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EXAMINING THE DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY'S EFFORTS TO RECRUIT, HIRE AND PROMOTE VETERANS

HEARING

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON MANAGEMENT, INVESTIGATIONS, AND OVERSIGHT

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ONE HUNDRED TENTH CONGRESS

FIRST SESSION

NOVEMBER 13, 2007

Serial No. 110–85

Printed for the use of the Committee on Homeland Security



Available via the World Wide Web: http://www.gpoaccess.gov/congress/index.html

U.S. GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE

48–980 PDF WASHINGTON : 2009

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) 512–2104 Mail: Stop IDCC, Washington, DC 20402–0001

VerDate Nov 24 2008 09:26 Nov 06, 2009 Jkt 000000 PO 00000 Frm 00001 Fmt 5011 Sfmt 5011 H:\DOCS\110-HRGS\110-85\48980.TXT HSEC PsN: DIANE

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EXAMINING THE DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY'S EFFORTS TO RECRUIT, HIRE AND PROMOTE VETERANS

Tuesday, November 13, 2007

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON MANAGEMENT,
INVESTIGATIONS, AND OVERSIGHT,
Washington, DC.

The subcommittee met, pursuant to call, at 2:02 p.m., in Room 311, Cannon House Office Building, Hon. Christopher P. Carney [chairman of the subcommittee] presiding.

Present: Representatives Carney and Rogers.

Mr. CARNEY. The subcommittee will come to order.

The subcommittee is meeting today to receive testimony on "Examining the Department of Homeland Security's Efforts to Recruit, Hire and Promote Veterans."

Thanks for joining us today. Due to some unforeseen events that came up on the calendar of the full committee over the last few weeks, we have had to push this hearing back a couple of times. So I appreciate your indulgence.

I am glad we are finally holding this meeting, especially after just having observed Veterans Day. And it has been a full weekend for me, certainly, of Veterans Day events. I would like to thank my friend, Mr. Rogers, for his cooperation in holding today's hearing, as well.

As this session winds down, there has certainly been no shortage of partisanship on the House floor. I am glad that our subcommittee, however, and that the committee have been able to get past all that and continue to examine issues affecting the Department of Homeland Security.

Thanks, also, to all of our witnesses for submitting their testimony on time, especially Ms. Pérez. I appreciate that very much. I hope this is a sign of things to come.

In fact, while our committee has held countless meetings on DHS shortcomings, hiring of veterans at DHS is an area where the Department seems to be on the right track. As I mentioned a few moments ago, this past Sunday we honored those who have served our Nation. Over the years, Congress has seen fit to ensure that there are laws in place to give vets an advantage when it comes to both applying for and being hired for Federal jobs.

In general I am pleased to see that DHS has been proactive in recruiting vets. Just last week, the Department convened the first

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meeting of its Veterans Advisory Council, comprised of key veterans service organizations. And while the American Legion has expressed concerns over DHS's efforts in general and the Legion did not participate in last week's meetings, feedback from our groups has been positive. These groups have long assisted vets in finding their way back into Federal service.

Aside from the Department of Defense, the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Air Force, Army and Navy, the Departments of Transportation and Homeland Security are atop the list of the Federal agencies with a percentage of their workforce being prize comprised of vets. As of last week, DHS had almost 40,500 veterans on the payroll. That is to be commended. This year alone, the Department has hired over 6,000 vets, twice as many as it hired in 2006 and four times as many as it hired in 2005. This is obviously good news, both for DHS and for veterans.

That said, I worry about massive retirements that our Federal workforce will endure over the next decade. Over 60 percent of the Federal employees will be eligible to retire over the next 10 years. The Department must do everything it can to stay competitive with other Federal agencies when recruiting, retaining and promoting veterans. Their unquestionable service ethic makes them ideal Federal employees. It is of the utmost importance that DHS leverage their experience, dedication and training to strengthen the Department.

While vets traditionally have strong ties with the VA, DOD or other various agencies, DHS is in a unique position to utilize skills that these former soldiers, seamen, airmen and Marines honed while on active duty. To borrow from an old recruiting phrase from the Army, is the Department being all it can be when it comes to matching skills of veterans to new careers at DHS? TSA sees attrition rates of roughly 15 percent. Surely there are veterans with comparable skills who can come back with little or no additional training, fill the vacancies and stick around long enough to right some of the wrongs that are driving screeners away.

Also, is the Department working to utilize the unique intelligence analysis and translation skills of vets to augment the existing intelligence functions? There are any number of areas where the skills of veterans could easily pair up with DHS job requirements. I think we all just want to ensure that the Department isn't overlooking any of these qualified, already-trained vets and instead hiring more costly private contractors to fill positions.

This means that in addition to DHS recruiters continuing to work at military hospitals and the Department working with the various VSOs throughout the Veterans Advisory Council, that DHS also expand recruiting to transition centers where veterans are first put in touch with civil service opportunities. Even though these vets are often in a hurry to get through the transition centers' doors—we certainly understand that—any contact with DHS is better than nothing.

I look forward to hearing what has been working and what hasn't worked and what is planned for the future to ensure DHS's success in recruitment and retention of these uniquely qualified and dedicated Americans.

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The Chair now recognizes the ranking member of the subcommittee, the gentleman from Alabama, Mr. Rogers, for an opening statement.

Mr. ROGERS. Thank you, Chairman Carney, for holding this hearing and the witnesses for participating in our effort to review the progress that the Department of Homeland Security is making to recruit, hire and retain veterans. It is timely, since our Nation just honored Veterans Day, that we honor the bravery and sacrifice of those men and women who served in uniform.

I would like to also welcome back to the subcommittee Ms. Marta Perez, Director of Human Resources for DHS. I know that is not your new title yet, but we are still hoping the Senate takes up the legislation Chairman Carney and I worked on for your new title.

The employment of veterans by the Federal Government, especially DHS, is a critically important issue. Veterans employed at DHS bring a wealth of experience from the specialized training they receive in the military. As a member of the House Armed Services Committee, I am especially aware of the sacrifices our brave men and women in uniform make every day in keeping our country safe. During that committee's site visits to Iraq, we saw firsthand the major challenges our troops are facing. We also saw how well-trained they are and what special skills they can bring to their future employers.

My home State of Alabama has over 412,000 veterans. Out of all the civilian DHS employees living in Alabama, 263, or 28 percent, are veterans. According to the Office of Personnel Management, in fiscal year 2006 DHS ranked seventh in the percentage of veterans in a Federal agency's workforce. And according to DHS, veterans constitute 24 percent of its workforce. This percentage compares to the government-wide average of employed veterans, which DHS states to be 26.3 percent. These numbers appear to indicate that folks at DHS are doing a good job in hiring veterans to support the Department's mission.

In addition to hiring veterans, it is also important to have programs in place to retain them. In the last Congress and earlier this year, this subcommittee held hearings on personnel challenges facing the Department of Homeland Security, including the retention of its valued employees. Last month, an OPM official testified before the a Veterans Affairs subcommittee that DHS has one of the highest retention rates of veterans throughout the Federal Government. We look forward to hearing more about DHS' efforts in these areas as well as more that might be done to recruit those soldiers returning from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

And, with that, I yield back.

Mr. CARNEY. Thank you, Mr. Rogers.

Should other members show up, their statements will be submitted for the record.

I want to welcome the witnesses.

Our first witness has appeared before the subcommittee several times before. Marta Brito Perez is the Chief Human Capital Officer at the Department of Homeland Security. Ms. Perez came to the Department late last year from the Office of Personnel Management, where she led the Human Capital Leadership and Merit System Accountability Division. Prior to her Federal service, Ms. Perez

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was the director of the Office of Human Resources of the Montgomery County, Maryland, government, where she oversaw all aspects of human resource management for more than 10,000 employees and 4,000 retired employees and their dependents.

Our second witness is Ms. Leslye Arsht, Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Military Community and Family Policy at the U.S. Department of Defense, a position she has held since February 2006. She is responsible for policy advocacy and oversight for all community support to service members and their families, including, but not limited to, the Transition Assistance Program for separated service members. Prior to her current appointment, Ms. Arsht was part of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness team since June 2004.

Our third and final witness is Mr. Eric Hilleman, deputy director of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States' National Legislative Service, a position he has held since March of 2007. Mr. Hilleman is a veteran himself, having served in the United States Marine Corps in several assignments overseas. Mr. Hilleman was honorably discharged in 1999 at the rank of sergeant. After his service, he attended Utah State University, where he was chosen as the Borg Scholar and studied Arabic at the American University in Cairo from 2002 to 2003. He graduated in 2004 from USU with a bachelor's of arts in political science with a focus in the Middle East.

Without objection, the witnesses' full statements will be inserted into the record. I now ask each witness to summarize his or her statement for 5μminutes, beginning with Chief Perez.

STATEMENT OF MARTA BRITO PEREZ, CHIEF HUMAN CAPITAL OFFICER, DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY

Ms. PEREZ. Good afternoon. Thank you, Chairman Carney and Ranking Member Rogers, for inviting me this afternoon. It is an honor to appear today to update you on the Department of Homeland Security's accomplishments and new initiatives to recruit, hire and promote our veterans.

Today's competitive job market presents increasing opportunities for the men and women—talented men and women—for rewarding careers outside of the Federal Government. This, coupled with our aggressive hiring goals, presents a challenge. I believe that our veterans are a key source for the challenge that we need at homeland security. We value the experience, the commitment and the work ethics that veterans bring to the job, as well as their skills and abilities. Their military backgrounds and training are well-suited for our jobs. We currently employ over 40,000, as you mentioned, 24 percent veterans across our organizations. We also have 41,000 active-duty and 8,000 reserve U.S. Coast Guardsmen and—women.

Over the last year, we have made progress in reaching out to veterans. Although we are pleased with the results, we are committed to doing more. This past year, the Department's human resources directors joined me in drafting a 2-year operational plan, which included veterans outreach as a priority for us. We have had successes in recruiting veterans. Over 23 percent of our headquarter employees are veterans. Over 4,000, or 27 percent, of our border patrol agents are veterans. Over 5,400, or 29 percent, of our Cus-

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toms and Border Protection officers are veterans as well. Our criminal investigators, deportation officers and detention center officers, almost 35 percent of them are veterans. And in TSOs, transportation security officers, over 22 percent are veterans.

I would like to update you on our progress in veterans outreach and share with you some of our unique initiatives.

Recently we launched a one-stop Web site for veterans seeking employment with DHS. The Web site contains job listings, application information or requirements, an e-mail box for inquiries and for them to submit documents, and a converter to help veterans identify what civilian occupations correlate to their military occupation.

