claims for service-connected compensation prior to discharge. As soon as we receive the veteran's military discharge certificate we can authorize payment. There are currently 47 VA regional offices in 40 states plus the District of Columbia and 129 military installations actively participating in the BDD initiative. This includes 42 Air Force, 36 Navy, 32 Army (including 2 overseas sites), 10 Coast Guard, and 8 Marine Corps sites, and 1 mixed command. In FY 2001, military bases where BDD was in operation accounted for 72% of all separations in the USA.

Almost 23,000 BDD claims were finalized in FY 2001 and over 6,200 were finished in FY 2002 through May. The VA regional offices involved in the program report that veterans have been very satisfied with the improved services.

Section 201, Public Law 107-103, authorized us to establish VA offices at military installations outside of the United States. Two BDD sites have been opened overseas -- the first in Korea in May 2001, and the second in Germany in October 2001.

VBA has plans for expansion of the pre-discharge initiation to additional military facilities. However, further BDD expansion will not be possible until regional office claims processing workload and new employee training has been adequately addressed.

DTAP is a component of the larger TAP initiative that focuses on disabled servicemembers. Potential DTAP participants are identified during TAP sessions or by service departments from service men and women who either are awaiting separation due to disability or who are retiring with disability claims. Self-referrals and requests for Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (VR&E) assistance from a disabled servicemember may come from various other sources within the military or VA. Through BDD we can reach severely disabled servicemembers who are discharged following a Physical Evaluation Board (PEB) and transferred for further medical

treatment to VA or private medical facilities.

DTAP provides in-depth information about services to restore suitable employment and independent living through VBA's vocational rehabilitation program to disabled service men and women.

Both the DTAP and BDD programs allow VR&E staff to begin counseling, vocational assessment, transferable skills and job analysis, training choices, and to address medical needs before the disabled member separates or retires. Such early intervention has a positive impact on an individual's adjustment to disability and attainment of employment.

Military services coordinators present VR&E program information to the participants of the overall TAP session in many locations. Either the military services coordinator or a VR&E Counselor assists individuals with the application process including, obtaining a copy of the Service Medical Records.

As resources permit, VR&E personnel conduct specialized DTAP presentations for servicemembers at military medical facilities and other locations and provide one-on-one counseling. In geographically remote locations, or in cases where single individuals are separating from the military, we provide DTAP service through our Access Initiative through contractors or through use of Web based electronic presentations. Additionally, we coordinate claims processing affecting a servicemember who is transferring from a duty station to his or her home state to ensure continuity of service.

VR&E counselors provide vocational and educational counseling services under Public Law 102-16 to separating servicemembers. This vocational educational counseling program allows VR&E to incorporate a comparative analysis of transferable military skills, education, and training and civilian occupational and training choices, as well as preparation for vocational rehabilitation planning once entitlement is established. In the past 18 months, VR&E has provided vocational and educational counseling to over 10,500 service men and women under Public Law 102-16.

We have created Web tools that are instrumental in the TAP/DTAP process, such as an on-line Military-to-Civilian Transferable Skills Identifier (TSI) that allows an individual to obtain an occupational report. Since activation in July 2001, the TSI has received over 25,000 hits.

To implement, section 203 of Public Law 107-103, we have developed and initiated distribution of an outreach publication on the Licensing and Certification test benefit (a one-page trifold pamphlet, VA Pamphlet 22-02-1, "A New VA Benefit"). As a result of Public Law 106-419, VA is now authorized to reimburse eligible VA beneficiaries for the cost of taking examinations needed for licensure or certification in professional or vocational fields where credentials are necessary.

To be effective in reaching the target audience, we've been working closely with the Department of Labor. We are sending supplies to each Department of Labor regional VETS (Veterans' Employment and Training Service) office, so that they may distribute information materials and conduct discussions regarding VA benefits at TAP and DTAP briefings and upon other contacts with veterans and potentially eligible dependents. (Dependents eligible for chapter 35 may receive the Licensing and Certification test benefit.)

We are also sending supplies of the pamphlet to organizations that offer tests for licenses or certifications. Our regional offices supply our military service coordinators stationed at military bases with copies of the pamphlet for distribution and discussion at TAP and DTAP briefings. Our Education Liaison Representatives (ELRs), stationed in each of our regional offices, also provide the pamphlets to the State Approving Agencies (SAAs) and to schools and training facilities in each state.

The SAAs have been very helpful since enactment of the Licensing and Certification test benefit and have become more interested in assisting VA with information dissemination. Public Law 107-103 now requires SAAs to assist VA in

outreach. Therefore, each SAA will develop an implementation plan as part of the FY 2003 contract administration process.

Interest in Licensing and Certification test reimbursement is growing. Through June 2002, more than 200 organizations with over 1,300 tests have been approved for the licensing and certification test benefit. From 400 to over 800 payments have been issued during each of the last few months. Our partnerships with Department of Labor and SAAs will insure that separating servicemembers are aware of the full range of VA education and training benefits available to them as well as licensing and certification test reimbursement.

We continue to have a close and effective working relationship with DOL and DoD in supporting TAP & DTAP, but we have more to accomplish to assure that separatees get appropriate assistance. Recently separated veterans, especially younger combat-arms veterans, continue to experience disproportionate rates and duration of unemployment compared to their non-veteran peers. As reported by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), the annual average median duration of unemployment in 2001 for 20 to 24-year old male veterans was substantially longer (7.1 weeks vs. 5.5 weeks) than for non-veterans in the same age cohort. Further, the average annual unemployment rate in 2001 for 20 to 24-year old veterans continued to be higher (9.6 percent vs. 8.2 percent) than similar age non-veterans. While we will continue to work closely with our sister Departments, through TAP as well as other VA programs, to facilitate the transition of our country's young men and women into a productive civilian life, we believe that enactment of the Administration's proposal, HR-4879, would substantially enhance our ability to better serve the transitional needs our Nation's service members during their transition to civilian life.

We want to assure you, Mr. Chairman, of our continuing commitment to the men and women who are serving the Nation in the Armed Forces. We are grateful for the opportunity to work with these men and women who are our newest veterans and to assist them in their transition to civilian life. We are equally appreciative to have Labor,

Defense, the military service departments, service organizations, and a host of other as partners in the total effort to assist those who have served so well.

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

STATEMENT OF FREDERICO JUARBE JR.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY FOR

VETERANS' EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING

BEFORE THE

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS

SUBCOMMITTEE ON BENEFITS

JULY 18, 2002

Mr. Chairman and members of this Subcommittee:

It is indeed an honor and a pleasure to appear before you today to discuss the Transition Assistance Program (TAP). The Veterans' Employment and Training Service (VETS), with our partners, are continually working on ways to improve the delivery of TAP services and provide greater accessibility to this successful program designed to assist our separating servicemembers who are transitioning to civilian life. I am pleased to be here with our partners from the Departments of Defense, Veterans Affairs and Transportation to share with you some of our recent cooperative efforts in this important program.

The National Defense Authorization Act of 1991 (Public Law 101-510) established the Transition Assistance Program (TAP). It authorized comprehensive transition assistance services and benefits to military personnel and their spouses who will separate from the service within 180 days.

The Veteran's Education and Benefits Expansion Act of 2001 (Public Law 107-103) amended the program to authorize members of the Armed Forces and their spouses to attend TAP workshops within 24 months of retirement or within 12 months of separation. In order to participate in TAP, the servicemember must have served on active duty for at least 180 days. If the military member is being retired or separated for a disability, the 180 days is waived.

TAP workshop subjects include, but are not limited to, career exploration, job search strategies, preparing effective resumes, understanding and preparing for job interviews, evaluating job offers, stress, self-appraisal, and identification of sources of support and assistance.

TAP workshops generally consist of comprehensive 2- to 3-day sessions that take place according to local separation demands throughout the United States. The workshops are primarily facilitated by Disabled Veterans Outreach Program Specialists (DVOP) and

Local Veteran Employment Representatives (LVER) from the State Workforce Agencies (Employment Offices). Due to the remote location of some military bases and the large number of military separations at some locations, contract personnel were added in fiscal year 1992 to facilitate TAP workshops. The contractor employs part-time professional training personnel who assist in workshop presentations located in 11 states.

We currently provide TAP workshops at 170 military installations throughout the United States. In fiscal year 2001 there was an average of 265 workshops and over 9,200 participants each month. The number of Department of Defense (DOD) separations in CONUS (Continental United States, including Alaska, Hawaii and Puerto Rico) was reported for fiscal year 2001 to be 162,599. Of this number, 110,796 separating servicemembers and their spouses attended TAP workshops conducted through VETS.

The tragic events of September 11, 2001, have caused a significant slowdown in military separations. It is, therefore, anticipated that our participation numbers will be lower this fiscal year. We will, however, continue to provide these important workshops.

Another effective method of reaching separating servicemembers, particularly those stationed at remote bases or those at sea, is the VETS' web site called "Use your Military Experience and Training" (UMET). This web site provides servicemembers and veterans with extensive information on credentialing, including, for example, what it is, how it affects them, what costs are associated and what resources are available to defray those costs. In addition to this general information, UMET provides some occupation-specific information. Specifically, for the 25 civilian occupations related to the top military occupational specialties of military personnel who transitioned in fiscal year 1997, UMET provides detailed information on civilian credentialing requirements as they relate to military training and experience. These 25 occupations represent about 45% of all the service people who leave the military needing a credential to work in the field for which they have been trained. In this sense, UMET serves as an automated career counselor that informs veterans about what they need to know to prepare for and become licensed and/or certified.

UMET is also intended to enhance credentialing opportunities by informing credentialing boards and employers about the unique qualifications of servicemembers and veterans. The site contains information on key attributes of transitioning military personnel, the types of education and experience that are provided in the military, and various employer-sponsored programs designed to enhance certification opportunities for current and former military personnel.

TAP has been successful in providing the needed skills for enhancing employment opportunities to separating servicemembers. A Congressionally mandated evaluation of the program entitled, Transition Assistance Program: Initial Impact Evaluation (November 1993) found that servicemembers were pleased with the program and that TAP had a positive effect on their post-separation employment experiences. The Initial Impact report also noted that TAP participants found employment approximately three weeks sooner than their non-participant counterparts. VETS also conducted focus groups

at 21 military installations, which reflected that these servicemembers were satisfied with the program.

