

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

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MEMORANDUM FOR ALEXIS HERMAN, KITTY HIGGINS, AND CAROL RASCO

FROM:

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SUBJECT:

Report of the Interagency Veterans Policy Group

The Interagency Veterans Policy Group (IVPG) has been working to enhance and promote communication and coordination on issues of importance to veterans across federal agencies.

Attached is a report on the status of issues addressed by the IVPG thus far. As you recall, the issues identified in this report were raised in White House meetings with veterans service organizations and military coalition groups, and were used as the working agenda of the IVPG. The IVPG met for the first time September 21, and subsequently on December 15 and April 26.

This report describes the current status of these issues and the steps being taken to resolve those that remain open. The IVPG will continue to work towards resolution of outstanding issues, and looks forward to working with the VSOs and military coalition groups to address issues identified in the future.

Attachment

REPORT OF THE INTERAGENCY VETERANS POLICY GROUP

May 22, 1995

Short term Issues

1. 1996 Budget

The Administration, including the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), held an unprecedented number of meetings this year with VSOs and military coalition groups to discuss budget issues. Reports from early meetings on the President's 1996 budget indicate that the meetings were very favorably received and provided an excellent forum for the groups to express their budget concerns, and for OMB to clarify the Administration's position on budget decisions.

The President's 1996 budget calls for a \$1.3 billion increase in veterans benefits, including an additional \$1 billion for health care. This increase will enable VA to provide medical treatment to an additional 43,000 veterans, construct two new hospitals and three nursing homes, and make a number of facility improvements.

The Administration and veterans groups are very concerned about many of the proposals included in the House and Senate Budget resolutions. These proposals would redefine disability for future new veterans' benefits, dramatically reduce the VA construction budget, and include no additional funding for veterans medical care. The President is also opposed to provisions in the Republican Rescission package, including a \$50 million cut in VA medical care and a \$5 million cut/elimination of DOL's Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program.

Meetings have been held to discuss these concerns.

2. Department of Labor Advisory Committee on Veterans Employment and Training

In August 1994, U.S. Department of Labor Secretary Reich appointed an Advisory Committee on Veterans Employment and Training to assess the employment and training needs of our nation's veterans, and to evaluate the effectiveness of Department of Labor programs delivering these services. Ron Drach of the Disabled American Veterans was named chair of the 17-member (and nine ex-officio members) Committee.

The Advisory Committee held its first two meetings on December 15 and March 14-15, and will meet again May 25-26. Secretary Reich met with the Committee at its initial meeting. The Committee will present a report of its findings to the Secretary by July 1.

To address the unique employment and training needs faced by many minority veterans, a special DOL task force to address minority Veterans employment needs was formed under the auspices of the DOL Advisory Committee on Veterans Employment and Training. Task Force members include Thomas Wynn of the National Association for Black Veterans, and Carlos Martínez of the American G.I. Forum of the U.S.. The task force will report to Secretary Reich at the May 26 meeting of the Advisory Committee.

See Tab 1 for a full list of Advisory Committee members and minutes of the first two meetings.

3. White House Conference on Aging

After concern was voiced about insufficient veteran representation among delegates to the White House Conference on Aging, the White House worked with the Conference and was able to ensure that the delegate allocation to the Conference included increased representation of the veterans' community. The White House Conference on Aging, held on May 2-5, 1995, included 20 delegates appointed by Secretary Brown and 40 appointed by veterans' organizations.

4. White House Conference on Small Business

The White House Conference on Small Business, scheduled for June 11-15, 1995, will propose a small business "action agenda" to the Clinton Administration and Congress to "ensure small business vitality into the 21st century."

Recognizing the importance of the 3.5 million veteran-owned businesses, specific outreach to veterans has preceded the Conference. In preparing for the Conference, Conference staff met with veterans service organizations and the Small Business Administration targeted mailings to individual veterans (identifying names through the Procurement Automated Source System), encouraging their participation in pre-meetings designed to help identify the needs and concerns of small business owners and managers. Press releases were also sent to veterans' press announcing the Conference and pre-meetings.

The Administration is working to ensure that the veterans community is represented among delegates to the White House Conference on Business. The President has, in fact, named several veterans among his delegates.

Longer Term Issues

1. Health Care Reform/Health Services

The status of the health reform effort and specifically the impact it will have on veterans hospitals and veterans health care continues to be of primary importance to the VSOs. The White House met with key veterans groups on December 14 and will continue to be available to the groups to hear their concerns and recommendations.