Last week we also hosted the first meeting of the Department's Veterans Outreach Advisory Council. The council is composed of military representatives and representatives from veterans support organizations such as the American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars and Vietnam Veterans of America. The council will advise us on the effectiveness of our veterans outreach efforts on an ongoing basis. And we believe this is the first council of its kind in the Federal Government.

We continue to conduct specific, targeted outreach efforts. Over the past year, we participated in approximately 130 outreach and recruitment events, many targeting disabled veterans.

While outreach is a vital element of our strategy, we are also trying to improve our internal processes so we can expedite our process. We are conducting enhanced training for human resources specialists in the areas of veterans' employment, authorities and rights. Our objective is to increase our ability to recruit and hire veterans. I am pleased to report that we are seeing progress. Over a 1-year period ending this past June, we used special veterans employment authorities to hire almost 600 veterans. These are very important authorities for us.

I am sure you are all familiar with the wonderful program sponsored by the Department of Defense, the Operation Warfighter Program. Our Department was one of the first Federal agencies invited to participate in the pilot program launch in 2005. And since that time, we have placed almost 40 participants, many of them on a permanent basis.

As we look back over the past few years, we see that we are making significant progress. The number of veterans hired in 2006, as you mentioned, doubled the number we hired in 2005, and we double the number in 2007 again.

With regard to disabled veterans, between 2006 and 2007 we increased the number of disabled veterans we hired from 366 to 771, and we now employ approximately 6,400 disabled veterans.

While we take pride in our hiring of veterans and disabled veterans, we continue to see separations, and, like you, we watch retirements and all separations. Equally important to hiring more veterans is ensuring that we have programs in place that will continue to develop their talents and abilities. Last year we implemented a brand-new comprehensive learning and development strategy to better address the needs of our employees, including our growing veteran population. The Department recognizes the importance of fully utilizing the talent, the skills and work ethics

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of our veterans. We value the experience and character of those who have already served their country and wish to continue to do so at DHS.

I thank you for your leadership and your support of our efforts to increase our veterans and our workforce, and I will be happy to answer any questions.

[The statement of Ms. Pérez follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF MARTA BRITO PÉREZ

Thank you, Chairman Carney, Ranking Members Rogers and Members of the Subcommittee. It is an honor to appear before you to update you on the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) accomplishments and new initiatives to recruit and hire more of America's veterans.

Over the last year, and even since the last time we met, we have made great progress in reaching out to veterans and in recruiting and hiring disabled veterans. We are pleased with the positive results we have seen from our efforts and we are committed to doing even more in this area.

Prior to joining DHS, I worked at the Office of Personnel Management where I had oversight of many veterans' initiatives. Since arriving at DHS in September 2006, I have used that experience and have worked to ensure we fully utilize as many programs as possible to improve our veterans' outreach efforts.

Veterans Have the Talent DHS Needs

At DHS, we value the experience, commitment and work ethic that veterans bring to the job, as well as their significant skills and abilities. Their military backgrounds and training are well suited for DHS jobs—and most importantly—to accomplishing our critical mission. We are proud to provide opportunities to those who wish to serve their country a second time.

The training, experience, resourcefulness and work ethic veterans bring to the job enable them to take on challenges beyond the task at hand. This unique combination makes them particularly well-suited for a number of Mission Critical Occupations across DHS. The chart below provides an illustration of the number of veterans in some of our Mission Critical Occupations.

Veterans Serving in DHS Mission Critical Occupations

Component	# of Employees	# of Veterans	% Veterans
U.S. Customs and Border Protection.			
Border Patrol Agents	14847	4044	27%
CBP Officers	18495	5429	29%
U.S. Immigrations and Customs Enforcement			
Criminal Investigators; Deportation Officers; Detention/Deportation Officers	5351	1872	35%
Federal Law Enforcement Training Center			
Investigator Instructor	564	277	49%

DHS Veterans Outreach Initiatives

At DHS, we are working on numerous fronts to reach out to veterans. I would like to update you on our progress and share with you some results from this past year.

On October 9, 2007, my office, working in collaboration with our Office of Public Affairs and Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties (CRCL), launched a "one stop" website for veterans seeking employment with DHS. This website contains current DHS job listings, application information and requirements, an e-mail box for inquiries and submitting documents and a "converter" to help veterans identify which civilian occupations correlate to their military occupation specialties.

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On November 6, 2007, we hosted the first DHS Veterans Outreach Advisory Council. Composed of military representatives and representative from veterans support organizations, such as the American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars and Vietnam Veterans of America, the Council will advise us on the effectiveness of our veterans outreach efforts on an ongoing basis. We believe this is the first Council of its kind in the federal government.

In addition to these unique initiatives, we continue to conduct specific, targeted outreach efforts.

In the past fiscal year, collectively we have participated in approximately 130 outreach and recruitment events, many targeting disabled veterans. Examples include:

- DHS was represented at Congresswoman Hilda L. Solis' 4th Annual Veterans Care Day held in East Los Angeles on October 6, 2007. I personally sent our Department Recruitment Program Manager to the event.
- DHS Headquarters sponsored a second annual open house event called "Connecting with Your Future" on October 24, 2007. The purpose of this event was to provide Veterans, Veterans with Disabilities and Students with Disabilities with an opportunity to meet managers and supervisors from organizations within DHS, and to obtain information about career opportunities.
- Representatives from DHS components attended the *New York Times'* "Annual Salute Our Heroes: Veterans Job Fair & Career Expo" held November 6, 2007 in New York City. This is sponsored in part by the Department of Labor's (DOL) Veterans' Employment and Training Service (VETS).
- We also had representation at the League of Latin American Citizens (LULAC) Veterans Conference in Orlando, Florida, over the Veterans Day weekend.

Finally, we are conducting enhanced training for the Department's HR specialists in the areas of veterans' employment programs, authorities and rights. We will establish a network of specialists in this arena dedicated to helping veterans join the DHS team.

Our objective in all of our efforts is to increase our ability to recruit veterans, and I am pleased to report that we are seeing progress. Over a one-year period ending this past June, we used the following veterans' employment authorities to hire 591 veterans:

- Veterans Employment Opportunities Act of 1998 (VEOA): **408**
- Veterans Reemployment Appointment (VRA): **144**
- 30% or more Disabled: **39**

Operation Warfighter Program

DHS, under the leadership of CRCL, is very proud to have been among the first federal agencies invited to participate in the April 12, 2005 meeting on the pilot program that launched the Department of Defense's Operation Warfighter (OWF) program. The first OWF participants were placed within CRCL. OWF is a temporary assignment program placing severely wounded service members undergoing rehabilitative services at Walter Reed Army Hospital or the National Naval Medical Center on detail assignments with federal agencies in the greater Washington, D.C. area. This program provides active duty wounded service members with an opportunity to explore their skills, start networking, experience a meaningful activity outside of the hospital environment and begin a formal transition back into the workforce. OWF is a collaborative effort between DoD and DOL/VETS.

In December 2005, DHS expanded its participation to include permanent placements of OWF participants seeking to continue their public service in civilian careers. Since inception, DHS has placed 36 OWF participants in components, of which 19 were placed during fiscal year 2007, hiring five permanently. DHS also assists wounded service members in their search for employment with locations in or near DHS field offices if they decide not to remain in the DC area upon release from Walter Reed Army Hospital or the National Naval Medical Center.

DHS components continually work with Operation WarFighter personnel and other organizations to match veterans to careers in the Department. CRCL provided the OWF Project Manager with a complete listing of major components and sub agencies that is used to attract wounded service members to DHS from Walter Reed Army Hospital and the National Naval Medical Center.

DHS officials actively participate in OWF bi-weekly Briefings, Transition Assistance Program sessions and career fairs at Walter Reed Army Hospital and the National Naval Medical Center. On June 20, 2007, Secretary Chertoff hosted a barbecue for Operation Warfighter participants and their families at the Nebraska Avenue Complex. And as indicated earlier, on October 24, 2007, DHS Headquarters Office of Equal Employment Opportunity hosted their second "Connecting with the Future" event to provide veterans and veterans with disabilities with the opportunity

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to meet DHS managers and to obtain information about career opportunities. All DHS components were invited to participate.

Results

- We employ over 40,000 veterans at DHS.
- The number of veterans hired in fiscal year 2006 (3,015) was double the fiscal year 2005 number (1,497), and in fiscal year 2007 we increased the number of veterans hired (6,013) by an additional 100%.
    - U.S. Customs and Border Protection hired almost three times as many veterans in fiscal year 2007 than fiscal year 2006.
    - U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement hired almost three times as many veterans in fiscal year 2007 than fiscal year 2006
    - The Federal Emergency Management Administration hired more than twice the number of veterans in fiscal year 2007 than fiscal year 2006.
    - We also significantly increased the number of disabled veterans hired in fiscal year 2007.

Conclusion

The Department recognizes the importance of fully utilizing the talents, skills and work ethic of our veterans in meeting the DHS mission of securing the American homeland. I hope you can appreciate how much we value the experience and character of those who have already served their country and wish to continue to do so with DHS.

My office plays an important role in ensuring and supporting DHS' capacity to build and sustain a high-performing workforce and provide programs to give employees at all levels the knowledge and tools they need to drive mission success.

Thank you for your leadership and your continued support of the Department of Homeland Security and the programs that support our employees. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

Mr. CARNEY. Thank you, Ms. Pérez.

Ms. Arsht for 5 minutes, please.

STATEMENT OF LESLYE A. ARSHT, DEPUTY UNDER SECRETARY OF DEFENSE FOR MILITARY COMMUNITY AND FAMILY POLICY, DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

Ms. ARSHT. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Mr. Rogers, for the opportunity to appear before you to reiterate the Department of Defense's commitment to providing assistance and support that is needed to meet the challenges confronting our severely injured and wounded service members and their families.

In addition to the Department's efforts, each individual military service has its own programs to assist wounded warriors. We share this mission to support quality of life for our families and service members.

The specific reason for my being here today is to highlight just one of our programs, Operation Warfighter. The Department has sponsored our Operation Warfighter for 2 years as a temporary assignment program for service members who are convalescing at military treatment facilities in the national capital area.

This program is designed to provide recuperating service members with meaningful activity outside of the hospital environment that assists in their wellness and offers a formal means of transition back to the military or to civilian workforce. The program's goal is to match service members with opportunities that consider their interests and utilize both their military and nonmilitary skills, thereby creating productive assignments that are beneficial for the recuperation of the service member and their outlook on the future.