The overall success of the TAP program can be directly attributed to the excellent interagency relationships among the partners. This was never so evident than during the recent TAP Re-engineering project when representatives from the Departments of Defense, Transportation, Veterans Affairs, and Labor met to make decisions on how to improve the overall program.

The Re-engineering Committee identified the main challenges to make TAP more effective, including:

- A standard method for delivery of TAP;
- The varying needs and constraints on military bases to provide workshops;
- Some installations must compete for available classroom space each month;
- There are not always enough facilitators to support the demand;
- The TAP participant manuals constantly need updating; and
- There is still a problem in getting spouses to participate in the workshops.

The Committee went to work on those issues that could be changed immediately. One of the major concerns was the quality and accuracy of the TAP Participant's Manual. While the manual was extremely successful in years past, we knew we could make it better. The manuals are provided to every servicemember and spouse who attends the workshops and participants are encouraged to constantly refer back to these materials during their actual career search process. The problem in the past was that much of the information printed became outdated, such as referenced telephone numbers or addresses where participants can go to get additional assistance. Also, many of the suggested reading materials or web sites in the manual change over time. The last full rewrite of this manual was in 1997.

The Re-engineering Committee addressed this challenge in several ways. First, the Participant's Manual was rewritten and redesigned to bring it up-to-date with the current job search trends. Outdated information sources have been removed. A web site was developed that provides a wide range of topics, such as job search tools and tips, career assessment, education and training information, personal financial assistance, employment opportunities and veteran's benefits. The TAP Participant's Manual is available on-line from VETS' home page. In addition, the participants will no longer be given scores of possible Internet addresses to assist them in their transition. They now receive one web site address (http://www.dol.gov/elaws/evets.htm) that will link servicemembers and their spouses to information they want or need. This web site is maintained and updated every 90-days to ensure accurate information. This new electronic method is now available to separating servicemembers both in CONUS and overseas.

In addition to modernizing the TAP Participant's Manual, we updated the matching TAP Facilitator's Manual for instructors, and we have developed a web site that allows the facilitators to electronically communicate best practices, present questions, and receive the most current TAP workshop information.

The new printed versions of the TAP manuals are ready for shipping to the military TAP sites. The new Facilitator's manual has been sent to all current facilitators in time for them to become familiar with all the changes before they start teaching from new manual.

The Committee also looked at the current curriculum being taught to new TAP facilitators. This weeklong course is provided by the National Veterans' Training Institute (NVTI) on an as needed basis. Right now there are about four courses each year. NVTI has done an excellent job in updating the curriculum and ensuring the most recent materials are being provided.

There were a number of issues identified by the Re-engineering Committee that will require constant updating or were identified as long-term action items. To ensure these issues receive the attention and actions necessary, a permanent Interagency Transition Assistance Program Steering Committee is again being formed.

This Steering Committee will be made up of senior decision makers from each of the Departments with TAP responsibilities. The purpose of this committee is to jointly identify the major issues concerning TAP, make appropriate recommendations for improving these situations, and, as necessary, form subcommittees of TAP specialists to implement the recommendations.

Currently, we do not provide TAP workshops at military locations outside of the United States. The Department of Defense has expressed its desire that DOL provide such overseas workshops. We are exploring the possibility of stationing DVOPs & LVERs in overseas TAP locations on a rotational basis as well as other alternatives, such as contracting the facilitation of TAP workshops to military spouses. This would enable us to increase military spouse participation in TAP and provide employment opportunities for spouses overseas. We will continue to examine expanding TAP overseas and keep you informed.

Mr. Chairman, that concludes my statement. I want to assure you of my willingness to work with you and members of this Subcommittee, as well as our partners in TAP, to ensure every separating servicemember receives TAP as part of his or her pre-separation process.

STATEMENT

BY

MORGAN BROWN
LEGISLATIVE ASSISTANT,
AIR FORCE SERGEANTS ASSOCIATION

FOR THE

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON BENEFITS

TRANSITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM AND
DISABLED TRANSITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

JULY 18, 2002

AIR FORCE SERGEANTS ASSOCIATION
5211 Auth Road, Suitland, Maryland 20746
(800) 638-0594 or (301) 899-3500
E-mail: staff@afsahq.org Home Page: www.afsahq.org

A participating organization in The Military Coalition

Mr. Chairman and distinguished committee members, on behalf of the 135,000 members of the Air Force Sergeants Association, thank you for this opportunity to offer our observations of the Transition Assistance Program (TAP) and the Disabled Transition Assistance Program (DTAP). AFSA represents the quality-of-life interests of active and veteran Air Force enlisted members of all components and their families and survivors. As such, this is an extremely important issue and we appreciate this chance to express our views. We thank you for your interest and appreciate your concern that these programs continue to provide viable assistance to over 225,000 separating and retiring members of our Armed Forces each year.

PROGRAM OBSERVATIONS

Congress established the Transition Assistance Program in 1990 in advance of the anticipated military drawdown that occurred in subsequent years. At the time, no one could have foreseen the development of this program into what it is today: an important military benefit that assists military members in finding meaningful employment after their active duty service commitment has ended. If we consider the many variables that impact military recruiting and retention, this is one of them. For example, occasionally a member attending the TAP program learns that is would be wiser to remain on active duty. The TAP counseling might show them that they have made inadequate financial preparation, or they may have been unaware of some benefits they are leaving by terminating their military service. Even clearer is the impact of how military members perceive they are treated as they depart the service. *These views directly impact how the former member will counsel young men and women who are considering military service.* This is especially true with retiring members whose children are old enough to join the Armed Forces.

We acknowledge that the current TAP program offered by the Air Force is a relatively good one and meets many of the needs of departing members. However, we feel that some improvements can be made to further enhance it. *We are concerned with Department of Labor statistics that show our younger veterans, those in the 20 to 24 age bracket, have a much higher level of unemployment after discharge.* Some would contend that this age group appears to be less inclined to participate in the TAP workshops. Other guess that maturity, experience levels, and unrealistic expectations of civilian employment may be contributing factors as well. Whatever the specific cause, expansion of the current TAP program to expressly target this age-specific group would seem appropriate.

More funding is needed to provide greater access to the TAP program. Please note that just over 60 percent of departing Air Force members participate in the TAP workshop. This is not always due to a lack of interest in the program. In some instances, members may not have been able to attend due to class size limitations. In most locations, the classes are only offered once a month and, at others, bimonthly or not at all. Another problem is that at large military bases the number of class participants is too high, reducing the effectiveness of the course. There is a direct correlation between the effectiveness of the course and the level of participation. Courses held at bases averaging smaller class sizes, have a higher level of interaction and are rated higher by attendees. Many retiring members do not actually complete the entire workshop and miss portions of the course due to the obligations that seniority brings. These higher ranking military members have a conditioned sense of "service before self" brought about by years of commitment to the military that influences their level of participation. Offering TAP workshops on a more frequent basis, especially at installations serving large military populations is needed and could

well eliminate the problems mentioned above.

Another need is to provide comprehensive TAP opportunities for those separation from overseas locations. Without question, favorable cooperation between the Departments of Defense, Veterans Affairs, and Labor is a prerequisite for this programs' success. However, The Air Force Sergeants Association would support any effort to expand VA and DOL presence at overseas bases. Such action would ensure that departing members at these locations receive assistance on a level as close as possible to those assigned here in the continental United States.

DISABILITY TRANSITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

Additional *work needs to be done to formalize the information provided to military members through the Disability Transition Assistance Program.* In particular, the VA needs to aggressively and comprehensively explain all benefits available to this group who gave so much to their nation. Likewise, specific information on this program needs to be made available to commanders and supervisors that are charged with the care and well-being of military personnel. In addition to the regular TAP workshop, it is unfortunate that only a short briefing by the VA on services available and the offer of one-on-one counseling are the only visible signs this program exists. Departing members of the armed services leaving by virtue of a serious injury or illness caused, or aggravated by military service deserve the very best support we can provide. Nothing less than the very best is acceptable in this area and it is evident that improvements are needed with this program.

EDUCATION

Improvement of transitional educational benefits are of paramount importance to a successful military-civilian transition. In 1996, Congress established the Commission on Servicemembers and Veterans Transition Assistance via Title 12 of the Veterans Benefits Improvement Act of 1996. Congress directed a review of all programs that provided benefits and services to veterans and service members making the transition to civilian life. The commission reported back to Congress in January of 1999 with no less than 101 recommendations of recommended improvements. Sadly, many of the recommendations have not been implemented, and we recommend that this subcommittee review this commission report as you consider the future of the TAP program. Most notably, the commission's number one recommendation for a successful transition: effective education programs, primarily through the improvement of the Montgomery G.I. Bill (MGIB).

Clearly, if we look at meaningful employment as the door to a successful transition to civilian life, then education will be the key a military person needs to achieve that goal. The Air Force Sergeants Association asserts that action must be taken now to raise the value of the MGIB. *The MGIB program should cover the costs of an average university, instead of an arbitrary dollar figure that has little to do with actual education costs.* The programs should include adequate funding to cover books, tuition, and fees toward a higher education for those able to take classes while in the military and after their military careers. Legislation passed last year and further attention this year recognizes the inadequacy of the current program and has programmed some increase the monthly benefit. But more needs to be done. Also, we asked this Congress to immediately provide an opportunity, an open window, for

all of those who are not enrolled in the Montgomery G.I. Bill to join that program. In the Air Force alone, there are nearly 90,000 active duty members currently serving that do not have a transitional educational benefit for use once they complete their active military service (DoD figures: Nearly 40,000 currently serving members who entered during the Veterans Educational Assistance Program era, and another 50,000 who entered during the era of the Montgomery G.I. Bill). Many of those without such a program turned down their only opportunity due to miscounseling, many more turned down their only enrollment opportunity (which occurs at basic military training, when they can least afford the $1,200 program "user fee"). Whatever the reason, nearly a quarter-of-a-million servicemembers (in all services) on duty today are without a transitional education program.

The Air Force Sergeants Association recommends you support legislation to change the policies that tend to push members away from the educational benefit. For example, as we indicated earlier, military members must contribute $1,200 toward their own educational benefit and are given only a one-time enrollment opportunity during basic military training; this is unfair and actually serves to deter people from entering the program. Also, we ask you to consider the MGIB benefit as an "earned" program, belonging to the member by virtue of their service to their nation. This would be done if the onerous $1,200 user fee were eliminated. Also, members ought to be able to transfer their benefits, in whole or in part, to immediate family members. This would be a great career benefit of military service, particularly for enlisted members who are paid considerably less within the military system.