Several of these concerns will be addressed in the second phase of the Department of Veterans Affairs' National Performance Review (an outgrowth of the Vice President's effort to reinvent government), to be announced this week. The initiatives included under this effort will improve services to veterans, revamp VA's complex medical care eligibility rules, determine pilots to test the use of Medicare benefits at VA hospitals, and save money by

streamlining, privatizing, or consolidating unnecessary or duplicative activities.

The VA will pre-brief the VSOs and Military Coalition groups prior to the May 25th Vice Presidential announcement of these initiatives.

2. Overlapping Research Agendas

Given that VA and HHS share common research interests regarding various human diseases and health services research, the VSOs asked whether there could be better coordination of the HHS and VA medical research agendas. VA has submitted a report on existing coordination which we will share with the VSOs for their reactions and recommendations.

See Tab 2 for VA report on coordination of research agendas.

3. Disability Policy

Disability policy is of vital importance to many members of the veterans community. The Clinton Administration is committed to supporting Americans with disabilities in their efforts to exercise their full rights and responsibilities, to live as independently as possible, and to be productive throughout their lives. To reach those goals, the Administration has launched a full-scale review of disability programs and policies in order to ensure that Federal initiatives are guided by these goals.

The Administration's National Disability Policy Review (NDPR) team includes Dennis Duffy from the Department of Veterans Affairs, and the team has included the Paralyzed Veterans and the Disabled Veterans of America on its outreach list. These groups met with members of the NDPR on February 16 to discuss NDPR's guiding principles. NDPR will continue to keep these groups informed of progress and solicit reactions to proposals.

To further ensure veterans input into disability policy, President Clinton named Ron Drach Vice Chair of the President's Committee on the Employment of People with Disabilities.

4. Backlog at Board of Veterans Appeals

Due to a backlog of cases at the Board of Veterans Appeals and the Veterans Benefits Administration, as well as the more complex nature of today's claims, veterans' claims adjudication processes have become lengthy for a long period of time.

The Department of Veterans Affairs has been working to address the backlog of claims at the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) and the Board of Veterans Appeals (BVA) through internal administrative initiatives, legislation, and the creation of panels of experts to review and improve procedures.

Recent numbers demonstrate that these initiatives have achieved some success. At the VBA, the total compensation and pension pending workload decreased from 550,000 in April 1994 to 450,000 in March 1995. Also at VBA, the average days required to complete original disability claims dropped from 213 days for the 12-month period ending September 1994 to 166 days for the period ending March 1995.

At the Board of Veterans' Appeals, by March 1995 of FY 95, BVA had issued 14,183 decisions, an increase of 6,025 decisions over the number of decisions issued by March 1994 of FY 94. And during the same period, the response time for decisions had dropped to 675 days from 745 days in March 1994.

In addition, the President's FY 96 budget included almost \$30 million for information technology improvements to assist in claims processing.

See Tab 3 for VA report on initiatives to reduce the backlog at the Veterans Benefits Administration and the Board of Veterans Appeals.

5. Persian Gulf Veterans

Many veterans who served in the Persian Gulf War have since experienced unexplained illnesses. The Administration has taken action to be responsive and sensitive to these veterans.

For example, veterans who have disabling illnesses that have defied diagnosis are, for the first time, eligible for veterans' compensation benefits. In addition, DOD will, for the first time, provide research grants to university faculty and other non-Federal scientists to study the causes, treatment, and possible transmission of Gulf War illnesses. The Administration will spend \$8-13 million on new research -- epidemiological research, research on the interactions between anti-nerve gas pills and insecticides and other chemicals, and a wide range of other research.

In March, the President announced the establishment of a Presidential Advisory Committee to review and make recommendations aimed at finding the causes of this illness and improving the care available to Persian Gulf veterans. The President will soon sign an Executive Order creating the Committee, and will shortly thereafter name its members and Chair.

6. Homelessness

Homelessness among veterans continues to be a significant problem. On any given day, as many as 250,000 veterans are living on the streets or in shelters, and perhaps twice as many experience homelessness over the course of a year.

The Clinton Administration has pursued aggressive action to address homelessness in America, giving special attention to the inordinate number of homeless veterans. The federal response is located in agencies across the Administration -- including HUD, VA,

HHS, DOL, SSA, and the Corporation for National Service. The President's Interagency Council on the Homeless works to ensure coordination among these agencies.