Since 2006, we have placed 315 service members within 80 participating Federal agencies and subcomponents. There is no short-

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age of employment opportunity, and many of the new agency partners result from specific requests by service members for a particular kind of work. The average length of an assignment is 3 to 5 months for 15 to 25 hours a week.

To meet new service members for the program, the Department holds regular information sessions twice a month at Walter Reed Medical Center. Federal employers in the program are invited to attend these sessions to speak about their job and career opportunities. Service members must be medically cleared to participate in Operation Warfighter, and work schedules need to be flexible and considerate of the candidates' medical appointments.

Through this program, service members are able to build their resumes, explore employment interests, develop job skills and gain valuable Federal Government work experience to help prepare them for the future. The Federal agencies and subcomponents acting as employers in the program have benefited from the considerable talent and dedication of these recuperating service members. Approximately 40 permanent job placements have resulted from Operation Warfighter assignments once the service member has separated from military service.

The Department of Homeland Security has been one of the most active participating agencies in the Operation Warfighter program. Within the Department of Homeland Security alone, we have placed 40 service members, 12 of whom were permanently placed.

One recent successful placement was that of Specialist Robert Kaminski, who began working with the Federal Air Marshal Service last April while he was convalescing at Walter Reed. Specialist Kaminski was assigned to flight operations during his recuperation from a loss of a leg from an improvised explosive device. His colleagues remarked, "Bob was given relevant, meaningful work from day one, and he was a valued asset. His qualities of dedication, good humor and courage were an inspiration to the entire division and served as a reminder of the importance of our ongoing mission." When he became eligible for the community-based healthcare organization program to receive his outpatient care close to home in western Pennsylvania, the Federal Air Marshal Service retained him in their Pittsburgh field office. He recently wrote to us, "If you want to tell them about my story, I think it is a great opportunity for wounded warriors coming back."

Another success story is that of Sergeant Elmer Armstrong, who worked on Operation Warfighter assignment with the Secret Service for almost a year. When he transitioned out of the military this past September, the Secret Service hired him.

Operation Warfighter is not just about employment. For many recovering service members, the program represents the first opportunity to return to work outside of the hospital environment. It is a time for easing transitions, for rediscovery during reintegration, for increasing self-worth. Placing service members in supportive work settings that positively impact the recuperation process is the underlying purpose of the program. We view this program as being immensely important to rebuilding lives one life at a time, and we appreciate your interest in the program.

Thank you.

[The statement of Ms. Arsht follows:]

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PREPARED STATEMENT OF LESLYE A. ARSHT

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and members of the Management, Investigations, and Oversight Subcommittee, for the opportunity to appear before you today to reiterate the Department of Defense's commitment to providing the assistance and support that is needed to meet the challenges confronting our severely injured and wounded Service members and their families. In addition to the Department's efforts, each individual Service has its own programs to assist wounded warriors. We share the mission to improve the quality of life of our wounded Service members and their families.

The specific reason for my being here today is to highlight just one of our programs—Operation Warfighter. The Department has sponsored Operation Warfighter for two years as a temporary assignment program for Service members who are convalescing at Military Treatment Facilities in the National Capital Region. This program is designed to provide recuperating Service members with meaningful activity outside of the hospital environment that assists in their wellness and offers a formal means of transition back to the military or civilian workforce. The program's goal is to match Service members with opportunities that consider their interests and utilize both their military and non-military skills, thereby creating productive assignments that are beneficial to the recuperation of the Service member and their outlook on the future.

Since 2006, we have placed 315 Service members within 80 participating Federal agencies and subcomponents. There is no shortage of employment opportunities, and many of our new agency partners result from specific requests by Service members for a particular type of work. The average length of an assignment is three to five months for 15 to 25 hours a week.

To meet new Service members for the program, the Department holds regular info sessions twice a month at Walter Reed Army Medical Center (WRAMC). Federal employers in the program are also invited to attend these sessions to speak about their job and career opportunities.

Service members must be medically cleared to participate in Operation Warfighter, and work schedules need to be flexible and considerate of the candidate's medical appointments. Under no circumstance will any Operation Warfighter assignment interfere with a Service member's medical treatment or adversely affect the well-being and recuperation of Operation Warfighter participants.

Through this program, Service members are able to build their resumes, explore employment interests, develop job skills, and gain valuable Federal government work experience to help prepare them for the future. Many Operation Warfighter participants will transition out of the military due to a medical retirement. It has been our experience that, while these Service members will no longer be in "uniform," the large majority are still interested in serving their country in some capacity and see working for the Federal government as an ideal solution.

The Federal agencies and subcomponents acting as employers in the program have benefited from the considerable talent and dedication of these recuperating Service members. Approximately 40 permanent job placements have resulted from Operation Warfighter assignments upon the Service member's medical retirement and separation from military service.

The Department of Homeland Security has been one of the most active participating agencies in the Operation Warfighter program. Within the Department of Homeland Security alone, we have placed 40 Service members, 12 of whom were permanently hired. One recent successful placement was that of SPC Robert Kaminski, who began working with the Federal Air Marshal Service last April while he was convalescing at WRAMC. Specialist Bob Kaminski was assigned to Flight Operations during his recuperation from loss of a leg from an Improvised Explosive Device explosion. His colleagues remarked, "Bob was given relevant, meaningful work from day one, and he was a valued asset. His qualities of dedication, good humor, and courage were an inspiration to the entire division, and served as a reminder of the importance of our ongoing mission."

When he became eligible for the Community Based Health Care Organization program to receive his outpatient care close to his home in western Pennsylvania, the Federal Air Marshal Service retained him in their Pittsburgh field office. He recently wrote to us, "If you want, tell them about my story. I think it's a great opportunity for the wounded warriors coming back. Thanks again for all your help." Another success story is that of SGT Elmer Armstrong, who worked an Operation Warfighter assignment with the United States Secret Service for almost a year. When he transitioned out of the military this past September, the Secret Service hired him. While the focus of Operation Warfighter will always be on the work expe-

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rience that a candidate receives, many agency partners have looked at the program as a vehicle to hire transitioning Service members.

Operation Warfighter is not just about employment. For many recovering Service members, the program represents the first opportunity to return to work outside of the hospital environment. It is a time for easing transitions, for rediscovery during reintegration, for increasing self-worth. *Placing Service* members in supportive work settings that positively impact the recuperation process is the underlying purpose of the program. We view this program as being immensely important in rebuilding lives, one life at a time. We are committed to helping any and all who need our help to do so, and we appreciate your interest in the program.

Thank you.

Mr. CARNEY. Thank you, Secretary Arsht. I appreciate your testimony.

And I recognize Mr. Hilleman to summarize his testimony for 5 minutes.

STATEMENT OF ERIC HILLEMAN, DEPUTY DIRECTOR, LEGISLATIVE AFFAIRS, VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS OF THE UNITED STATES

Mr. HILLEMAN. Thank you, Chairman Carney, Ranking Member Rogers. I ask that my complete statement be made part of the record, please.

Mr. CARNEY. Without objection, so ordered.

Mr. HILLEMAN. Thank you.

On behalf of the 2.3 million men and women of the Veterans of War Foreign Wars and our auxiliaries, I thank you for inviting us to testify at this important hearing today.

We strongly believe that recruiting, hiring and promoting veterans into the Federal agencies is a natural fit for veterans and for the Government. We have long advocated for greater emphasis in the areas of veterans preference. We believe that education and gainful employment are fundamental for the transition back to civilian life.

The VFW applauds this committee for focusing its efforts on veterans preference in the Department of Homeland Security. We are heartily encouraged by the ongoing efforts and the leadership that DHS has demonstrated in attracting veterans to Federal employment.

The VFW recognizes the growth need to attract young, talented veterans to Federal service. According to the Office of Personnel Management, the Federal Government anticipates an 18.5 percent government-wide retirement rate between fiscal year 2006 and fiscal year 2010, with a continuing upward trend in the coming years.

Since the Civil War, veterans of the Armed Forces have been given some degree of preference in obtaining Federal employment. In recognition for their sacrifices, Congress continues to enact laws to prevent discrimination for military service.

The Office of Human Capital within DHS is filling vacancies within the confines of these laws. With the recent formation of the Veterans Outreach Council, they have enlisted the support of numerous offices across Government throughout the veterans service community, and they are interested in staffing higher levels of veterans than ever before.

During a recent meeting on November 6, 2007, DHS reported on recruitment activities and elicited ideas for future endeavors. The three-part recruitment approach includes events, outreach and

partnership. The Department's veterans recruitment strategy is in its early stages of development. DHS regularly attends veterans-focused job fairs. They have also launched a veterans-centric Web page. And the recent formation of their advisory council draws on the experience and the ongoing efforts to employ veterans and service disabled veterans.

The VFW sees a number of challenges in successfully carrying out this campaign. The challenge primarily will be funding. As we have seen with the VA and other agencies, DHS could quickly become a victim of its own success. By increasing veteran applicants and by wider publication of the program, the large inflow of paper can quickly inundate a small staff. This overburdened staff faces the daunting task of placing these veterans within the numerous components of DHS. So, too, educating DHS staffing managers on veterans preference law and further training on accommodation of persons with disabilities require a great deal of resources. We urge Congress to value this program and implement a lasting funding stream for this program.

Further consideration is needed in publicizing the program externally. While DHS is ramping up efforts to attract veterans, educate veterans, the key is letting veterans know about the preferences and the fast-track authority.

Veterans with the greatest need for opportunities are service-disabled veterans. There is no greater key to restoring a disabled veteran's income, self-reliance and repaying our Nation's eternal debt like that of providing a hand up, versus a handout. We urge DHS to focus strongly on educating as a means of publicizing employment opportunities within the agency.

We believe a robust veterans employment preference program could lead the way toward greater outreach efforts across the Federal Government. The VFW hopes this program will be developed and maintained as an example of efficient and compassionate governance.

Continued congressional oversight, leadership within the agency and feedback from veterans on this program will determine the depth and breadth of its success. The VFW looks forward to working with both this committee and the Department of Homeland Security to make this program an example for others to follow.

Thank you.

[The statement of Mr. Hilleman follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF ERIC A. HILLEMAN

Mr. Chairman and Member of this Subcommittee:

On behalf of the 2.3 million men and women of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the U.S. (VFW), this nation's largest combat veterans' organization, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to testify today before you today.

We strongly believe that recruiting, hiring and promoting veterans into the various Federal agencies is a natural fit for veterans and the government. We have long advocated for greater emphasis in the areas of veteran's preference in filling federal vacancies. We believe education and gainful employment are the fundamentals for a successful transition for all service members. The VFW applauds this committee for focusing its efforts on veterans' preference within the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). And we are heartily encouraged by the ongoing efforts and leadership that DHS has demonstrated in attracting veterans to federal employment.