We urge this subcommittee to work to allow military job certification to seamlessly satisfy civilian/government requirements. On the part of the military, continued emphasis to ensure military technical training closely matches the respective civilian career field is a must to ensure that our highly trained and qualified service members do not face unnecessary barriers as they transition from the military to civilian life. Of course, the education, training, and experience obtained by military service members provide tangible benefits for our nation's defense. However, it also provides a significant contribution to a skilled civilian work force. Unfortunately, however, every year, skilled Air Force enlisted members who leave the service miss out on the chance to quickly move into good, high-paying, career-building jobs. This is, in part, because they must undergo lengthy and expensive retraining in order to meet civilian licensure and certification requirements -- often for the same jobs they held in the military, and for which they were fully qualified. *This time-consuming and costly waste of valuable human resources penalizes the veteran through forced underemployment, costs business because skilled workers are unavailable, and has a negative impact on the economy due to delayed job creation and consumer spending.* This, of course, costs our citizens unnecessary unemployment compensation insurance payments. Continued emphasis to ensure military technical training closely matches the respective civilian career field is a must to ensure that our highly trained and qualified service members do not face unnecessary barriers as they transition from the military to civilian life. By reducing the barriers presented, the transitioning servicemember can move quickly to become a productive member of society.

CONCLUSION

Mr. Chairman, the success of the Transition Assistance Program over the past 10 years is evident. It has become a benefit military members value highly, and it is the right thing to do for those who have chosen our nation's defense as their profession. The improvements described here can easily be implemented with a

modest increase in budget. Program directors have informed us the program is restricted solely by lack of adequate funding and that a nominal funding increase could result in dramatic improvements. Current cost estimates of this program equate to a figure somewhere between $150 to $200 dollars spent per participant. It is clear that the large number of participants, recurring training requirements, and contracted service costs all serve to reduce the amount of money that can actually be spend on TAP training and education. Civilian corporations spend more than $2,000 (sometime quite a bit more) on their personnel for similar services. This leads one to question, "Are we really doing a good job assisting our personnel in ensuring their future?" AFSA asserts that we should be doing more for those who make the day-to-day sacrifices so others may enjoy the freedoms our citizens enjoy today.

Mr. Chairman, AFSA is proud to have worked with this subcommittee and respective agencies tasked with delivering this program, and we look forward to help shape the future improvements as well. We hope you will consider our suggestions and increase funding for this program. Again, thank you for the opportunity to share our thoughts on this important issue and as always, AFSA is ready to assist you and all the members of this subcommittee on matters of mutual concern.

STATEMENT OF
KENNETH SERCERCHI, CHAIRMAN
NATIONAL ECONOMICS COMMISSION
THE AMERICAN LEGION

SUBMITTED TO THE
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON BENEFITS
UNITYED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
ON
TRANSITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM AND
THE DISABLED TRANSITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

July 18, 2002

Mr. Chairman and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, The American Legion appreciates the opportunity to submit its views on the services offered through the Transition Assistance Program (TAP) and the Disabled Transition Assistance Program (DTAP).

The Department of Defense's (DoD's) TAP and DTAP programs are designed to help prepare separating servicemembers and their families for a smooth and successful transition to civilian life. Public Law (P.L.) 101-510 (Chapter 58, Section 1142) mandates pre-separation counseling for transitioning servicemembers. These programs consist of specific components: pre-separation counseling; employment assistance; relocation assistance; education training, health and life insurance counseling; finance counseling; reserve affiliation; disabled veterans and transition assistance seminars. DTAP is designed to educate and facilitate disabled veterans to overcome potential barriers to meaningful employment. Currently, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), the Department of Labor (DoL), and DoD operate 207 transition offices:

- 80 Air Force Transition Assistance Program Offices;
- 65 Navy Transition Assistance Program Offices (TAMP);
- 44 Army Career Alumni Program Offices (ACAP) and;
- 18 Marine Personnel Service Centers.

While the TAP program assists transitioning service members leaving the military under their own accord, the DTAP program focuses on the specialized needs of the service members who are separating for medical reasons. The DTAP workshop is a half-day seminar sponsored jointly by DoL, DoD and VA. The workshop provides specialized information on VA's many disability benefits:

- Medical Care
- CHAMPVA
- Disability Compensation
- Vocational Rehabilitation
- Disabled Veterans Insurance

In the current era of an all-volunteer military, the importance of attracting and retaining well-qualified individuals to execute the fundamental functions of a strong and viable national defense is paramount. Without providing proper incentives, the military of the 21st Century will be hard pressed to effectively accomplish this task. The strength of national security is directly effected by the ability of the Armed Services to engage in successful recruitment and retention.

Historically, The American Legion has encouraged the development of essential benefits to help attract and retain service members into the Armed Services, as well as to assist, them in making the best possible transition back to the civilian community. Since many servicemembers enter the armed forces straight out of high school, they have very little job search experience in the private sector. However, today's separating servicemembers possess many transferable job skills needed by employers. Newly separated servicemembers are team players, mission oriented, certifiably drug-free, and possess strong leadership qualities. These programs are an effective means of providing the counsel and training needed for service members to successfully transition into the civilian workforce.

Many of the benefits and services provided to service members currently leaving active duty are rooted in the programs and services that were established in the closing days of World War II. On June 22, 1944, then-President Franklin D Roosevelt signed the Serviceman's Readjustment Act of 1944, or what would later be known as the GI Bill of Rights. This historic piece of legislation, authored by the leadership of The American Legion, enabled veterans to purchase their first homes, attend college, and start private businesses. The emergence of the American middle-class, the suburbs, civil rights, and finally a worldwide economic boom can be attributed to this important legislation.

Additionally, the benefits of the GI Bill were afforded to all veterans who had served honorably, regardless of race, sex, or religion. The benefits of a college education, home loan assistance, and private business ownership preceded Civil Rights legislation by 2 decades. This ground breaking legislation ignored the social stigma of race based opportunities and blindly granted benefits to all eligible veterans who earned these opportunities through service to this country.

The American Legion believes that successful transition to civilian life is ultimately the responsibility of the individual servicemember. However, The American Legion also believes that these same servicemembers must be provided with the tools and services needed to take advantage of the opportunities they have served to protect. The national workforce, the economy and the veteran are all beneficiaries of improved benefits and services for transitioning servicemembers.

Increase TAP funding

Unfortunately, the discretionary funding for TAP/DTAP remains flatlined at its FY 1997 levels. Inflation and salary increases continue to consume the current operating

budgets. Increases in funding are urgently needed to provide at least eight hours of individualized transition assistance services per separating or retiring servicemember. The American Legion continues to strongly support the Disabled Veterans Outreach Program (DVOP) and Local Veterans Employment Representatives (LVER) program that exists within DoL's Veterans Employment and Training Service (VETS). These programs, when incorporated with the TAP program, provide valuable technical expertise and services to veterans actively seeking employment. In order to achieve their mission of assisting job-seeking veterans, DVOPs and LVERs must be adequately funded.

Currently, ACAP and TAMP offer two to five-day workshops followed by a non-fixed amount of individualized transition assistance counseling. Both services report substantial positive benefits when counselors are able to work one on one with servicemembers and their spouses. Some of the positive benefits include enhancement of personal readiness, speeding the attainment of career development and returning "ambassadors" to the civilian community who support recruiting efforts.

Make TAP/DTAP a mandatory program

DoD estimates that 68 percent of all separating service members attend the full TAP seminars. The American Legion believes this low attendance number is a disservice to all transitioning servicemembers. Many servicemembers are unaware of the assistance offered through the TAP and return to the civilian workforce less equipped than his or her counterpart who took advantage of the information provided through the TAP program. The American Legion recognizes the value of this program and recommends that it become a mandatory requirement for all transitioning service members. Additionally, each servicemember must be given the opportunity to participate in training not less than 180 days prior to their separation or retirement from the military.

Require DoL to establish and maintain transition assistance offices on military installation overseas.

Part of the legislative mandate for DoL is to provide a 3-day TAP seminar along with a transitional assistance and retention manual for all separating servicemembers. However, DoL currently is not providing separating servicemembers from overseas bases these services required by P. L. 101-510 (Chapter 58 Section 1144). Therefore, The American Legion supports amending section 7723 of title 38, United States Code to mandate that the Secretary of Labor provide outreach services to overseas members of the armed forces as part of the transition program. Presently, thousands of veterans are released from service while stationed overseas without the opportunity to take part in the full TAP/DTAP programs. Without DoL's presence, those servicemembers are at a profound disadvantage when compared to their stateside compatriots. DoL's only provides stateside servicemembers with copies of the transitional assistance manual. Presently, DoD only copies and distributes the transitional assistance manual for servicemembers separating overseas. For example, the Navy spent an estimated

$20,000 in FY 2001 on printing costs for those copies. The American Legion supports full involvement by DoL in the overseas TAP/DTAP program.

Identify Licensure and Credentialing Barriers and Opportunities

DoD and DoL should do more in keeping servicemembers informed of licensure, certification, and apprenticeship requirements in addition to expanding licensure and certification opportunities. Currently, DoD uses DD Form 2586 to reflect activities relevant to certification, licensure, and apprenticeship. However, The American Legion believes that more needs to be accomplished to ensure that military education and training is recognized by civilian licensing and credentialing agencies. Millions of dollars are invested in quality military education and training each year. Servicemembers are receiving the most advanced training in highly technical military specialties that go unrecognized in the civilian workforce. Given the advanced level of training and education offered in the military, servicemembers should not be forced to undergo the same training once they have left the military. National standards should be developed for licensure and certification of certain military occupations that can be transferred to the private sector. Various states have different requirements for certifications and licenses and it would be impossible for the DoD and DoL to train servicemembers for every individual state requirement. A servicemember that was trained and worked as an emergency medical technician on the West Coast should be able to work as one on the East Coast without having to spend additional time and money retraining.

Assessing services rendered

The American Legion recommends that Congress mandate federal agencies, that deliver TAP/DTAP services, to develop a management monitoring program to better assess how well services are being delivered to transitioning service members. Presently, the effectiveness of services provided by TAP agencies is unknown because adequate performance goals and benchmarking measures have never been instituted. Consequently, there is a lack of any verifiable outcome data. Performance measures should be instituted to hold all federal agencies involved in TAP/DTAP accountable for services rendered.

