

**TESTIMONY OF  
TODD KOLDEN  
VETERANS' SERVICES STATE COORDINATOR  
SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF LABOR  
BEFORE THE  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY  
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AFFAIRS  
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
JUNE 19, 2006**

Chairman Boozman, Ranking Member Herseth, and distinguished members of the Committee:

My name is Todd Kolden, Veterans' Services State Coordinator, with the South Dakota Department of Labor. I also serve as an active member of the National Association of State Workforce Agencies (NASWA), Veterans Affairs Committee. It is my honor to appear before this committee today on behalf of South Dakota Secretary of Labor Pamela Roberts to present the views of the South Dakota Department of Labor (SDDOL) regarding the Transition Assistance Program (TAP) Workshop at Ellsworth AFB and to discuss any questions or issues you may have. As we feel all benefits owed to veterans are important, today's testimony will focus primarily on TAP.

In order for TAP to be successful the partnerships between the Department of Defense (Ellsworth AFB), VA Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (VR&E), South Dakota Department of Military and Veterans Affairs, US Department of Labor/VETS, and the SDDOL need to be solidly in place. I'm pleased to say these partnerships are well established in South Dakota and have been instrumental in the success of TAP facilitated at Ellsworth AFB. Without these solid partnerships, veterans attending TAP would not be receiving the full benefit of transition services they richly deserve. However, we do ask your assistance to ensure these partnerships can continue to function successfully.

In recent months, the "Key to Career Success" campaign was launched by the Employment and Training Administration in partnership with US DOL/VETS and the Department of Defense (DoD), which assists active duty service members in transition and also helps returning Guard and Reserve members connect to employment and supportive services available through the DOL. This campaign employs a wallet card that highlights a service member's "special" status upon arrival at their local Employment Office (in SD referred to as Career Centers) and contains important information about DOL services and electronic tools. This card is primarily handed out during the TAP Workshop, and we feel this has been a good asset to help get the word out on the employment services DOL provides to veterans and assist in their transition.

The importance of our DVOP Specialists and LVER's is not only serving veterans in the local office but also conducting outreach. One of the best times for outreach is during the facilitation of TAP Workshops. In SD, our DVOP Specialists and LVER's facilitate approximately 80 percent of the workshop and 25 percent of the Disabled TAP (DTAP) Workshop which is conducted each month. Often through a TAP Workshop, transitioning

service members develop a one-on-one working relationship with a DVOP Specialist or LVER which enhances a successful transition.

As this sub-committee is aware, there has been discussion at the national level to make TAP Workshops mandatory for Guard and Reserve components as well for active duty service members before transitioning or retiring from military service. SDDOL feels it should be mandatory for active duty personnel since many of these service members have been in the military for more than four years and most likely have been serving since a fairly young age. Many have probably never had a civilian job, and this possibility will be an abrupt change. For Guard and Reserve components, SDDOL feels this should be made mandatory coming from the command level. In other words, it should be mandatory for the Adjutant Generals of each state to inform their units about the TAP workshops and allow them the opportunity to attend a TAP Workshop if they desire by sending them on no-cost TDY (or TAD) orders. As you know, many of these individuals may already have jobs they are returning to and may not have a desire or need to attend TAP. But again, it should at least be mandatory. In SD, SDDOL made this request to the Adjutant General and thanks to the partnership we have established, there is an unofficial agreement in place. Currently, there are full-time Guard members attending TAP when they retire or separate. US DOL/VETS reports that about 60 percent of our service members are attending TAP, with a goal of 80 percent over the next few years. We support this initiative and feel making TAP mandatory by these means will help bolster this percentage and the successful transition of service members.

Another example of the strong partnership is reflected by who facilitates a TAP Workshop. Being job-ready after attending TAP and leaving the service is very important, but it's not the only service that takes place. During our TAP Workshops we have the following services presented:

- Finances
- Labor Market Overview
- Personal Appraisal
- Job Search Techniques
- Employment Applications
- Resume/Cover Letter (including work groups)
- Interview Process (including mock interviews)
- VA Benefits
- County Veterans Services
- Vet Center
- A one-half day Disabled TAP Workshop is facilitated for service members who have or may have service-connected disabilities, focusing on the benefits available to them (including Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment, etc).

As you can see, TAP informs service members not only about how to get ready to make the transition and receive benefits, but also what they are entitled to and how to go about receiving these benefits. Again, we feel this instills the importance of the partnerships involved to successfully assist in the transition of our service members.

Finally, I would like to share my personal experience with TAP. When I retired from military service in 1997, I was given the opportunity to attend TAP. The information I learned and the resources I was provided helped me immensely and immediately, and still assists me to this day. I feel the TAP Workshop is one of the best resources we currently have for our service members who are making the transition from military to civilian life and for Guard and Reserve individuals who want to make a career change.

Thank you again for allowing me to testify. This concludes my testimony, and I would be happy to discuss or respond to any questions.