

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Subcommittee, I am pleased to appear before you today to discuss my bill, H.R. 2285, the Servicemembers Overseas Outreach Act.

H.R. 2285 mandates that the Department of Labor place staff in overseas veterans' assistance offices which are on military installations, in accordance with the VA model. VA has six employees at overseas locations in Europe and Southeast Asia, where they visit up to 25 bases during a 3-month period. These employees are sent overseas for 6-month periods.

On July 18, 2002, while I was Chairman of this Subcommittee, Ranking Member Reyes and I held a hearing on the Transition Assistance Program. I asked the Assistant Secretary for Veterans' Employment at that hearing for the Department of Labor to station staff at military transition centers in Western Europe and the Far East to help separating servicemembers line-up jobs in the United States before they came home.

VA has had benefits counselors stationed overseas since 1992 and I felt it important that DOL have a presence there too. After all, many of these servicemembers have been stationed overseas for two or three years and they cannot even talk with a U.S. employer during their business day due to time differences.

Lastly, throughout Fall 2002, the bi-partisan leadership of the Veterans Affairs Committee sent two letters to Secretary Chao asking that DOL simply go to where its customers are. At an April 10, 2003 Labor-HHS Appropriations Subcommittee hearing, I again questioned Secretary Chao on this issue, and was told DOL would get back to me.

Mr. Chairman, this is not responsive government, especially since Congress gives DOL \$200 million per year to help servicemembers and vets get jobs. I am embarrassed at the glacial pace at which DOL has proceeded on this matter. It is time for the Department of Labor to step up to the plate and fulfill their responsibilities to our servicemen and women who are separating from service while stationed overseas.

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Subcommittee, thank you once again for allowing me to appear before you today.

I would be happy to answer any questions.