Mr. Chairman, that concludes my testimony and I welcome any questions from the Subcommittee on this important transition program.

Statement by

Thomas M. Hale

Senior Vice President

Resource Consultants, Inc. (RCI)

To the

Benefits Subcommittee of

the Veterans Affairs Committee

U.S. House of Representatives

Transition Assistance Program and Disabled Transition

Assistance Program

18 July 2002

Mr. Chairman, I am pleased to have this opportunity to comment for the record on the experience of Resource Consultants, Inc. (RCI) with transitioning military personnel from active duty to productive careers in the private or public sectors.

RCI's involvement with military transition programs dates from August 1990. The company was selected by the U.S. Army to design, furnish, staff, train, and open eight pilot transition employment assistance offices equipped with the latest automation to test and further develop a model worldwide program to assist with an expected 25 percent downsizing of the Army. From the beginning of the program the employment assistance offices were modeled after outplacement facilities developed and perfected in business by the outplacement industry. Each office was equipped with a full library of outplacement related books and

publications, computer positions for the use of office clients with software tailored to the needs of military personnel including job databases, and staffed by outplacement counselors with advanced degrees. The Army program, called the Army Career and Alumni Program (or ACAP), was designed to meet the transitioning needs of soldiers stationed in the United States and overseas. It was sufficiently flexible to be exported by the Army for use by the Navy for personnel at remote locations and ships at sea, and to other Government agencies such as NASA and a dozen other agencies which used the Army model and contract to support their own outplacement needs.

Since the opening of the first Government-funded, RCI-operated transition office at Fort Myer, Virginia on October 1, 1990, RCI has maintained a continuing and close relationship with the Army as the program expanded to large installations throughout the world and partnerships were forged with the Department of Labor and Department of Veterans Affairs to fully include the TAP and DTAP programs into ACAP. Over the past twelve years the transition needs of more than one million military personnel, Department of the Army civilian employees, and their family members have been served by the Army program. Based on my personal experience over the past several years as a member of the Board of Directors of the Association of Career Management Firms, North America, the trade association for the outplacement industry, I can state unequivocally that the Army program is the largest and most successful program of its type in the field of outplacement services. Also, the investment that the Army has made in automating job assistance workshops and related transition programs is unmatched in industry.

Today, an eligible participant who has access to the Internet can continue his or her job search from anywhere in the world, and often does with the support of our distance counseling process. The automated system in place at all ACAP centers includes a fully interactive transition program encompassing all elements of the Army transition program, including job assistance. The automated system at ACAP centers is augmented by a dedicated Internet site developed exclusively for ACAP clients located at http://acap.army.mil . This site offers current job leads and other useful information for the Army transitioner including links to relevant job database engines and agencies dedicated to veteran's assistance such as the Departments of Labor and Veterans Affairs. Transitioners then can further refine their transition and job search process by discussing specific issues or questions by using the telephone, email or fax with an ACAP Counselor. For example, an Army soldier assigned to DMZ duties in Korea will typically receive transition workshop and counseling services from the fully automated and staffed ACAP center at Camp Mobile and conduct follow up job search research and leads through the Internet using the ACAP Homepage. By using distance counseling or in Korea's case, a traveling team from the Camp Mobile ACAP center also visits remote camps in the DMZ area providing workshops and counseling on a regular schedule to ensure that no soldier is left behind.

As the Committee considers changes to transition assistance programs for veterans, I would like to pass along some lessons we have learned over the past 12 years of proving transition assistance to military personnel and civilian employees of the Government.

First, set the bar high. The military veteran has earned, deserves and ought to get the finest transition assistance help that is possible. This should include, as a minimum, a full service program that augments transition workshops with transition offices staffed by full-time counselor/coaches experienced in the job search process and equipped with automated systems with software tailored to the military transitioner, and provide access to the Internet for the millions of jobs available on the many job data bases that are available. These services should be augmented by an Internet portal offering access to information of interest to the veteran and links to pertinent web sites so that the transitioner may continue the job search from home or other locations with access to the Internet.

Second, recognize that the marginal cost to establish a full services program such as one modeled after the Army program is insignificant compared to the resultant benefits. Benefits include the added value to the veteran and the country in terms of reducing unemployment insurance costs, increased income opportunities for the individual, and providing a better prepared candidate for the job market who is fully capable of using the skills and values learned in the military and applying this skill base to maximize future income and career opportunities. We also believe that providing timely and effective transition services to exiting soldiers predisposes them to becoming an advocate for the Army thereby helping the Army's retention and recruiting programs

Finally, keep the pressure on to modernize military transition programs. It is a good investment for the country and it is the right thing to do for our veterans.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide our views and thank you for all that you have done to help our veterans.

STATEMENT OF

JAMES N. MAGILL, CHAIRMAN
SECRETARY OF LABOR'S ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON
VETERANS' EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING

TO THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON BENEFITS
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

WITH RESPECT TO

THE TRANSITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM AND
THE DISABLED TRANSITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

WASHINGTON, D.C. July 18, 2002

Dear Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

On behalf of the Secretary of Labor's Advisory Committee on Veterans' Employment and Training (ACVET), I appreciate the opportunity to present the views of the committee with respect to the effectiveness and operational results of the Transition Assistance Program (TAP) and the Disabled Transition Assistance Program (DTAP). As Chairman, I have contacted each member of the ACVET to solicit their opinions and recommendations concerning TAP and DTAP and this statement reflects the responses I received. It is important to note, the following opinions and recommendations are those of the ACVET and are not necessarily those of the Department of Labor and its Office of the Assistant Secretary of Veterans' Employment and Training (ASVET).

Of those who responded, it was unanimous that the TAP and DTAP are beneficial in assisting armed service personnel and their spouses in their transition from military to civilian life. However, many members of the committee expressed certain concerns about the programs and made recommendation on how to strengthen and improve the delivery of service and assistance.

While it is required that base commanders conduct TAP sessions, it is optional for service personnel to attend. Considering the benefits associated with the TAP/DTAP, it is recommended these sessions be mandatory and that attendance confirmation be included on the pre-separation "check-off" list.

The committee members understand the value of the program but question the cost-effectiveness of three and five day classes. Similar results, without sacrificing quality, could be offered from a two day course with an optional third day in specific training for those exiting service members who have either special needs or requesting additional information, (i.e. a curriculum on Small Business/Entrepreneur Training, or intensive counseling that deals within an area of specific need).

Accountability is a major concern. While the TAP/DTAP objective is to prepare the service-member's return to the civilian community, follow-up on the program's effectiveness is almost non-existent. One example of follow-up from the veteran would be a reevaluation upon arrival at their final destination. Here they would be able to find detailed answers that have local solutions instead of questions with vague national responses. Such a feedback system would allow for real self-assessment and productive change to improve the overall quality of service to the veterans. The resources to enable this individual effort could possibly be provided from DoD TAP personnel and local One-Stop Career Center's veterans' services staff.

Another positive action would be to perform an overall review of what is being taught and consolidate that information to develop the best and most consistent program available. The feedback that would be provided from the One-Stops and the individual counseling, must be captured to ensure that the information being provided proves to be useful and helpful in the service-member's career transition.

While all are in agreement on the importance of the TAP/DTAP programs, the consensus is that more research should be conducted to provide information on how the programs should be shaped for the future concentrating on the importance of the mission and scope of responsibility and accountability to the service-members.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes the Statement of the Secretary of Labor's Advisory Committee on Veterans' Employment and Training.

The Premier Association of Real Estate Finance

Mortgage Bankers Association of America
MBA
1919 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20006-3438
www.mbaa.org

Statement of the Mortgage Bankers Association of America
Hearings on H.R. 4042, the "Veterans Home Loan Prepayment Protection Act of 2002"
Subcommittee on Benefits
Committee on Veterans' Affairs
U.S. House of Representatives

June 18, 2002

The Mortgage Bankers Association of America (MBA) is pleased to submit this testimony on H.R. 4042, the "Veterans Home Loan Prepayment Protection Act of 2002." MBA represents mortgage companies, banks, thrifts and credit unions that originate over 80 percent of all mortgage loans in the United States. Many of our members are actively involved in originating mortgage loans guaranteed by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). Since the end of World War II, more than 14 million VA-guaranteed loans have been originated. More recently, 195,000 and 165,000 VA-guaranteed loans were originated in 1999 and 2000, respectively. The member firms of the MBA are proud to participate in a program that serves America's veterans.

MBA understands the good intentions behind H.R. 4042. Unfortunately, H.R. 4042 creates considerable problems for lenders by encouraging late remittances of payoff funds as a standard business practice, expanding where payoff funds can be remitted and rejecting the commercially understood meaning of "business hours." A practice of late remittances and reduced control over payoffs will severely strain mortgage servicing staff, increase lenders' interest losses, place lenders at risk of violating investor requirements and cause servicers to impose greater restrictions on instruments received for payoff.

Background

Current VA regulations provide that if a veteran prepays a loan in full, the loan holder must credit the debt with such payment "on the date received, and no interest may be charged thereafter." 38 C.F.R. §36.4310. The VA does not define "date received." H.R. 4042 effectively defines this term by requiring that VA lenders credit the veteran's mortgage account on the date the prepayment is received regardless of any cutoff hour established by the lender. Effectively, the bill would prohibit mortgage companies, banks, thrifts and other VA lenders from setting cutoff hours. The bill also defines

"business hour" broadly and appears to deny lenders the ability to direct where payoff funds must be delivered.

It is critical that mortgage companies be able to impose reasonable cutoff hours to ensure timely processing of VA payoffs, control overtime expenses, reduce interest losses and manage investor relationships. Mortgage lenders face a number of constraints that necessitate the establishment of reasonable cutoff hours, some of which are outside of their control.