The VFW recognizes the growing need to attract young and talented employees to federal employment. According to the Office of Personal Management (OPM), the

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federal government anticipates an 18.5 percent retirement rate government wide between fiscal year 2006 to fiscal year 2010. The continuation of this trend shows the federal government loosing 40 percent of its work force in the coming years. To fill this yawning gap, the VFW believes, there is no better applicant than Americas young veterans.

As employees, America's service members are known for their discipline, technical skills, and leadership. Our military is the finest and most technologically advanced in the world. Our nation invests billions of dollars annually training and developing in our troops the technical skills, loyalty, discipline, selflessness, leadership, and the ability to follow instructions and perform under pressure. This is the skill set of a military veteran.

Despite service members qualities, they experience trepidation in entering the work force. A November 5th Military.com poll illustrates the need for assistance for recently departed service members. Of 4,442 military or veteran respondents, eighty-one percent of transitioning military personnel surveyed revealed that they do not feel fully prepared to enter the job market. Of those who feel unprepared: seventy-two percent of respondents feel unprepared to negotiate salary and benefits, seventy-six percent report inabilities to effectively translate their military skills to civilian terms, and fifty-seven percent are unsure of how to network professionally. While our service members may possess the skills to perform the job and the discipline to see work through to completion, they lack the confidence and the knowledge to market their own strengths.

This sector of the veterans' population is a rich environment for federal recruiting. While service members may not be comfortable navigating the job market, federal employment offers them many of the same factors that attracted them to military service: a sense of service, innovative training, opportunities for travel, and competitive benefits. Also, the bulk of Military Occupational Specialties (MOS) translate directly into federal job descriptions, especially when using web based tools like the One Net Center: *http://online.onetcenter.org/crosswalk.*

The Miltiary.com survey also included input from 287 recruiters and hiring managers from a variety of businesses and industries of all sizes. The survey results stated that sixty percent of hiring managers and recruiters reported favorable attitudes toward employing veterans, yet many face difficulties recruiting and hiring from this talent pool. Sixty-one percent reveal they do not have a complete understanding of the qualifications ex-service members offer. Sixty-four percent feel that veterans need additional assistance to make a successful transition into the civilian job-seeking market, with twenty-seven percent citing the need for stronger interviewing skills. Fifty-three percent of employers spend two percent or less of their recruitment advertising budget on targeted military hiring. Due to employers' lack of understanding and undervaluing veterans as employees, many do not seek out these extraordinary Americans.

The lack of understanding by private industry further creates an opportunity for federal employers, but it also presents a number of challenges. The lack of private sector recruiting reduces the competition for federal recruiters in attracting skilled veterans. In order to capitalize on this market trend, federal recruiters and managers must be able to recognize and translate military skill sets into the needs of the given opening. The managers and recruiters must also have current training in veterans' employment standards as prescribed by the Office of Personal Management (OPM).

T2Veterans Preference Background

Since the Civil War, veterans of the Armed Forces have been given some degree of preference in obtaining federal employment. In recognition of their sacrifices, Congress continues to enact laws to prevent veterans seeking federal employment from discrimination for their military service. Veterans' preference recognizes the economic loss suffered by citizens who have served in uniform, grants veterans a favorable competitive position for Government employment, and acknowledges the larger obligation owed to disabled veterans.

The *Veterans' Preference Act of 1944,* established the modern form of veterans' preference and is now codified in various provisions of Title 5, United States Code. Title 5 states that veterans, who served in military campaigns or are disabled, are entitled to preference among competitive applicants, and their retention is protected during reductions of the work force. In addition to receiving preference in competitive appointments, veterans may be considered for special noncompetitive appointments for which only they are eligible.

The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Pub. L. 9309112, Title V), as amended (Pub. L. 9309516), requires the development and implementation of affirmative employment programs for the hiring, placement, and advancement of individuals with disabil-

ities, as well as annual reports. Further, Executive Order 13164 requires Federal agencies to establish written procedures to facilitate the provision of reasonable accommodation for individuals with disabilities so that they can enjoy the benefits and privileges of employment equal to those enjoyed by employees without disabilities.

Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) Veterans Outreach Initiative

The office of Human Capital, within DHS, is engaging veterans at many levels with the goal of recruiting from among their ranks. With the recent formation of a Veterans Outreach Advisory Council they enlisted the support of numerous offices across government and throughout the Veterans Service Organization (VSO) community. During the recent meeting of November 6, 2007, DHS reported on the past recruitment activities and elicited ideas for future endeavors. The three-part strategy recruitment approach includes events, outreach, and partnership.

The veterans' recruitment strategy is in the early stages of development. DHS regularly attends veterans-focused job fairs. They have also recently launched a veterans-centric page with a number of pertinent links on the DHS's web site. The recent formation of the advisory council is a positive step to draw on the experiences and ongoing efforts to employ veterans and service disabled veterans. The VFW is very encouraged by the ongoing efforts and hopeful to broaden the campaign to attract a dedicated and deserving population of America's veterans.

The VFW sees a number of challenges in successfully carrying out this campaign. Of which, the primary challenge is adequate funding and more full time DHS staff solely dedicated to this program. As we have seen in VA, and other agencies, DHS could quickly become a victim of their own success. With an increase of veteran applicants and wider recognition of DHS's desire to attract skilled applicants, the larger number of applications and inflow of paper will quickly inundate the small staff working on this initiative. This overburdened staff will face the daunting task of placing these veterans within the numerous components within DHS. The complexity of the training is great; each component requires specific skills, each staffing manger of each component will require training on veterans' preference law, and further training on accommodation of persons with disabilities in the workplace. We urge Congress to value this program and implement a lasting funding stream to sustain it into the future.

Further consideration is needed in publicizing the program externally. While DHS is ramping up efforts to attract veterans, education on veterans' preference appointments is paramount. The veterans with the greatest need for opportunities are service-disabled veterans. There is no greater key to restoring a disabled veteran's income, self-reliance, and repaying our nations eternal debt like that of providing a hand-up vice a handout. We urge DHS to focus strongly on educating as a means of publicizing opportunities within the agency.

We believe that a robust veterans' employment preference program, such as this, could lead the way toward greater outreach efforts across agencies to attract veterans. The VFW is hopeful that this program will be developed and managed as an example of efficient and compassionate governance. Continued Congressional oversight, leadership within the agency, and feedback from veterans on this program will determine the depth and breadth of its success as a model for future implementation of veterans' preference.

The VFW looks forward to working with both this committee and DHS to make this program a success. We welcome any questions that this committee may have, thank you.

Mr. CARNEY. Thank you, Mr. Hilleman.

And I want to thank everyone for their testimony.

We will have 5 minutes of questions between Mr. Rogers and myself, since we are just a duet today. We will go back and forth until we are out of questions. But I will first recognize myself for 5 minutes.

Ms. Perez, you tell us that there are over 40,000 veterans employed by the Department. Very good news. Hiring numbers have increased in the past 2 fiscal years, with CBP and Immigration, at ICE, hiring three times more than the previous years, and then FEMA doubled its numbers in the past 2 years. That is correct?

To what can we attribute these increases? A large number of vacancies? High attrition? Good recruiting? What types of positions are veterans filling? Is there a breakout between management and

nonmanagement positions and those sorts of things? Can you give us kind of a sense of that, please?

Ms. PEREZ. Sure, be happy to.

To what do we attribute the success? In my opinion, it is all of the above. It is outreach. It is the fact that we have increased the number of our vacancies at the Department, and the number of new jobs in the Department has increased as a result of presidential mandates, congressional mandates, additional funding. So we have had a surge, if you will, of opportunities to come to Homeland Security.

As a result of the opportunities and the commitments that we have made that we would hire, you know, thousands of individuals in 2006 and 2007 and 2008 and going forward, we have done extensive outreach. And as I mentioned in my opening statement, we feel that the veteran community is one where we can draw from absolutely talented people with the experience and the commitment that we need. So we do a lot of outreach in the community that TSA does, CBP, all of our components, as well as headquarters.

So that is the good news and the reason why I think so many of them are coming onboard.

Our rate in our supervisory management ranks I think is about 28 percent of them are veterans as well. So, you know, we have veterans across the entire Department. We also have, as I mentioned earlier, the disabled veterans as well.

Did I get at all the points you raised?

Mr. CARNEY. You did, actually. You did a very nice job.

Another question—This is for everyone, Ms. Arsht especially. Mr. Hilleman highlights that there has been success, and that is very good, especially within DHS. And what we want to see is that success continue, but we don't want to risk it by not having enough dedicated staff.

I mean, do you all see value in having somebody at DHS dedicated—I mean, a line item dedicated to this kind of recruiting and outreach to the Department of Defense and to veterans, you know, rather than just have it—it is not exactly ad hoc, but have it more formalized. Do you see a value in that?

Ms. PEREZ. Well, at Homeland Security, absolutely, it would be very beneficial. We have, sort of, centralized the initiative at headquarters. It is out of my office. The initiative around the employment, sort of the three-pronged initiative is managed out of my office.

One of the concerns that I have, to be very candid with both of you, is that we have, as you know, in the appropriations, the House appropriations for 2008 and the Senate appropriations, there is a recommendation that our budget, the budget in my office, be cut from $15 million to $3 million in the House budget and to $5 million in the Senate budget. Those budget cuts would have a significant impact on any program that is outside of our normal, you know, salaries and expenses.

So do I think that the funding for these programs is absolutely important? Do we think that dedicated resources is important? And do we think, as Mr. Hilleman mentioned, that we may be the victim of our own success, in terms of influx of, you know, e-mails and

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questions from our veterans? Possibly. But we just think it is too important and too valuable a tool not to utilize.

So with your help and if you call the appropriators and you ask them to keep money coming our way, I think we will be in good shape. Thank you.

Mr. CARNEY. Ah, those appropriators. I appreciate it.

Ms. Arsht, what is your opinion on that?

Ms. ARSHT. Since you mentioned the transition assistance, I thought I would take the opportunity to speak to a new, more robust effort on our part, working with our partners at the Department of Labor and at the Department of Veterans Affairs.

In transition assistance, we have launched a program called TurboTap, initially designed to meet the considerable needs of our Guard and Reserve members who don't want to stay at demobilization sites to go through the traditional 2 1/2 days of preseparation counseling, which we do, and the employment and benefits counseling which Labor and VA do.

TurboTap is designed to be 24/7, anytime, anyplace access to your benefits, where members can create their own accounts, individual accounts. They can maintain them throughout their service years. Initially, as I say, we are focusing on making more robust services for Guard and Reserve, but eventually we think this will be an active retention tool for our active duty of all components.

