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Assistant Secretary for Veterans' Employment and Training

before the Subcommittee on Benefits,

House Committee on Veterans' Affairs

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Chairman Brown, Ranking Member Michaud, and other distinguished members of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee, Subcommittee on Benefits, the Department of Labor is pleased to have this opportunity to provide comments on H.R. 2285, the "Servicemembers Overseas Outreach Act."

Transition Assistance Program (TAP)

The Department of Labor (DOL) recognizes the importance of providing TAP services to servicemembers separating overseas. As you know, the Department of Labor and Department of Defense (DOD) are currently working together to make this a reality. We believe that because the current legislation authorizing TAP already requires these services worldwide additional legislation is not needed to accomplish this mission. Under current law, DOL is required to provide specific employment information to separating servicemembers and their spouses through TAP workshops regardless of where they end their military career. Accordingly, we already have the authority to provide these services at overseas locations.

We and our partners at DOD are continually working on ways to improve and standardize the delivery of TAP services and to provide greater accessibility to this highly effective program for separating servicemembers and their spouses. This cooperative effort includes a plan for DOL to assume responsibility for employment workshops which DOD currently provides to transitioning servicemembers overseas.

Providing DOL TAP workshops overseas is a goal that requires the combined resources and close partnership of the Departments of Labor and Defense. Secretary Chao and Secretary Rumsfeld are committed to improving transition assistance for separating servicemembers worldwide and soon plan to sign a Memorandum of Understanding that promotes our cooperative efforts, including TAP overseas. As an example of this renewed cooperation, we recently provided TAP workshops on the USS Constellation during her return from action in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom, and in the next few days will provide workshops on the USS Kearsarge as she returns to port. Our objective is to ensure that servicemembers are prepared and are competitive as they transition from military service to other careers in the 21st Century.

The primary concern of both DOD and DOL is to make certain that we provide the same level of services to servicemembers overseas as is available to those who separate in the Continental United States, Alaska, Hawaii and Puerto Rico.

Within existing resources, both Departments will continue their ongoing efforts to assure that all separating servicemembers receive meaningful transition assistance. To that end, the Veterans' Employment and Training Service (VETS) will continue to provide the TAP Manual to those servicemembers separating overseas. We have combined and updated all our web-based resources into a personalized Internet tool-kit called e-VETS which offers a wide range of helpful topics, such as job search tools and tips, career assessment, education and training information, including services available through the One-Stop Career Centers, civilian certification and licensing, personal financial assistance, employment opportunities, a military occupational specialty crosswalk and veterans' benefits. We will soon release a "Virtual One-Stop" web site

that allows access to services and assistance from anywhere in the world. This system is mandated by the Jobs for Veterans Act of 2002. We will continue to enhance and improve our current web sites and electronic systems.

These tools are in addition to the planned overseas TAP workshops that will help ensure that military members can seamlessly transition to civilian employment. We are prepared to deploy immediately fully qualified professional facilitators who are available to travel to any overseas location(s) and to begin providing quality classes to separating servicemembers overseas. Before we begin these deployments, however, we must first come to an agreement with our DOD partner to identify the initial site(s) and receive the necessary Status of Forces Agreement clearances for each country.

Conclusion

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, this concludes my statement. I assure you that we will continue our efforts with DOD to make available DOL TAP employment workshops to our separating servicemembers overseas. I will be happy to answer any questions.