Payoff Processing is a Manually Intensive Process

The primary reason lenders need specific cutoff hours is to ensure sufficient time to process payoffs by the end of the business day. Most payoffs are processed manually. MBA estimates that 90-95 percent of payoffs are made using overnight delivery service[1]. Generally, this requires the mortgage company to open overnight envelopes manually, extract the checks or other money instruments by hand, process the payoff information and deposit these instruments in the lender's bank by courier. For the vast majority of lenders, payoff payments do not go through a lockbox system--a highly automated function for handling monthly mortgage payments that involves the mechanical opening of envelopes, imaging of money instruments, batching and depositing of checks in the mortgage company's bank and posting to borrowers' accounts. In order to manually process payoffs by the end of the day, a cutoff hour is necessary. The elimination of cutoff hours would encourage late delivery of payoffs, making it impossible for servicers to physically process these payments during business hours especially during high refinance periods.

Bank Established Cutoffs Are Imposed on Mortgage Companies

Mortgage companies establish cutoff hours because they are subject to cutoff hours imposed by depository institutions. Mortgage companies do not take deposits. Therefore, they do not have immediate use of funds received. A company must physically deposit money instruments into a clearing account at a depository institution. The receipt of a payoff check after the bank's cutoff hour necessarily means that the mortgage company does not get "credit" for these funds until the bank's next business day.[2] Mortgage company cutoffs are designed to take into consideration sufficient time to post and deposit funds at a depository institution.

A reasonable cutoff time serves to discourage intentional late remittance of payoff funds by holders of closing escrows. Despite specific instructions for good funds, settlement agents often send payoff funds in the form of business checks, which must be cleared through the Federal Reserve System. The ability to submit funds after the mortgage company can deposit these checks with its depository institution, grants the escrow/closing agent the ability to collect additional float or interest, while denying the mortgage lender use of these funds. The impact can be significant for mortgage

[1] Approximately 4 - 9 percent of payoffs are made by wire, 1 percent or less by regular mail.
[2] Mortgage companies often receive payoff funds in the form of business checks from title companies or settlement services, which may not be "available" for use until the next business day or several days thereafter.

lenders, which must: (1) pass through interest to Government National Mortgage Association (Ginnie Mae) mortgage-backed security holders, not only for that day, but the entire month and (2) must also comply with investor guidelines for funding principal and interest custodial accounts (P&I accounts).

Lenders Must Advance a Full Month's Interest Regardless of Payoff Date

Among some consumer advocates, there is a presumption that mortgage lenders are profiting from cutoff times. This is not the case. It is important to note that 85 percent of VA-guaranteed loans are placed in Ginnie Mae mortgage-backed securities. Pursuant to Ginnie Mae requirements, lenders must advance the entire month's interest to Ginnie Mae security holders regardless of when the borrower pays off.[3] Unless a mortgagor's liquidation payment is received on the first day of the month, the mortgage company is actually incurring an interest loss known as an "interest shortfall." This shortfall is paid to Ginnie Mae from the lender's corporate funds. A brief survey of three of the largest mortgage lenders indicated they collectively incurred an average estimated monthly interest shortfall on VA loans of $2.2 million in 2001.

MBA has attached an example of this interest shortfall calculation. This two-page example shows the accounting for a loan that was prepaid in full.[4] The first page shows the loan being removed from the pool on October 16, 1999 (the date of pay off), and the second page shows the interest shortfall of $229.64, which is the difference between what was collected from the borrower (interest of $229.64 from the 1st to the 16th and the full month's interest due the security holders of $459.29). Servicers are severely impacted by payoffs and the combination of current Ginnie Mae and VA policies.

Ensuring Funding of Investor P&I Accounts

The consequences of late deposit also may mean insufficient or untimely funding of secondary market investors' P&I accounts. Ginnie Mae, for example, requires that funds deposited in check clearing accounts get transferred daily to the principal and interest custodial account (P&I accounts).[5] Funds placed in P&I accounts are for the benefit of Ginnie Mae security holders. If payoff funds are not given same day "credit" by the bank because of late deposit, in certain situations, sufficient funds may not be "available" to transfer to the P&I account as required by the investor. For example, funds received after 3 p.m. on June 17th, would not be recognized by the lender's bank as deposited until June 18th and, therefore, may not be "available" until the 19th due to the Federal Reserve check clearing process. On June 18th, however, funds must be drawn out of the clearing account for deposit into the investor's P&I account. This may result in overdrawing the collection clearing account or breaching an investor obligation by not moving the funds until June 19th. Neither option is favorable.

[3] 5500.3 GNMA I & II: Mortgage Back Securities Handbook, Chapters 14-4, 15-3 and 15-4.
[4] GNMA Accounting Manual "Issuer's Monthly Accounting Report" and "Liquidation Schedule"
[5] 5500.3 GNMA I & II: Mortgage Back Securities Handbook, Chapters 16-9 and 16-10. *See also*, FNMA Servicing Guide, Volume II, Part IX: Custodial and Remittance Accounting, Chapter 1, Section 102.

Conflict with State and Federal Law

H.R. 4042 conflicts with the Uniform Commercial Code (UCC), which permits banks to establish cutoff hours for purposes of determining the date of receipt of a negotiable instrument. Article 4, Section 4-108 of the UCC provides that an "item or deposit of money received on any day after a cutoff hour so fixed or after the close of the banking day may be treated as being received at the opening of the next banking day." Although specific state adoption of the UCC may vary, the model code establishes a 2 p.m. or later cutoff hour. To the extent the VA lender is a "bank," H.R. 4042 appears to preempt the UCC and/or state law. H.R. 4042, however, does nothing to preempt the UCC cutoff hour for when banks must credit the mortgage company's payoff deposits, thus putting VA mortgage companies at a significant disadvantage. A federal approach that singles out VA loans as an exception will create significant disruption in processing and will by necessity require special handling in an already manually intensive process.

Bill Could Discourage Acceptance of Certain Money Instruments

A prohibition on the establishment of cutoff times may force lenders to restrict the type of instruments received by settlement agents. While policies vary, most mortgage companies instruct settlement agents to remit good funds via cashier's check, certified check or wire. Despite these instructions, settlement agents often remit business checks in order to benefit from the interest float on those funds. Until the instruments clear, the mortgage company does not have the benefit of those funds, but naturally does not charge the escrow agent or borrower. Today, most mortgage companies will accept business checks despite instructions indicating such instruments are not acceptable for payoffs. In order to continue fostering good relationships with settlement agents and borrowers alike, lenders would like to retain the flexibility to accept a variety of payment options.

Definition of "Business Hour" and "the Business Location" of a Lender

Finally, MBA would like to comment on two specific provisions that create considerable difficulties for mortgage lenders. First, H.R. 4042 states that a payment will be deemed received on that calendar day if made "during any business hour."[6] The bill defines "business hour" as "any business hour during which (A) the lender offers any services to customers or for the convenience of the public, and (B) any officer of the lender is present in an official capacity."[7] This definition implies that a payment received at 4:00 p.m. on the west coast is deemed received during "any business hour" despite the servicing center being on the east coast and closed. Similarly a payment made at 8:00 p.m. in a "drop box" could be deemed received during any "business hour" (because the drop box is "for the convenience of the pubic"), because most mortgage servicers maintain customer service call centers that operate into the evening.

[6] H.R. 4042, Section 2(a) (to be codified as 38 USC 3703 (g)(2)).
[7] Id. (to be codified as 38 USC 3703 (g)(3))

Of equal concern is the provision that a prepayment shall be credited on the date of receipt "at the business location of a residential mortgage lender."[8] This language implies that a borrower or settlement agent could walk into an origination branch, tender a payoff check and the payment must be deemed received on that date despite the fact that the payoff operation is in a different state or time zone and despite specific payoff instructions indicating where funds should be sent. Unlike banks, mortgage company "branches" are not full service entities. They are origination entities. Servicing departments, which include the payoff function, are generally consolidated in one or two locations. Loan origination branches are typically not equipped to accept payoffs. By design, origination employees are not connected to the servicing system (which would allow them to verify payoff amounts, for example) and do not have the necessary security to handle receipt of cash or money instruments. Also, it is important to note that the majority of mortgage company subsidiaries of depository institutions are separate corporate entities. As a result, a borrower or settlement agent cannot expect to make a payoff at the depository institution parent. The parent does not maintain information on the mortgage transactions serviced by its subsidiary and, at best, can only wire funds from its customer's bank account to the mortgage company's account.

Conclusion

MBA thanks the Subcommittee for this opportunity to submit comments. We appreciate your outreach to the mortgage banking industry and your willingness to consider our concerns. We certainly understand the good intentions behind this legislation. We hope the Subcommittee will agree, however, that there are some real and significant concerns with eliminating reasonable cutoffs for VA mortgage lenders. Mortgage lenders make every attempt to provide good customer service, but the industry does need reasonable protections to ensure a smooth payoff operation, to avoid excessive losses and to provide considerable flexibility in the loan closing and settlement process. We, therefore, hope that the Subcommittee will reconsider H.R. 4042 and continue to allow reasonable cutoffs and practices. We would be happy to furnish any additional information.

#####

MBA is the national association representing the real estate finance industry. Headquartered in Washington, D.C., the association works to ensure the continued strength of the nation's residential and commercial real estate markets; to expand homeownership prospects through increased affordability; and to extend access to affordable housing to all Americans. MBA promotes fair and ethical lending practices and fosters excellence and technical know-how among real estate finance professionals through a wide range of educational programs and technical publications. Its membership of approximately 2,600 companies includes all elements of real estate finance: mortgage companies, mortgage brokers, commercial banks, thrifts, life insurance companies and others in the mortgage lending field. For additional information, visit MBA's Web site: www.mbaa.org.

[8] Id. (to be codified as 38 USC 3703 (g)(1)).

Issuer's Monthly Accounting Report

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
Government National Mortgage Association

OMB Approval No. 2503-0004 (Exp. 11/30/2000)
(Example for page #103)

Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 6 minutes per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. This agency may not collect this information, and you are not required to complete this form, unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number.

The information is required by Sec. 306(g) of the National Housing Act or by Ginnie Mae Handbook 5500.3.