Part of this new online service is an employment hub, which the Department of Labor has created and which is cited there, which connects into career one-stops but also allows other job boards, some of them run by the VSOs, to post active jobs directly for veterans.

So, again, I think that this relationship, the more that we do focus on our service member as the client, the person that we are all trying to serve, the more our services from across the agencies and across the executive branch, those agencies will dovetail and will support each other.

Mr. CARNEY. Well, as somebody who demobilized, I didn't like the outprocesses very much myself, hanging out to do very little, I thought. It makes sense to me that we encourage those who don't have necessarily a direction to go to put them toward Homeland Security. I think it makes a lot of sense.

I am over my time. I now recognize Mr. Rogers for 5 minutes.

Mr. ROGERS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I want to ask Ms. Perez if you can answer this with some specificity. It may be a little bit too narrow a question. I don't know.

You made reference to the fact that ICE and CBP have been able to turn to veterans as an applicant pool. One of my concerns and criticisms about CBP and its effort to grow the Border Patrol's ranks to 19,000, roughly 19,000, agents is that they don't seem to be able to attract a large enough pool of qualified applicants to go into the academy in New Mexico in order to turn out that number by the end of next year. When I went out and toured the facility and asked the folks at the Department exactly what they were doing to recruit this number of people, they couldn't tell me exactly how they thought they were going to be able to get these numbers.

Can you tell me specifically how you are trying to recruit—it seems like the veterans are such a great match for that institution.

What are you doing, with some specificity, to recruit those veterans for CBP?

Ms. PEREZ. Yeah, well, first of all, I would acknowledge with my colleagues with CBP that the numbers that they have to hire are staggering numbers. I am pleased to report that for 2007—we just completed our annual report, and they met their targets for 2007, which were a little over 3,000 agents.

And their outreach—and I have actually been very involved and briefed numerous times, because this is a priority, obviously, of the administration. It is a priority of Secretary Chertoff, so we have been briefed numerous times on the outreach efforts.

It takes—and maybe, if I am wrong, I will come back to you and correct myself, but my understanding is it is almost 30 to one. They have to process 30 individuals in order to get one individual into the academy, which is—if you were at the academy—and I have been to the academy—the academy staff may not be all aware of—they have basically decentralized their hiring efforts, doing a lot of regional hiring that has reduced the time that it takes to hire.

Part of the problem that we have in Government, sometimes it takes us—it is a long time between when you first get a notice that they are interested in you and then by the time the applicant, you know, gets actually notified that they are hired. CBP has made incredible progress in actually doing what is called High Touch recruiting, which is where we actually stay in touch with the applicants through the process.

So the Department, I think, is poised to meet the requirements, but you are right in that the numbers are staggering, and then putting them through the academy is more complex.

The veterans—certainly my experience has been that they are doing a great deal of outreach in the veterans community. But I will get back—if there is a perception on your part that we are not doing enough in that regard, I will go back. I think I mentioned over 27 percent of our agents are, in fact, veterans. For us, it is absolutely an applicant pool that is a fabulous resource.

So we agree with you, it is challenging. We think we are going to—we met it in 2007. We think we will continue to meet the hiring targets and the commitments that we have made to the administration.

Mr. ROGERS. Do you know exactly how that outreach is being made to veterans, for CBP in particular? I mean, what methodology do you use to contact them?

And if one of you knows, I would love to hear from you.

Ms. PEREZ. Yeah, I would have to come back to you, sir, with specific information in terms of—we do a lot of outreach with the actual veterans services organizations, the TAP programs, transition programs and so forth. But my preference would be, Mr. Rogers, to come back with a more specific—from the Department, from the component, specifics on veterans outreach, rather than guess.

Mr. ROGERS. Thank you.

Mr. Hilleman, you made reference to the fact that you would like to see better notice to veterans about preference programs. What could DHS do better to make veterans aware of those preference programs?

Mr. HILLEMAN. Thank you for your question, sir.

There are a number of avenues available to DHS, as well as Federal Government, to make the employment practices and the hiring preferences known to veterans. DHS has a program for 30 percent disabled veterans, to fast-track their recruitment effort. It allows them to forgo some of the cumbersome hiring processes that all Government agencies are bound by but that other veterans with only a five-point preference or lesser disability do not qualify for. Making things like this known in the community is very important.

I first came into contact with a member of DHS at a recruiting fair, and he was very proactive. He came up to me, introduced himself. He explained what they were doing. He talked highly about how they have been able to attract more and more disabled veterans. It was very heartening to me.

So every disabled veteran that I have come in contact with, just as word of mouth, I let them know that DHS is hiring. Publicizing something like the fast-track authority that they are able to apply in hiring disabled veterans is huge. It means a lot to young men and women who are trying to figure out how they are going to get their lives back together.

Mr. ROGERS. Are you aware of any exit package that is presented to disabled veterans when they are looking at their horizon of opportunities that might include these kind of preference programs?

Mr. HILLEMAN. A number of veterans are made aware of the different avenues for employment after service disability. Typically, when a veteran is disabled, they are eligible for vocational rehabilitation. They get special preferences. Veterans get special preference when it comes to, like, employment offices.

There are a number of means to explore publication. I would be remiss if I sat here and said I could come up with all of them. The Department of Homeland Security has done a good job of bringing together some experts in an advisory setting. And I know, from attending an advisory meeting, a number of ideas have been discussed, some of which are making veterans-centric pamphlets, catering hiring videos toward veterans.

In terms of getting that information before them, I would suggest using Department of Labor's DVOPs and LVER program, which is employment outreach, as well as VA's vocational rehabilitation. Those are the two that make immediate contact with veterans on a regular basis.

Mr. ROGERS. Thank you.

Mr. CARNEY. Thank you, Mr. Rogers.

Mr. Hilleman, you cited in your testimony the November 5th poll that a majority of respondents don't feel prepared to enter the job market, the veterans. And we know that they possess the kinds of skills that DHS could use, certainly the Federal Government could use as well.

Are there ways, do you think, we could assist the veterans getting out to feel more confident that they could actually make a contribution, that they would be welcomed?

Mr. HILLEMAN. I think there is always work to be done, in terms of transition. I hear the phrase "seamless transition" repeated and repeated and repeated on the Hill. And Government and private-sector seamless transition is anything but seamless. It is, in some places, beyond a gap. Many veterans have to make that decision

whether to go to work today or seek an education to feed their families. And when they make those simple decisions, it is a decision on the margin, what is best for me. When they find out what they are entitled to in terms of Government employment prospects, they have an opportunity. And whether they seek to take that opportunity or not depends on their personal circumstances.

Preparing them to enter the job market is something that the Defense Department is not equipped to do. It is not tasked with educating veterans on their employment opportunities. They do a transitional assistance program.

Mr. Carney, you, yourself, talked about your outprocessing. I imagine you got a lot of information in a very short period of time. Not much was relevant to you at the immediate moment, while you were thinking about returning to your family.

Mr. CARNEY. I already had a job, coming back. You know, I was a professor at Penn State, so I was probably going to stay there.

Mr. HILLEMAN. Yeah. So it is a tumultuous period for a young person.

Mr. CARNEY. Right.

Mr. HILLEMAN. I am sorry. I wish could I say more about it. I can speak anecdotally, but I really couldn't point to anything more than that, sir.

Mr. CARNEY. But do you have a sense of why they don't feel qualified?

Mr. HILLEMAN. I think that they feel qualified. They feel qualified for the positions. They can do the job.

I will speak from my own personal experience. When I left the United States Marine Corps after doing diplomatic security for 2 1/2 years and working in some relatively hostile environments, I felt pretty equipped to handle anything. Did I know how to get there? No.

I have many counterparts who I served with who filled out Federal applications that were pages and pages and pages long, and they thought, "Man, what is this going to get me?" You know, it is a shot in the dark.

Ms. Perez talked about, you know, High Touch. I think that is very important. Letting a veteran know or an individual know, "Yes, we have gotten your application; we are still reviewing it." But I applied to Federal jobs when I left service. It was a black hole. My applications just went away. It was a lot of work with little reward.

So, from my personal experiences, I would suggest some sort of—I know Government doesn't do a very good job of this, but some sort of personal contact with those veterans, giving them some idea of what is in store for them, a little bit of counseling along the way. And I know that it is burdensome and it takes time out of people's schedules to sit down on the phone and make themselves available, but that is what has to happen.

Mr. CARNEY. Some more follow-up?

Mr. HILLEMAN. Yes, absolutely.

Mr. CARNEY. Ms. Perez?

Ms. PEREZ. Yes, one comment, that the veterans authorities are absolutely fabulous and much needed. It is very difficult to apply to a Federal job for a variety of reasons. But one of the VRA, Vet-

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erans Recruitment Authority, is one that allows them to bring them from a GS–5 up to a GS–11, where we can hire noncompetitively, and then they can be, over a 2-year period, be on the job, we require some training, and then they can be promoted competitively.

It is a way to bring them in. It is early in their career, and then be promoted up to GS–11, which in the Federal Government is a reasonably good job, and not have to go through the competitive process, which can be extremely long, you know, takes a long time to process. We are also trying to expedite that, but it still takes a long time.

Mr. CARNEY. Is there any way, Ms. Arsht, we can reduce the paperwork, of filling that out? Because I had to do it, too.

Ms. ARSHT. Well, I can't help you with the Federal employment process. But in terms of what the service member knows about his or her competitiveness in the marketplace and how to get from the skills they have to the skills they need, or understand they need, and how to position themselves, I do think this is a place where TurboTap is a tool—just a tool—that will allow service members to sort down to the priorities of their interests at the moment.

I mean, I really think that this is—we are in a world of immediate need. You want to be able to—when you realize you have an issue, you want to go deal with it. You don't want to have to hear about 20 other things in order to get to the one that you want. And that is sort of the setting that we have had in the past, the classroom setting where you had to sit through everything to get to the thing you wanted. This will allow a service member to go in and sort, "I want to go back to school," and look at the issues and benefits related to that and what the rules are, and go to, then, your assistance counselor to talk about that.

Or if it is—you don't want to go back to the job that you had, which we often hear. You go down range, you have a whole different perspective on life. You want to do something more. You want to be in control. These kinds of experiences, to be able to come back and say, "I want to be counseled into a career track." We actually believe that we need to start those conversations earlier.

For instance, now the Navy links a credential to every rank step-up improvement that you receive. So you are building your credentials that are valued on the outside as well as on the inside of the service. And each of the services are looking at this mechanism for identifying career tracks and helping people see that they are on a course. It is not a beginning, a middle and an end and start over again. It is all connected.