Ginnie Mae Pool/Loan Package Number	Date	Reporting Month
87654CD	10-25-99	OCTOBER

Issuer (Name, Address and Zip Code)
XYZ MORTGAGE COMPANY
ANYTOWN, USA

Issuer ID Number: 5555

Reporting Codes		
CD	SF	X

Section 1 – Pool Administration

Pool/Loan Package Activity This Month	Total Number of Mtgs.	Fixed Installment Control	Pool Interest	Pool Principal
A. Balances from last report	28	8,195.82		1,063,911.47
Less:				
B. 1. Installment collections			6,464.61	566.55
2. Additional principal collections				
3. Liquidations-in-full, attach form HUD-11710-E (Payoffs, FHA/VA/RHS/§184 settlements, etc.)	1	499.85	1,378.72	64,920.86
C. Other (+ or –) Attach explanation				
D. Balances this monthend	27	7,695.97		998,424.06

E. Total Number Delinquent	Percent Delinquent	Installments Delinquent: One	Two	Three or More	Foreclosure	F. Amount Prepaid	Interest	Principal	H. Servicing Fee
1	3.7	1			1	G. Amount Delinq.	1,193.72	103.60	461.37

Section 1A – Format for Calculating Mortgage Principal Installments Due this Month

A. Fixed Installment Control	B. Interest		= C. Scheduled Principal (Line A – B)	D. Weighted Average Interest Rate (if applicable)
8,195.82	7,530.72		665.10	

Section 2 – Schedule of Payments (Principal and Interest)

A. Scheduled Principal	B. Additional Principal	C. Liquidations	D. Other (+ or –) (Attach explanation)	E. Total Principal (A through D)
665.10	-----	64,800.03	-----	65,465.13

F. Cash distribution due holders for interest (Interest rate used 8.0%) 7,087.74

G. Total cash distribution due holders (Sec. 2-E + 2-F) 72,552.87

H. Deferred interest paid holders (GPM only) $

Section 3 – Principal Amount of Securities

A. Principal amount of securities from last report	1,063,161.06
B. Principal distributed to holders this report (Section 2-E)	65,465.13
C. Serial Notes - Principal available for distribution to holders - Attach Form HUD-1710-B	
D. Principal of securities this monthend	997,695.93

Section 4 – Remittance to Ginnie Mae (Guaranty Fee Rate .06 %)

A. Ginnie Mae guaranty fee (Opening principal balance of securities multiplied by annual guaranty rate divided by twelve)	53.16
B. Other (explain)	

Section 5 – Status of Custodial Funds

	A. Name and Address of Custodial Banks	Account Number(s)
Principal and Interest	Custodial Bank Anytown, USA	1-00000-1
Escrow	Custodial Bank Anytown, USA	1-0000-2

B. Composition of fund balance at monthend

1. Escrow Funds	2. Principal and Interest	3. Other
	64,507.10	- 0 -

Liquidation Schedule

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
Government National Mortgage Association

OMB Approval No. 2503-0004 (Exp. 10/31/96)
(Example for page #105)

Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 10 minutes per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. This agency may not collect this information, and you are not required to complete this form, unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number.

The information is required by Sec. 306(g) of the National Housing Act or by Ginnie Mae Handbook 5500.3.

Issuer ID Number	Reporting Month	Pool/Loan Pkg. Number	Constant P & I
5555	10/99	87654CD	499.85
FHA-VA-RHS-§184 Case Number	**Date Removed**	**Loan Type**	**Mortgage Interest Rate**
LH-196869	10-16-99	VA	8.5%

Reason for Removal (Check Applicable Box)

☒ A. Mortgagor Payoff ☐ B. Foreclosure ☐ C. Substitution (Attach Details) ☐ D. Other (Attach Explanation)

	Payment Due Date	Interest Due	Principal Remitted	Balance
1.	08/99			64,920.86
2.	09/99	459.86	39.99	
3.	10/99	459.57	40.28	
4.	11/99	459.29*	40.56	
5.				
6.				
7.				
8.				
9.				
10.				
11.				
12.				
13.				
14.				
15.				
16.				
17.				
18.				
19.				
20.				
21.				
22.	* Interest collected to the 16th was $229.65. Shortage in interest collection to be funded by issuer is $229.64. ($459.29 - $229.64)			
		Total Interest Due	**Total Principal Remitted**	**Liquidation Balance**
		1,378.72	120.83	64,800.03

Previous edition is obsolete

Page 1 of 1
Submit an Original and one copy

form **HUD-11710-E** (10/99)
ref Ginnie Mae Handbook 5500.3

TESTIMONY OF

MICHAEL D. MURPHY, PRESIDENT

National Association of

COUNTY VETERANS SERVICE OFFICERS

Mr. Chairman, members of the committee, it is truly my honor to be able to present this written testimony before your committee. As President of the National Association of County Veterans Service Officers, I am commenting on the Transition Assistance Program which is administered by the Department of Defense, the Department of Veterans Affairs with assistance from the Department of Labor.

The National Association of County Veterans Service Officers is an organization made up of local government employees. Local government employees that believe we can help the Department of Veterans Affairs, Department of Defense and Department of Labor assist with the Transition Assistance Program throughout the United States and better serve our veterans.

Our members work for the local government offices and are tasked with assisting veterans in developing and processing their claims. County Veterans Service Offices exist to serve veterans and partner with the National Service Organizations and the Department of Veterans to serve veterans. The National Association of County Veterans Service Officers views the local County Veterans Service Officer as an extension or arm of government, not unlike the VA itself.

Our member County Veteran Service Officers are present in 37 of our 50 states and located in over 700 local communities. This readily available workforce represents approximately 2,400 full time employees that are available to partner with Department of Veterans Affairs, Department of Defense and the Department of Labor to help speed the process of claims development and transition of our military personnel to civilian life.

The Transition Assistance Program was established in 1990 in response to the United States Armed Forces being down-sized in the early 1990's after the official end of the Cold War Era. It has been a definite benefit to the military personnel who are being discharged from their assignments in the United States during this era.

Participants in this program receive a three day workshop where the service members are instructed on how to write a resume, conduct a job search and job interview training, as well as other job necessary skills. These workshops are conducted at military installations throughout the United States, but overseas personnel are currently not serviced to the same level. Unfortunately many service members are discharged from overseas assignments and miss out on this important process.

In discussing the Transition Assistance Program with our members throughout the United States of America, the primary issue that arises is that we **can** help if the Federal Government will let us. As in many cases, the Veterans Administration seems to view county government as an outside, disinterested party rather than a true partner in the transition process.

Once the military releases the person, they then become a veteran. The veteran then returns to a local community. Perhaps the same community he left from or perhaps not. Regardless, there is probably going to be a County Veterans Service Office some where near by.

The County Veterans Service Officers from around the country have indicated that the Transition Assistance Program is extremely positive from the stand point of the veterans who were able to attend the briefing. Each military base and geographic area seems to handle them a little different. In most cases, the local Employment Development Department or its equivalent arranges for presenters during the briefing.

Some Employment Development Department personnel openly discriminate against County Veteran Service Officers because they are not affiliated with one of the Veterans Service Organizations, such as the American Legion or the Veterans

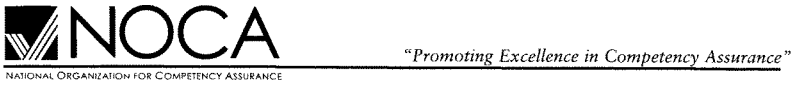
of Foreign Wars. Being an arm of government and filing claims for the veterans in our counties do not qualify us in the eyes of many bureaucrats.

In most cases, County Veterans Service Officers believe that the Transition Assistance Program briefing is vital to the soon to be veteran. The missing component is advocacy. If the County Veterans Service Officer is allowed to be invited to the briefing, as is customarily done in many jurisdictions, the veterans of our great nation will be much greater served.

If the veteran has not attended a Transition Assistance Program briefing, for reasons the veteran could not control, the veteran probably has not filed a claim. A vast majority of claims filed for disability and compensation are generated from a local County Veterans Service Office in the veteran's local community. If the County Veterans Service Officer is given access to the veteran prior to them being discharged, the veteran will have a much better chance of obtaining his hard earned benefits.

Local veteran's advocates should have access to the transition process because they can provide the clearest information to the veteran without any bias. The veterans have earned this consideration and should be given access.

The National Association of County Veterans Service Officers is grateful for this opportunity to testify to the House Subcommittee on Veterans Benefits. We believe that the Transition Assistance Program is vital to send the new veteran out into the civilian world with the best chance for success in the future. We believe that it is the least we can do.



Statement for the Record

Regarding the Importance of Certification and Licensure Opportunities

Submitted by
The National Organization for Competency Assurance (NOCA)

To the
Subcommittee on Benefits
Committee on Veterans Affairs
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC

Regarding its Oversight Hearing on
Military Transition Assistance Programs

July 18, 2002

2025 M STREET, N.W., SUITE 800 ■ WASHINGTON, D.C. 20036-3309
PH 202.367.1165 ■ FAX 202.367.2165 ■ http://www.noca.org

About the National Organization for Competency Assurance (NOCA)

NOCA, the oldest and largest association representing certification agencies, testing companies, consulting firms and individuals involved in professional certification, was created in 1977 as the National Commission for Health Certifying Agencies (NCHCA) with federal funding from the Department of Health and Human Services. Its mission was to develop standards for quality certification in the allied health fields and accredit organizations that met those standards. With the growing use of certification in other fields, NCHCA's leaders recognized what was essential for credible certification of individuals in the healthcare sector was equally essential for other sectors. Hence, NCHCA evolved into the National Organization for Competency Assurance. NOCA is a non-profit, 501(c)(3) organization and remains committed to serving the public interest by ensuring adherence to rigorous certification standards.

NOCA also brings the expertise of its internationally recognized accrediting arm, the National Commission for Certifying Agencies (NCCA). NCCA uses a peer review process to evaluate adherence to its standards for certification agencies and grant recognition through accreditation to those organizations judged to have met those standards. These standards exceed the requirements set forth by the American Psychological Association and the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and thus help to protect the health, safety, and welfare of the public. NCCA is the only national accreditation body that provides this service for private certification organizations in all disciplines.

NOCA's membership is composed of more than 300 organizations responsible for credentialing the skill sets and knowledge base of individuals at the national and international level. NOCA members represent more than 6 million individuals around the world and include representatives from some 150 professions and occupations, including 57 healthcare professions. NOCA's members represent credentialing fields as diverse as construction, healthcare, automotive, and finance. A current roster of NOCA members is attached for your information.

NOCA's mission is to promote excellence in competency assurance for individuals in all occupations and professions. No other organization has the presence in or commits the resources to the field of credentialing. NOCA is proud of its position as the international leader in competency assurance, as well as its role in promoting excellence in competency assurance for practitioners in all occupations and professions. As such, NOCA is in a position to bring experience, perspective and resources to the transition issue.