So I really think we are all focused now on getting better at this. Whether that works on the Federal application process, I am not sure.

Mr. CARNEY. We will work on that, too.

Mr. Rogers?

Mr. ROGERS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Ms. Arsht, you made reference to the fact that in Operation Warfighter you had 376 placements of veterans. I took it—and maybe I am assuming incorrectly—these were people who were ei-

ther in Walter Reed or Bethesda. Is that the pool that you are working with?

Ms. ARSHT. Correct.

Mr. ROGERS. This 376, is that drawn from a—how many potentially could you have worked with? Is that half? Is that 75 percent, is that 100 percent of the people that would be eligible for this program?

Ms. ARSHT. No. The issue of eligibility really has to do with readiness of the service member and the recovery period. So the medical command has to have medically cleared the service member to take the outside assignment. And that, obviously, is very individual. So some service members are eager earlier and capable of doing it, and they get right onboard. Others, it takes longer. And so——

Mr. ROGERS. Does this 376 represent all the people who want to participate who are medically cleared and otherwise eligible?

Ms. ARSHT. Yes. There is probably a group. Every week we add more service members who come to the every-other-week meetings to see what it is about and whether they are ready and to talk to employers. Some will start to pursue it right then. Some will wait another month or 2. And so it is very individual, both the placement and the desire to get involved.

Mr. ROGERS. The same thing with the 40 permanent post-separation placements. Does that represent pretty much most everybody who was trying to get post-separation placements?

Ms. ARSHT. Yes. And we have had other placements outside of Operation Warfighter. Someone left Operation Warfighter and went to a nongovernment position. We have many of those. I don't have those numbers with me today.

Mr. ROGERS. Okay.

Ms. ARSHT. We actually seek to service members. So if he or she wants to stay in the agency they are in, we will work with that employer. If they are looking for a local job back home in another activity but the same line of work, the Department of Labor would step in and try to help with that.

Mr. ROGERS. Thank you.

Ms. Perez, I want to visit this process of vets applying. As a member whose largest employer in his district is a DOD facility, I hear complaints all the time from folks applying, particularly veterans, that they have to apply online. The computer, from what I have learned, basically scans their application for key words. And then those people who know how to post their application and the correct wording get on the eligible list. The thing occurs with promotions.

For a veteran or, for that matter, anybody else who wants to come to work for DHS, what is the process mechanically to apply? Is it all online?

Ms. PEREZ. The processes are pretty much online. And, in fact, it is a requirement in the Federal Government that any competitive promotion, any competitive advertisement has to be done through the Office of Personnel Management, USAJOBS, which is an online service. And, frankly, it is a way to provide access to thousands of individuals outside of the immediate area of recruit-

ment and so forth. So, for the most part, it is probably a good thing.

The problem becomes when you submit an application that is either incomplete or—one of the problems that we have found and the reason why we have incorporated into the Web site that we have now for helping veterans apply is that sometimes they would submit the application—when I was at OPM, I did a lot of auditing of what agencies were doing relative to veterans' hire, as well as work with the hospital in helping veterans who wanted to find employment. Some of the problems that we encountered were that when they submitted their application, they would use a lot of the terminology they used in the military that didn't really have any application in the civilian world. So we are helping them, kind of doing translating, if you will, converting, what we call the converter, converting the jargon to the civilian jargon. So that is a way that we are helping them.

We are actually looking to improve our outreach across the board, veterans and nonveterans.

Mr. ROGERS. Let me interrupt you just for a minute.

Ms. PEREZ. Yes.

Mr. ROGERS. When you say you help them convert the jargon, is this a live person who is helping them?

Ms. PEREZ. It is a tool, the online Web site. You can go to a place, there is a converter and you can key in whatever the numbers are. And we tested it when we had our meeting 2µweeks ago with the veterans organizations. You put in whatever job, you know, you did in the military. That might have had a number or something associated. It actually converts it to civilian jobs of that for which you are now eligible to apply or at least have competencies and skills.

Mr. ROGERS. Can I get one of those for my CPA? Because she and I talk in completely different languages.

Ms. PEREZ. We can work on that, sir. Yeah.

Mr. ROGERS. I know I interrupted you.

Ms. PEREZ. No, no. I was going to say, so that is just—we are actually also trying to improve our recruitment period and have engaged with organizations to help us do a lot more of the outreach.

I think that the High Touch, it is a way that we are going to—when we go to the applicants and you survey applicants relative to the Federal process, time and time again the biggest complaint is that we never hear back. So what we are trying to do is, okay, we want to make sure that we respond to the applicants, that we stay in touch with them. If we are not interested, that we notify them, you know, right away that we are not interested in them. Or if we think that, even it is a protracted process, you know, that we just keep them involved or at least knowledgeable.

We also are hoping to get available online our e-recruitment system, which we are in the process of implementing. We hope to have something in the beginning of the year. You can actually, as an applicant, you can go online and find out where you are in the application process. So we are trying to get there. We are not there yet.

Mr. ROGERS. Specifically, if veterans are interested in going to work for DHS, where do they go on the Internet?

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Ms. PEREZ. Right now you can go to dhs.gov and there is a veterans link. So it is an all-inclusive or one-stop shop, and you can go there. And from there, you can actually connect to DOD, Department of Labor, OPM and all the other sites that have veterans information. We think it is quite a helpful site.

Mr. ROGERS. Okay.

My last question is, you all are at roughly 25 percent, and rank seventh in Federal agencies in veteran hiring. What is your target goal? Or do you have a target goal that you are trying to achieve?

Ms. PEREZ. We have target goals to reach across the board, in terms of our hiring, period. Meeting all of our target is our goal. Leveraging the veterans population allows us to meet those targets much quicker, because we have access to individuals.

We don't have a number per se. It has to be 25, it has to be 35 or whatever it has to be. We have to meet the targets, and veterans is a place where we can go and meet them.

Mr. ROGERS. Thank you very much.

Mr. CARNEY. Thank you, Mr. Rogers.

Ms. Perez, how does your office work with the DHS components to identify staffing needs and match them to the specific skill sets of veterans? How does that work?

Ms. PEREZ. I will explain the process, and hopefully I get to your question.

Basically, my office, we do all the hiring for headquarters. So hiring for headquarters happens through my office. But in addition to that, we have various councils, that we call them. We have a recruitment council—we have a variety of councils that meet on a regular basis, where the components are represented. My office has the lead.

And, basically, we work with the councils to ensure that any outreach that we do—so, for instance, if we go to our veterans, if we go to an event, a hiring/recruitment event, we don't just send DHS headquarters, we send the entire DHS. We work with the hiring council. We have a staffing council. We have a variety of councils and opportunities to reach out to the components, work with the components to make sure that we leverage the resources of the Department well.

Does that get to your question?

Mr. CARNEY. Well, are the components required to provide to you their needs and develop a sort of strategic recruitment program?

Ms. PEREZ. They are required—yes. In the strategic plan, the action plan that we developed last year, we laid out the targets for each component. And part of the work that I did was basically meet with the components and the leadership of the components and said, "Okay, what are you doing to meet your hiring targets?" FEMA, CBP, TSA, all of the components. So on a regular basis, they have provided that information.

But in addition to that, it is in their interest to collaborate. So there is nobody there that is saying, "Gee, these are my hiring needs, and I don't want anybody to know." They want us to know because they want us to help them with the recruitment as well. So it is a very collaborative effort, in my opinion.

Mr. CARNEY. Mr. Hilleman, do you want to comment on that?

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The question, really, basically is, can DHS do better at reaching out to veterans, to identifying, even before they made a decision to get out of the military, so you are in that phase, is there a way Ms. Arsht should identify those people? Should we let the veterans organizations know, should we let DHS know, or any Government organization, for that matter?

Mr. HILLEMAN. I think that would come through greater agency cooperation. DOD has a pretty clear idea of who is separating. I mean, VHA has the numbers on the Web site. I am sorry; VHA is Veterans Health Administration. Since fiscal year 2002, over 751,000 service members have become eligible for Veterans Health Administration. So there is a population out there.

They are able to identify who is leaving through transition assistance programs. That is certainly a jumping-off point. But transition assistance programs vary from post to post, and they vary from region to region. So standardization could be helpful in implementing some sort of publication.

But cooperation I would suggest as first and foremost would be required from DOD, but DOL as well because they contact veterans at a much different level, when they are starting to enter the workforce.

Mr. CARNEY. Uh-huh.

Do you see that as a problem, Ms. Arsht, that we don't have, kind of, consistency across the posts in TAP?

Ms. ARSHT. One of the challenges that we face, as you know, each of our services are different. They have a different vocabulary, they recruit from different pools, and they have different cultures and characters. So there are these differences. There is usually an underpinning of likeness in the core activities.

One of the reasons that I hesitate to go toward what you might call standardization is because our service members are different. They are at different times in their lives. Our young members need one set of supports; older service members, after a career, need a different set. Our regular service, active duty, needs a certain combination of things. Our Guard and reserve components need other and additional things.

So we need flexibility. We need to be responsive. We need to be able to map out those differences and be able to support them in the way that they need. So that would be my response. And I think that is where we are moving, and it is how we are trying to organize ourselves.

I leave tomorrow afternoon to go down to a Department of Labor council that is working both across the Federal agencies and with the private sector to better understand these opportunities and how these partnerships need to work in order to become solid funnels of people from where they are to where they want to go, but in a way that is, you know, part of our culture. We need to be able to pass information, and people need to be able to take it and move with it. And that is the kind of system that we are working on.

Mr. CARNEY. Standardized flexibility, in other words. Understood. Okay.

Well, while certainly no panacea, I think that DOD and Veterans certainly can go a long way toward filling enormous gaps, what with—DHS across the country, and Government as well. I think it

is incumbent upon veterans organizations and, of course, the DOD to make sure that as much information as possible is coming to veterans as they transition out of the military, to let them know that they have meaningful positions waiting for them once they get out.

We want to develop—I know Mr. Rogers and I talked about this—we want to make sure that the Department of Homeland Security develops the culture of what DHS is. When you take transitioning veterans who know what the culture of an organization means and integrate them into DHS, for example, you are going to, I think, facilitate that culture again more quickly. I certainly encourage you all to keep working on this. I think it is something very, very valuable.

Hearing no further questions, we will stand adjourned in a moment. I want to just make sure if we have further questions, we will get them to you. Please respond in writing promptly.

With that, the committee stands adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 3:00 p.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

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Appendix: Additional Questions and Responses

QUESTIONS FROM THE HONORABLE CHRISTOPHER P. CARNEY, CHAIRMAN, SUBCOMMITTEE ON MANAGEMENT, INVESTIGATIONS, AND OVERSIGHT

RESPONSES FROM MS. LESLYE A. ARSHT

Question 1.: In your testimony you stated that the goal of Operation Warfighter is to match service members with opportunities that consider their interest and utilize both military and non-military skills. **Please describe how a typical match occurs. Are you provided with the skill set needs of each participating federal department and their components? And regarding placements, has there been instances or mismatches and if so, what happens in that case?**

Response: To start the matching process, a Service member attends an information session at the Walter Reed Amy Medical Center and signs up for the program so that can begin the clearance process to participate. At that information session, the individual peruses all of the profiles that have been submitted by the different participating agencies in the program. The Service member has the opportunity to speak with agency representatives who are present to discuss their particular organizations. The candidate indicates to the Operation Warfighter (OWF) program manager the agencies vocational fields that are of interest to Those agencies will then interview the candidate and hopefully a match will be made that is to the satisfaction of both the Service member and the employer.

The OWF program's focus is to assist and cater to the needs and interests of wounded warriors in transition. We hope that the program is malleable enough to accommodate Service members who are interested in exploring new careers, or in furthering skills that they have already developed. For some placements, candidates are looking for more of a mentorship experience while others may be able to hit the ground running in their areas of expertise.

There have been rare instances where after a couple months, it is determined that the original placement is not working out as well as the agency or Service member would have hoped. In those cases, a second placement can be made.

Question 2.: What kind of staff resources are in place for Operation Warfighter? And are there any specific time commitments or placement commitments that federal agencies need to honor to participate in the program? What makes the Department of Homeland Security a particularly good partner in this program?

Response: The Operation Warfighter (OWF) program manager is instrumental in connecting the Service member to the agency offering the position. Although the program manager is pivotal in placing Service members, they do not and cannot operate without other key individuals the hospital and agencies.

Participating agencies understand that Service members' therapy and treatment schedules can often prevent them from having standard or set hours. The first priority for wounded warriors is to get well, and wellness cannot take a backseat to OWF duties. The typical placement starts at 2–3 days a week for roughly 15–25 hours. We encourage individuals to start slowly, and work into additional hours per week if their schedule permits an increased workload. We attempt only to place individuals that have a minimum of 3 months to participate in the program.

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) is a great partner in OWF since many of our candidates are interested in DHS jobs and the participating DHS components have provided supportive work settings for Service members in the program. Many participating DHS components have also looked to use OWF as a vehicle for potentially hiring Service members who have "graduated" from the program and are interested in permanent Federal employment.

Question 3.: Does the Department of Homeland Security attend your bimonthly sessions at Walter Reed Army Medical Center to speak about the

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job opportunities available at their Department? What other Departments joining you in these sessions?

Response: The Department of Homeland Security components regularly attend our information sessions at Walter Reed Medical Center to present their opportunities to potential candidates for the program. Every participating agency in Operation Warfighter (OWF) is invited and strongly encouraged to attend these sessions as often as possible. Due to the large number of agencies participating, however, attendance must be coordinated through the OWF program manager. Typically, agencies that have been proactively involved in these information sessions receive the most placements.

Question 4.: What component or components hired the majority of the veterans who have been placed in the Department of Homeland Security through Operation Warfighter?

Response: No single Department of Homeland Security component has hired a large number of Operation Warfighter (OWF) participants, but Immigration and Customs Enforcement, Customs and Border Protection, United States Coast Guard, and United States Secret Service have all had multiple OWF placements and have hired OWF graduates.

QUESTIONS FROM THE HONORABLE MIKE ROGERS, RANKING MEMBER, SUBCOMMITTEE ON MANAGEMENT, INVESTIGATIONS, AND OVERSIGHT

RESPONSES FROM LESLYE A. ARSHT

Question 5.: Could you please explain how DHS coordinates with Operation Warfighter?

Response: At the headquarters level, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has a main representative that coordinates with the Operation Warfighter program manager. Most DHS subcomponents also have one additional individual who helps coordinate placements within their particular organization.

Question 6.: How would you characterize the Department's participation in that program?

REsponse: The Department of Homeland Security has been a very strong supporter of Operation Warfighter over the past two years and the Department of Defense hopes to continue this beneficial partnership to assist more wounded warriors in 2008.

Question 7.: Do you believe that the Department of Homeland Security has been a strong supporter of Operation Warfighter?

Response: The Department of Homeland Security has been a very strong supporter of Operation Warfighter over the past two years and the Department of Defense hopes to continue this beneficial partnership to assist more wounded warriors in 2008.

Question 8.: Do you have any recommendations for how DHS—or other Federal agencies—can expand use of Operation Warfighter?

REsponse: We hope to continue our partnership with the Department of Homeland Security and other Federal agencies to provide meaningful work opportunities for wounded warriors in transition. As the Operation Warfighter program grows, we hope that agencies will continue to support the program and encourage non-participating sub-components to get involved.

QUESTIONS FROM THE HONORABLE CHRISTOPHER CARNEY, CHAIRMAN, SUBCOMMITTEE ON MANAGEMENT, INVESTIGATIONS, AND OVERSIGHT

RESPONSES FROM MARTA BRITO PÉREZ

Question 1: How did the Office of the Chief Human Capital Officer at the Department develop its veterans outreach strategy? Is the strategy based on a review of best practices from other federal agencies that demonstrated strong performance in the recruitment of veterans?

Response: The three-prong Veterans Outreach Strategy was the result of experience over the past year in addressing ongoing concerns of Veteran applicants individually and collectively. The Department's Office of the Chief Human Capital Officer (OCHCO) identified trends about the nature of applicants' questions, their lack of knowledge of application requirements, and the need to have one information source for DHS jobs. Based on this analysis, OCHCO created the one-stop web page, established the Veteran's Outreach Advisory Council, and designed additional train-

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ing for the Human Resources and Equal Employment Opportunity communities regarding Veterans Preference and other hiring authorities.

Question 2.: As noted by your testimony, the one stop website for veterans seeking employment with the Department has been running for over one month now. **In that time, how many inquires have resulted from the website, how many documents have been submitted, and how many times has the "converter" tool been utilized?**

How is the Department publicizing this new website and what are the future plans to get the word out to the Veterans community?

Response: Since the website's inception, the Department has received 231 inquiries. Out of those 231 inquiries, approximately 81 have submitted attachments such as resumes, DD214's (Military Discharge Papers), and VA Disability Letters. At this time, DHS is unable to track hits to the converter tool because we are linking to the Department of Labor's Occupational Information Network—O*NET—website. Currently, the Department is publicizing the new website through word of mouth and ongoing career fairs. Additionally, one of the Veterans Organizations that participated in the Veterans Advisory Council, the Reserve Officers Association, has linked the DHS Veterans page to their site. OCHCO plans to further publicize the website on future printed materials and recruitment brochures as additional resources become available.

Question 3.: The inaugural meeting of the Department's Veterans Outreach Advisory Council occurred in early November. **What is the specific function of the advisory council—will you develop a list of action items, provide a forum for feedback? Are you reaching out to all of the veteran's support organizations for their participation and input? Who else is participating from the Department itself?**

Response: The function of the Veterans Outreach Advisory Council (VOAC) is to advise DHS on the effectiveness of the Department's veterans outreach efforts and initiatives; i.e. are DHS efforts designed and deployed in a manner that will attract more veterans and assist them in applying for vacancies. Representatives at the inaugural meeting were very enthusiastic and engaged. They supported the three-prong strategy and recruitment video, and they recommended that DHS develop a recruitment video and brochure specifically targeting veterans. OCHCO has solicited their input on: (a) future meeting frequency; (b) which additional Veterans Service Organizations to include, and (c) agenda topics and potential for a VOAC charter. DHS representatives include the Office of the OCHCO, the Office of Civil Rights and Civil Liberties, and the U.S. Coast Guard.

Question 4.: I understand that the Office of Personnel Management regularly visits transition centers to educate veterans who are separating from the service about the opportunities available to them in civil service.**Does the Department visit these transition centers in joint partnership with OPM or have plans to do so in the future?**

Response: DHS, at the Departmental and component level, has made frequent visits to transition centers to share information about employment opportunities at DHS. While these visits are not done specifically in joint partnership with OPM, DHS representatives interact with OPM officials at Walter Reed Army Medical Center on a frequent basis and plan to continue this in the future.

Question 5.: Other than career events at Bethesda Naval Hospital and Walter Reed, to what extent does or will representatives from your office visit other military hospitals across the nation to educate Veterans about job opportunities at the Department?

Response: DHS components have also visited the following military hospitals:

- Brooke Army Medical Center, Fort Sam Houston, TX
- Madigan Army Medical Center Fort Lewis, WA
- William Beaumont Army Medical Center, Ft. Bliss, TX

Question 6.: I've heard accounts that processing time for federal employment, even where a security clearance is not required, takes too long and acts as a deterrent to some service members. **How long is the typical processing time from the time a veteran's application is submitted to start date? Do you consider this processing time acceptable? What follow-up does the Department do with the veterans who have applied to let them know their application has been received and is under review?**

Response: The Department adheres to the Government-wide mandate of a 45-day hiring cycle, from the closing date of the vacancy announcement to a tentative

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job offer. Once received, applications are referred to the appropriate component(s), which in turn contact the veteran with a copy to OCHCO. However, most DHS jobs require some type of suitability investigation in addition to any required security clearance. Depending upon the job and the selected candidate's circumstances, this additional time period before a final job offer can vary. In Fiscal Year 2008, OCHCO plans to explore means to streamline the security process for veterans who are selected for DHS vacancies.

Question 7.: According to a 2006 Office of Personnel Management report, agencies across the federal government are encouraged to develop education and training programs that strike a balance between the needs of agencies and the aspirations of veterans. **To what extent is the Department developing such programs for its hired veterans? If it is not, are there plans to do so in the future?**

Response The Department's many learning and development programs are designed to advance the individual and organizational goals of all employees, including veterans. The learning and development programs within the DHS University System offer employees a variety of learning opportunities in the areas of leadership, preparedness and homeland security. Although these programs do not specifically target veterans, veterans are able to participate in all DHS University System programs and are also able to participate in components' training, education, and professional development opportunities.

QUESTIONS FROM THE HONORABLE MIKE ROGERS, RANKING MEMBER, SUBCOMMITTEE ON MANAGEMENT, INVESTIGATIONS, AND OVERSIGHT

RESPONSES FROM MARITA BRITO PÉREZ

Question 8.: Do you believe that the Department of Homeland Security has made significant progress in its efforts to recruit, hire, and promote veterans?