NOCA's Commitment to America's Veterans

NOCA remains committed to reaching out to federal agencies and the veteran's community to ensure that veterans have access to certification opportunities that will allow their post-military careers to flourish. NOCA has played an active role in the Task Force for Veterans Entrepreneurship, a coalition of veterans service organizations and other interested parties which joined together a number of years ago to advocate for stronger business development opportunities for veterans. The Task Force is especially committed to advocating the needs of service-disabled veterans and the special challenges they face in returning to civilian life.

NOCA's advocacy efforts on behalf of veterans have been recognized with a 2002 "Associations Advance America" award from the American Society of Association Executives (ASAE). Now in

its 12th year, the prestigious Associations Advance America Awards program recognizes associations that propel America forward – with innovative projects in education, skills training, standards-setting, business and social innovation, knowledge creation, citizenship, and community service.

NOCA has been significantly involved in veterans' transition issues for the past several years. Last year, the National Veterans Business Development Corporation (NVDBC) appointed NOCA representative and Executive Director Wade Delk and Commission for Certification in Geriatric Pharmacy Executive Director and NOCA Past-President Michael Martin to sit on the Professional Certification Advisory Board (PCAB). Established by Sec. 202(a) of Public Law 106-50, the PCAB's statutory mission is to advise the Board of Directors of the NVBDC in the creation of uniform guidelines and standards for the professional certification of members of the Armed Forces in order to aid in their efficient and orderly transition to civilian occupations and professions, and to remove potential barriers in the areas of licensure and certification. Mr. Martin currently co-chairs the PCAB. NOCA also worked side by side with veterans service organizations in advocacy for adequate funding for the National Veterans Business Development Corporation.

The passage of the Veterans Benefits and Health Care Improvement Act of 2000 (Public Law 106-419) in November 2000 expanded opportunities for veterans to use their Montgomery G.I. benefits to pay for professional certification tests. NOCA strongly supported this legislation and assisted the U.S. Department of Labor in developing standards for organizations to achieve should they want their certification tests to be eligible for Montgomery G.I. reimbursement. NOCA has enthusiastically promoted this program to its members to ensure that as many certification organizations as possible meet the requirements. NOCA Past-President Michael Martin was also appointed to serve as a representative of NOCA on the Professional Certification and Licensure Advisory Committee (PCLAC). Established by Public Law 106-419, the purpose of the PCLAC is to advise the Secretary of Veterans Affairs on the requirements of organizations that offer licensing and certification tests to veterans using their Montgomery GI benefits as payment.

NOCA sought to provide additional resources to military personnel and veterans by redesigning its Web site. A special section on NOCA's Web site is specially designed to provide information to veterans about what kinds of certifications exist in the private sector, including a listing of certification programs by industry sector. NOCA has encouraged other interested organizations to link to its Web site. The site may be reached at http://www.noca.org/military/vets.htm.

More Work Needs to Be Done

On September 27, 2000, this Subcommittee graciously afforded NOCA the opportunity to appear before it to discuss what role certification and licensure might play in enhancing post-service employment and career opportunities for military personnel. We identified several areas we thought to be key in strengthening these opportunities for service members.

First, we recommended that agencies maximize the use of the Internet as a tool for the widest audience possible to have access to credentialing information. We pointed to the Department of Labor's Veterans' Employment and Training Service "Use Your Military Experience and Training" ("UMET") Web site as a good start at providing veterans with online access to certification and licensure opportunities. UMET remains an excellent resource and VETS is currently redesigning the site to provide a more user-friendly experience. However, UMET still only identifies 25 occupations that allow a service member to transfer military skills from the

service to the civilian sector. NOCA has continued to offer its organizational resources to VETS so that UMET might be able to provide as extensive resource information as possible. We hope that Congress continue to provide adequate levels of funding to VETS so that they have the necessary resources to carry out their important mission. Of particular value would be an extensive effort to identify the full universe of certification programs that may offer additional transition opportunities for service members.

The Department of the Army has also created an excellent resource for service members with its new "Credentialing Opportunities Online" (COOL) Web site. NOCA provided assistance and expertise to the Army as the Web site was being developed. We are pleased to see that the site is up and running.

Second, we pointed out the need for uniform standards to be created for armed services certification programs to ensure that military personnel receive the highest quality certification with maximum transferability to the private sector. NOCA and like organizations that have been appointed to the Professional Certification Advisory Board and the Professional Certification and Licensure Advisory Committee are working to bring a set of uniform standards to fruition. NOCA has developed the only set of internationally recognized standards for certification that can be used as a starting point for the development of quality uniform standards for certification programs. Professionals in a wide variety of fields work hard to earn their credentials and to ensure that their credential has value in their careers. Any effort to "dumb down" professional certification standards is a disservice to military veterans as well as individual professions that certification program standards serve to protect.

Third, we recommended that the full resources of the certification community be brought to bear when attempting to create more professional opportunities for military veterans. NOCA has attempted to reach out to all branches of the service and to federal agencies to share information, ideas, and expertise. To date the Army has sought our assistance in developing its certification and licensure strategy. It is important that the military branches reach out to outside organizations with expertise in identifying certification skill-sets. Likewise, it is important that agencies involved in certification and licensure draw upon a broad range of voices in the certification community. Developing policies inside a vacuum will only serve to hurt the veterans this Committee and Congress is rightfully trying to help.

Conclusion

As we stated before, improving the prospects for employment of service members when they leave the military will go a long way toward meeting recruiting goals, improving military morale, enhancing the quality of our civilian workforce, and keeping our economy competitive. These brave men and women of the armed services, many of whom are today in harms way, deserve the resources that will help make the training they receive in service into marketable skill-sets in their post-military careers. NOCA stands at the ready to assist in this mission.

Respectfully Submitted,

Wade Delk
Executive Director
National Organization for Competency Assurance
2025 M Street NW Suite 800
Washington DC 20036
202.367.1165 Phone

APPENDIX

NOCA Organizational Members

NOCA's Organizational Members consist of associations, certifying organizations, customer groups, and government agencies that are interested in credentialing.

- AACE International
- ACNM Certification Council, Inc.
- Academy of Ambulatory Foot Surgery
- Academy for Certification of Vision Rehabilitation and Education Professionals
- Accrediting Bureau of Health Education Schools
- Aerobics and Fitness Association of America
- American Academy of Audiology
- American Academy of Nurse Practitioners
- American Academy of Otolanyngology - Head & Neck Surgery
- American Academy of Pain Management
- American Academy of Wound Management
- American Association for Medical Transcription
- American Association for Respiratory Care
- American Association of Critical-Care Nurses Certification Corporation
- American Association of Family and Consumer Sciences
- American Association of Medical Assistants
- American Association of Physician Specialists
- American Board for Certification in Orthotics and Prosthetics, Inc.
- American Board for Occupational Health Nurses
- American Board of Ambulatory Medicine
- American Board of Cardiovascular Perfusion
- American Board of Chiropractic Consultants
- American Board of Chiropractic Orthopaedists
- American Board of Chiropractic Sports Physicians
- American Board of Industrial Hygiene
- American Board of Nursing Specialties
- American Board of Opticianry
- American Board of Pain Medicine
- American Board of Professional Neuropsychology
- American Board of Surgical Assistants
- American Board of Transplant Coordinators
- American Board of Veterinary Practitioners
- American Certification Agency for Healthcare Professionals
- American Chiropractic Neurology Board
- American Chiropractic Registry of Radiologic Technologists
- American College of Forensic Examiners
- American College of Healthcare Executives
- American College of Sports Medicine
- American Compensation Association
- American Construction Inspectors Association
- American Council of Certified Podiatric Physicians and Surgeons
- American Council on Exercise
- American Fence Association, Inc.
- American Hospital Association Certification Center

- American Institute of Certified Public Accountants
- American Lung Association National Asthma Education Certification Board
- American Medical Technologists
- American Nurses Credentialing Center Commission on Certification
- American Occupational Therapy Association
- American Osteopathic Association
- American Payroll Association
- American Petroleum Institute
- American Physical Therapy Association
- American Podiatric Medical Specialties Board
- American Production and Inventory Control Society
- American Reflexology Certification Board
- American Registry of Diagnostic Medical Sonographers
- The American Registry of Radiologic Technologists
- American Society for Industrial Security
- American Society for Microbiology
- American Society of Anesthesia Technologists and Technicians
- American Society of Association Executives
- American Society of Military Comptrollers
- American Speech-Language-Hearing Association
- Aquatic Exercise Association, Inc.
- Art Therapy Credentials Board
- Associated Landscape Contractors of Colorado
- Association for Canadian Registered Safety Professionals
- Association for Death Education and Counseling
- Association for Investment Management and Research
- Association of Government Accountants
- Association of Medical Illustrators
- Association of Professionals in Business Management
- Association of Social Work Boards
- Association of Surgical Technologists, Inc.
- Association of Water Technologies, Inc.
- BICSI: A Telecommunications Association
- Behavior Analyst Certification Board
- Biofeedback Certification Institute of America
- Board for Certification in Pedorthics
- Board for Orthotist/Prothetist Certification
- Board of Certification for Emergency Nursing
- Board of Certification in Professional Ergonomics
- Board of Certified Safety Professionals
- Board of Environmental, Health & Safety Auditor Certifications
- Board of Pharmaceutical Specialties
- Board of Registered Polysomnographic Technologists
- California-Nevada Section, American Water Works Association
- California Water Environment Association
- Canadian Alliance of Physiotherapy Regulators
- Canadian Board for Respiratory Care, Inc.
- Canadian Chiropractic Examining Board
- Canadian Council of Professional Engineers
- Canadian Securities Institute
- Certification Board for Music Therapists
- Certification Board of Infection Control and Epidemiology