Response: Yes, especially in the areas of recruitment and hiring. During Fiscal Year (FY) 2007, DHS:

- Doubled the number of veterans hired from FY 2006: 6,013 were hired in FY 2007 versus 3,015 in FY 2006;
- Recruited disabled veterans from 132 events and career fairs nationwide;
- Hired 771 disabled veterans, more than double the number from FY 2006; and
- Promoted 1,340 disabled veterans, an increase of 57.1 percent from FY 2006.

Question 9.: What specific steps have you taken since being appointed as the Chief Human Capital Officer at DHS to expand outreach to veterans and improve the DHS hiring process for veterans?

Response: OCHCO has launched a three-prong Veterans Outreach strategy:

(1) We have created a one-stop veterans web page for veterans seeking jobs in DHS. This contains application information, job openings, a "converter" to compare military jobs to civilian ones, and an e-mail box for one-on-one assistance;
(2) We established the first DHS Veterans Outreach Advisory Council composed of various veterans service organizations to advise us on our outreach programs and products; and
(3) We are conducting enhanced training for Human Resources and Equal Employment Opportunity specialists in all components on the various Veterans preference hiring authorities.

Finally, at our first DHS Career Fair, we had a booth specifically for veterans and spoke to more than 200 veterans.

Question 10.: Are you considering implementing any new programs or initiatives in Fiscal Year 2008 to enhance outreach to veterans?

Response: Yes, based on recommendations from the Advisory Council, OCHCO is developing a recruitment video and brochure specifically targeting veterans. OCHCO also plan to increase its presence at the Transition Assistance Program centers, as well as numerous job fairs held for veterans.

Question 11.: Are there any specific programs that reach out to veterans who have recently returned from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan?

Response: Non-disabled Iraq and Afghanistan war veterans are entitled to a ten-point hiring preference. DHS has an ambitious training program for all Human Resources personnel on veterans' preference issues, programs, and the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act, to ensure those preferences and programs are recognized and adhered to by our Human Resources staff. For disabled veterans, including those who have recently returned from the wars in Iraq

and Afghanistan, the Department makes great use of DoD's Operation War Fighter Program, which provides temporary assignments to wounded service members receiving rehabilitation services at Walter Reed.

DHS is also involved in the Army's Wounded Warrior Program (WWP) which places disabled service members who served in the Iraq and Afghanistan theaters of war into temporary assignments. DHS Headquarters established accounts with the WWP and the Marine for Life program to provide additional methods to view job opportunities within Headquarters. Other less formal programs are also utilized; for example, to become more familiar with the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), disabled veterans from Walter Reed spent one day job-shadowing a USCIS manager.

DHS is an active partner in the Department of Veteran Affairs' Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment, though this is not specific to those returning from war.

Question 12.: How do you measure the success of DHS' programs to recruit, hire, and train veterans?

RESPONSE: I think you can measure the success in a number of ways. First, by the number of veterans DHS hires: as mentioned, in each of the past two years, the Department has doubled the number of veterans hired over the previous year. In addition, a good measure will be the numbers of veterans hired that satisfactorily complete their probationary period at DHS and who progress in their careers by benefiting from DHS career paths and learning and development strategies. I am also proud to say that nearly 30 percent of our managers and supervisors are veterans.

Question 13.: What additional resources would your office require to enhance DHS' outreach and recruitment of veterans? How would you utilize these additional resources?

Response: Resource needs for this office are reflected in the upcoming FY2009 Budget. The resources will be used to establish a Veterans Speakers Bureau and produce recruitment materials and video specifically for veterans.

Question 14.: In your prepared statement (p. 2) you mention that the Department has recently launched a "one stop" informational website for veterans seeking employment with DHS.

Did you conduct any type of user testing with veterans for your new veterans web page?

Have you received any positive feedback from veterans or veterans service organizations (VSOs) regarding use of the website?

Response: Yes, OCHCO asked ten veterans who have been employed by DHS for less than a year to test the web page, and the feedback has been very beneficial. The web page has an e-mail box where potential job applicants can comment on the web page and its various uses.

Yes, OCHCO demonstrated the web page at the first meeting of the Veterans Outreach Advisory Council on November 6, 2007. There was very favorable reaction from the entire group, and many comments were made commending the entire concept.

Question 15.: The Department recently convened its newly established DHS Veterans Advisory Council, which held its inaugural meeting on November 6, 2007.

Could you please tell us how the first meeting went and what were some of the topics that were covered?

Have you received any feedback from the veterans service organizations that participated in the advisory council meeting?

How do you plan to implement the recommendations that resulted from the Advisory Council meeting?

Will you be inviting additional member organizations to your Veterans Outreach Advisory Council? If so, which ones?

How often do you expect the Advisory Council to meet?

Response: The meeting was a very positive beginning. It was evident that the participants were engaged and vested in our common cause to attract and hire more veterans. They were showed the Department's new recruitment video, veterans web page, and recruitment brochure. Reaction was overwhelmingly favorable, and they made recommendations which we are pursuing such as a veteran-specific recruitment video and brochure.

Yes, all the participants expressed interest in establishing the Council as a permanent advisory body. Many commended DHS on establishing this forum.

OCHCO is moving forward with two recruitment products recommended by the Council: a veteran-specific recruitment video and brochure. I have designated a member of my staff to serve as a coordinator for Council activities and follow-up.

Based on advice from the Council, OCHCO is inviting the VA's Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, and the Office of Personnel Management to join the Veterans Outreach Advisory Council. OCHCO would welcome any other suggestions from the Committee.

I prefer to allow the Council itself to determine the frequency of Council meetings. I would hope they could meet and advise us on a quarterly basis.

Question 16.: In your prepared statement (p. 3) you mention that the Department is conducting "enhanced training for the Department's HR specialists in the area of Veterans employment programs, authorities and rights."

Could you please walk us through the hiring process—from posting a position to selecting an applicant—and how the veterans preference is considered during this process?

Could you please elaborate on that, and explain how DHS ensures that its human resources specialists are knowledgeable about the various veterans preference statutory authorities?

Response: The attached DHS Hiring Model can be used to walk through hiring process:

In Step 13, veterans who meet the criteria for preference and who are found eligible (achieve a score of 70 or higher either by a written examination or an evaluation of their experience and education) have five or ten points added to their numerical ratings depending on the nature of their preference.

When the list of all that are qualified for scientific and professional positions in grade GS–9 or higher is issued, the names of all eligibles are listed in order of rating, augmented by veteran preference, if any. For all other positions, the names of ten-point preference eligibles who have a compensable, service-connected disability of ten percent or more are placed ahead of the names of all other eligibles on a given list of qualified applicants. The names of other 10-point preference eligibles, five-point preference eligibles, and non-veterans are listed in order of their numerical ratings.

From a Department-wide perspective, DHS is conducting classes on Veterans Preference hiring authorities. Each component will send two Human Resources (HR) specialists and one Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) specialist to the class. The graduates of this class will form a new network of experts on veterans hiring which we can leverage across the Department. In addition, some components have independently taken similar steps. For example:

- The U.S. Coast Guard prepared and conducted a training module for all 35 Human Resources Specialists on Veterans' Preference in Federal Hiring and the use of special appointing authorities for disabled veterans. To assist managers and supervisors, they have posted a recruitment guide on their intranet that includes information on the process for hiring disabled veterans.
- The U.S. Secret Service sponsored a hiring flexibilities seminar to provide hiring officials with information regarding recruitment and retention, appointing authorities for disabled veterans, direct hire, persons with disabilities, excepted service employment and category rating.

Training for HR Specialists scheduled in early 2008 includes:

Four Hour Veterans' Preference Overview (January/February 2008)

Training using an agency partnership format with veteran employment experts from the Office of Personnel Management (OPM), Department of Labor (DOL), Department of Defense (DoD), and the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) for approximately 35 DHS HR/EEO employees.

Training format as follows:

- Veterans' Preference—Interactive discussion on unique processes, polices, and decisions and their impact on Hiring Authorities and Adjudications (1 hour). Lead by OPM;
- Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act of 1994 (USERRA) (1 hour). Lead by DOL;
- Disabled Veterans Initiatives
  - *Operation Warfighter Program*—The Department of Defense Military Severely Injured Center sponsors this initiative which is a temporary assignment or internship program for Service members who are undergoing therapy at military treatment facilities in the United States(1/2 hour). Lead by DoD; and

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• *VA's Vocational Rehabilitation & Employment—Coming Home to Work Program*—The Coming Home to Work (CHTW) Program is an integral part of VA's early intervention and outreach efforts to Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom service members and veterans. CHTW has provided opportunities for eligible service members and veterans to obtain work experience, develop skills needed to transition to civilian employment, determine the suitability of a potential career, and become suitably employed in the civilian labor market. (1/2 hour). Led by VA.
• Questions and Answers (15 minutes) following each session.

Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act of 1994 (USERRA)

Two USERRA training sessions:

8 Hours—Basic Level Overview for HR Specialists

The overview training will provide a review of the Veterans' Reemployment Rights (VRR) Statute that will help to ensure that returning service-members are reemployed in the job that they would have attained had they not been absent for military service (the long-standing "escalator" principle), with the same seniority, status and pay, as well as other rights and benefits determined by seniority.

• 3 Days (six half day sessions)—Advance Class for Veterans' Preference Experts

This class will provide an in depth look at Veterans' Reemployment Rights (VRR) Statute and will cover reasonable efforts (such as training or retraining) that must be made to enable returning service members to refresh or upgrade their skills to help them qualify for reemployment.

Question 17.: In your prepared statement (p. 2) you refer to veterans and state that their "military backgrounds and training are well suited to DHS jobs—and most importantly—to accomplishing our critical mission."

Could you please provide us with some specific examples of how veterans are able to apply their military background and training in their employment at DHS?

What specific components of DHS or positions within DHS would best enable veterans to utilize their special skills?

Response: Many veterans occupy military positions that require skills and experience that are easily transferable to DHS civilian careers. For instance, military competencies gained as the result of working in law enforcement, security, and intelligence provide the necessary background experience for many mission critical jobs Department-wide. In addition, military training provides veterans with the ability to, inherently, understand the national security mission and the subsequent risks. All components, including Headquarters, can utilize and benefit from the rich training and experience a veteran brings. Border Patrol Agents and CBP Officers, Secret Service personnel, Federal Air Marshals in TSA, Intelligence Analysts in Headquarters, Enforcement Officers and Investigators in ICE and the U.S. Coast Guard are just some of the areas in which veterans are currently working. In addition, two Headquarters Operation Warfighter alumnae are now permanent employees with the Office of Security, providing security to the DHS Headquarters facility.

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