- Certification Board Perioperative Nursing
- Certification of Disability Management Specialists Commission
- Certified Financial Planner Board of Standards, Inc.
- Certified Fund Raising Executive International Credentialing Board
- Certified General Accountants' Association of Canada
- Certifying Board for Dietary Managers
- Certifying Board of Gastroenterology Nurses and Associates
- Clinical Nutrition Certification Board
- College of Massage Therapists of Ontario
- College of Medical Radiation Technologists of Ontario
- College of Occupational Therapists of Ontario
- College of Respiratory Therapists of Ontario
- Commercial Real Estate Education Foundation, Inc.
- Commission for Case Manager Certification
- Commission for Certification in Geriatric Pharmacy
- Commission on Dietetic Registration of the American Dietetic Association
- Commission on Graduates of Foreign Nursing Schools
- Commission on Rehabilitation Counselor Certification
- Computing Technology Industry Association
- Construction Management Association of America
- Consultant Services
- Convention Liaison Council
- Council on Certification of Nurse Anesthetists
- Council on Licensure, Enforcement and Regulation
- Council on Nutrition
- Defense Activity for Non-Traditional Education Support
- Dental Assisting National Board
- The Educational Foundation of the National Restaurant Association
- Examination Board of Professional Home Inspectors
- Hand Therapy Certification Commission, Inc.
- Healthcare Quality Certification Board
- Human Resource Certification Institute
- IEEE Computer Society
- ISA, the international society for measurement and control
- Infusion Nurses Certification Corporation
- Illinois Department of Professional Regulation
- Institute of Certified Management Accountants
- Institute of Hazardous Materials Management
- Institute of Real Estate Management
- International Air Filtration Certifiers Association
- International Association for Colon Hydrotherapy
- International Association of Healthcare Central Service Materiel Management
- International Association of Psychosocial Rehabilitation Services
- International Board of Lactation Consultant Examiners
- International Certification and Reciprocity Consortium/Alcohol & Other Drug Abuse, Inc.
- International Conference of Building Officials
- InterNational Electrical Testing Association (NETA)
- International Executive Housekeepers Association, Inc.
- International Society for Clinical Densitometry
- International Society of Arboriculture
- Joint Commission on Allied Health Personnel in Ophthamology
- Knowledge Management Certification Board

- Lamaze International
- Liaison Council on Certification for the Surgical Technologist
- National Aerobics & Fitness Trainers Association
- National Air Duct Cleaners Association
- National Association Medical Staff Services
- National Association for Subacute & Post Acute Care
- National Association of Alcoholism and Drug Abuse Counselors
- National Association of Boards of Pharmacy
- National Association of Forensic Counselors, Inc.
- National Association of Legal Assistants
- National Association of Mortgage Brokers
- National Association of Purchasing Management
- National Athletic Trainer's Association Board of Certification
- National Board for Certification in Hearing Instrument Sciences
- National Board for Certification in Occupational Therapy
- National Board for Certification of Registrars
- National Board for Certified Counselors
- National Board for Professional Teaching Standards
- National Board for Respiratory Care
- National Board of Certification for Community Association Managers, Inc.
- National Board of Examiners in Optometry
- National Board of Orthodontics, U.S.
- National Business Aviation Association
- National Center for Competency Testing
- National Certification Board for Diabetes Educators
- National Certification Board for Therapeutic Massage and Body Work
- The National Certification Board of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners and Nurses
- National Certification Commission for Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine
- National Certification Corporation for the Obstetric, Gynecologic, and Neonatal Nursing Specialties
- The National Commission for Health Education Credentialing
- National Commission for the Certification of Crane Operators
- National Community Pharmacists Association
- National Contact Lens Examiners
- National Council for Interior Design Qualification
- National Council for Therapeutic Recreation Certification, Inc.
- National Council of Architectural Registration Boards
- National Council of Examiners for Engineering and Surveying
- National Council of State Boards of Nursing, Inc.
- National Council for Therapeutic Recreation Certification
- National Council on Qualifications for the Lighting Professions
- National Dental Hygiene Certification Board
- National Examining Board of Ocularists
- National Glass Association
- National Ground Water Association
- National Healthcareer Association
- National Ground Water Association
- National Indian Child Welfare Association
- National Institute for Automotive Service Excellence
- National Institute for Certification of Healthcare Sterile Processing and Distribution Personnel
- National Institute for Standards in Pharmacist Credentialing
- National Phlebotomy Association, Inc.

- National Registry of Emergency Medical Technicians
- National Registry of Food Safety Professionals
- National Safety Management Society
- National Strength and Conditioning Association (NSCA) Certification Commission
- National Surgical Assistant Association
- North American Electric Reliability Council
- North American Registry of Midwives
- North American Technician Excellence
- The Nuclear Medicine Technology Certification Board
- Oncology Nursing Certification Corporation
- Ontario College of Pharmacists
- Ophthalmic Photographers' Society, Inc. Board of Certification
- Pharmacy Technician Certification Board
- Professional Photographers of America
- Project Management Institute
- Radiology Coding Certification Board
- Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf, Inc.
- Registry of Magnetic Resonance Imaging Technologists, Inc.
- Rehabilitation Engineering and Assistive Technology Society of North America
- Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada
- Sales & Service Voluntary Partnership, Inc.
- Society of Actuaries
- Society of Cable Telecommunications Engineers
- The Society of the Plastics Industry, Inc.
- Society of Tribologists and Lubrication Engineers
- Transportation Professional Certification Board, Inc.
- Washington State Department of Health
- Wound, Ostomy, and Continence Nurses Certification Board

STATEMENT OF

DENNIS M. CULLINAN, DIRECTOR
NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE SERVICE
VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS OF THE UNITED STATES

SUBMITTED TO THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON BENEFITS
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

WITH RESPECT TO

THE TRANSITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

WASHINGTON, DC July 18, 2002

MR. CHAIRMAN AND MEMBERS OF THE SUBCOMMITTEE:

On behalf of the 2.7 million members of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States (VFW) and our Ladies Auxiliary, I would like to express our sincere gratitude for including our organization in this hearing. The Transition Assistance Program (TAP) is of vital concern to our members, many of whom are currently on active duty, or who have recently transitioned back into civilian life. We have found the program to be generally successful in its important mission but have also found several areas of concern that we will explore further.

TAP is a joint venture of the Departments of Defense (DoD), Veterans' Affairs (VA), Labor (DoL), and Transportation (DoT). Together, these Departments develop training seminars, workshops and the associated materials to provide the necessary skills so that our nation's defenders can make the sometimes difficult transition from military to civilian life.

DoD expects that, for the near future, between 200,000 and 250,000 servicemembers will leave the service annually. Further, DoL statistics show that at the ages most common for separation or retirement, veterans have higher unemployment rates than non-veterans do. Consequentially, the main thrust of TAP has been employment counseling.

TAP provides career and job search advice as well as development of critical skills including resume and cover letter building. The VFW has found this program to be very beneficial to our veterans. As DoL has pointed out, most TAP participants find employment several weeks sooner

than those who do not participate.

TAP does not focus solely on employment issues. VA, through the Veterans Benefits Administration, provides information and counseling with respect to VA's programs and benefits for veterans. The VFW strongly believes that it is important that these veterans be made aware of their earned benefits and rights. We feel that this information creates a more sophisticated veteran—one who more fully understands his or her rights, and one who, perhaps more importantly, knows where to go for assistance.

Another key component of VA's contribution is the Benefits Delivery at Discharge program (BDD). We are proud to be a partner in this joint VA-DoD program. It allows transitioning servicemembers to begin receiving VA disability compensation for their service connected illnesses and disabilities within approximately 30 days of separation. To accomplish this, the servicemembers receive their discharge physicals under VA protocols, saving them the time and delay of a separate physical at a VA facility.

These BDD claims are consistently more fully developed and ready-to-rate. We have found that these claims do not require the frequently time consuming efforts to track down old military and medical records. Further, the information gleaned from these physicals provides an accurate baseline for future evaluations based upon the initial rating as well as making those future ratings decisions easier.

This program is a great benefit to both VA and the veteran. VA receives ready-to-rate claims that it can adjudicate quickly and easily. And the veteran receives his or her earned compensation much sooner than usual. The VFW believes that this can greatly improve the ease with which the servicemember transitions into civilian life.

The full TAP program has received excellent reviews from its participants. The VFW has heard many complimentary things from our members who have utilized the program and who appreciate the wide-variety of services, the skills they have learned, and the important

information imparted in the program.

Despite the program's many successes, there are a few areas of concern. First, access remains a problem for some servicemembers. Many commanders, understandably, focus primarily on building and maintaining unit readiness. As a result, some servicemembers have reportedly had difficulties getting time off to attend the program. Although this has improved since TAP's beginning, the VFW feels that more can and should be done to ensure that all servicemembers have access to this essential program. We applaud the Marine Corps for their foresight and dedication to their servicemembers through their implementation of a mandatory transition program.

Access can also be a problem for those who are serving in remote locations. As in the previous example, improvements have been made, but more can be done. The VFW welcomes DoL's initiative in developing a transition website and programs and materials to be used for long-distance training. Under ideal conditions, all servicemembers would receive the same face-to-face meetings, but we realize that the nature of military service renders this impossible in some cases. DoL's initiatives are an important step in the right direction.

A third area of concern is with the low rate of spousal participation. Every indication is that these men and women are not taking advantage of the excellent opportunities afforded them. Many of the skills and the majority of the information in TAP is just as valuable to the spouse as it is to the servicemember. Whatever the reason for their low participation, the VFW believes that more outreach, as provided for in P.L. 107-103, is needed and would be a great benefit to our veterans and their families.

The General Accounting Office's (GAO) testimony highlights what is perhaps our greatest area of concern. There just are not enough meaningful statistics to determine the overall success of the program. The majority of information we receive is anecdotal. While the indications we receive are that the program is very effective at assisting our transitioning servicemembers, unless additional statistics are collected, we cannot fully understand what facets of the program

are most beneficial and which ones need to be improved to more effectively aid the servicemember.

One possible improvement is through more frequent labor statistics. Currently, the Bureau of Labor Statistics only updates their veterans' data once a year. We feel that more frequent reporting would make it easier to establish trends and could form a more useful baseline when analyzing these employment statistics

Another potential data improvement would require the involvement of DoL. Both DVOPs and LVERs are required to keep a myriad of information about each of the veterans they serve. Among the information they collect should be whether the veteran participated in TAP. Although this statistic would not be completely conclusive, it would provide a good generalization as to whether TAP participants are better prepared and have an easier time seeking employment.

Despite the lack of concrete data, we do believe that the program is effective. Teaching these brave men and women the critical skills and techniques they need to be the leaders of tomorrow is the least we can do to thank them for their years of dedication in support of this country. The Transition Assistance Program is clearly beneficial to our veterans and we strongly encourage that more be done to ensure that all separating servicemembers have access to the program.

Mr. Chairman, we again thank you for including the VFW in this hearing on this essential program.

○