Administration initiatives that focus specifically on homeless veterans include:

- The HUD-VASH program, a joint Supported Housing program at which VA staff provide case management and other assistance to homeless veterans in permanent housing supported by 1300 specially-designated HUD rental assistance vouchers.
- DOL's Homeless Veterans Reintegration Project (HVRP) which helps homeless veterans get and retain jobs, using veterans who have experienced homelessness themselves to reach out to homeless veterans. HVRP has successfully moved almost 50% of homeless veterans into unsubsidized employment.
- Under a grant from the Corporation for National Service, AmeriCorps members are working with local VA Medical Centers, Regional Benefits Offices and community based groups in Houston and Los Angeles to renovate housing, conduct street outreach, help find employment and assist in providing ongoing case management to homeless veterans. Half of AmeriCorps members recruited in these cities are veterans themselves.¹
- A joint outreach program between VA and the Social Security Administration under which VA and SSA benefits counselors coordinate outreach and benefits to increase the number of veterans receiving SSA benefits and otherwise assist in their rehabilitation.

Several of these programs are threatened with cuts in Republican budget proposals -- the Corporation for National Service and DOL's HVRP in particular. The President remains committed to programs that address the problem of homelessness in America, and will fight to protect necessary and effective programs.

The need continues for greater interagency coordination on programs to assist homeless veterans. The IVPG will redouble its efforts in the next months to facilitate this cooperation.

See Tab 4 for details on these and other Administration initiatives to address homelessness among America's veterans.

¹Under the President's Corporation for National Service, AmeriCorps Members receive an education award worth \$4,725 in exchange for a period of national service in meeting critical needs in education, human needs, public safety and the environment. The Corporation encourages veterans to join AmeriCorps by allowing them to earn regular AmeriCorps benefits without diminishing those earned while in military service.

7. Veterans Preference

A longstanding policy of the federal government is to provide veterans of the armed forces with preference in federal employment.

As the Administration works to make the federal government more effective and responsive to the needs of citizens, the President remains committed to veterans preference and the Administration has continued a dialogue with veterans groups to hear their concerns and recommendations on the issue.

The Administration is in the process of preparing a legislative proposal for civil service reform. In drafting this proposal, OPM and the National Performance Review met with veterans groups to discuss proposals and solicit reactions. The proposal maintains a commitment to the concept of veterans preference. Legislation will be transmitted to Congress in the near future.

8. Transition/Downsizing

Last fall, the Coast Guard raised concerns about inclusion in discussions concerning retraining and downsizing. The IVPG was successful in addressing these concerns by facilitating meetings with DOL and VA on the issue.

9. SBA 8A Program

The Small Business Administration's 8A Program provides assistance in obtaining government contracts for economically and socially disadvantaged individuals. The IVPG continues to work with the SBA in exploring greater access for both veterans and for the disabled to 8A preferences in contracting.

The President's National Disability Policy Review team has agreed to consider this issue in their review of federal programs. The IVPG will follow and report on these discussions.

10. National Guard/Reserve Job Security

During Desert Storm, an unprecedented number of Ready Reserve of the Armed Forces were called to active duty, causing disruption in their lives in many ways, including economically. As a result, proposals have been raised to provide economic assistance or assurance for members of the Ready Reserve to alleviate the economic effects of activation for service in support of urgent operational missions or in times of national crisis.

The Department of Defense is developing a proposed insurance program to be offered to reservists to protect them against financial disaster if mobilized for a long period of time. The IVPG will continue to monitor the status of this proposal.

Legislation signed by the President in October 1994, the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act, was also aimed at aiding veterans' post-service economic status by improving and clarifying veterans employment rights and right to reemployment after a break in employment for military service. The law continues to prohibit discrimination against an employee or job applicant because of a past, current, or future military obligation. And it reaffirms a veteran's right to be reemployed in a position he or she would have attained if continuously employed.

11. GI Bill

VSOs have expressed support for improvements to the GI Bill, particularly the education benefit, given the rising cost of a four year college education. At this time, no legislation has been introduced to expand or alter benefits under the GI Bill. Neither the House nor Senate Veterans Affairs Committees addressed GI benefits in their Budget Views and Estimates.

12. DoD/VA Program Coordination

There are a series of management issues on which DoD and VA are working to improve coordination. The VA has been meeting with veterans groups on how to streamline services from active duty.

A report on the status of current coordination efforts is included in Tab 5.

Issues to Monitor

The IVPG has continued to monitor several issues that were of concern in the past, but about which the Administration plans no change in policy. If there is any change in the status of any of these issues, agencies will bring them to the attention of the IVPG.

1. Taxation of Benefits

The Administration is not considering taxation of veterans benefits.

2. Veterans Employment Training Service (VETS) Program

There are no Administration plans to change the structure or management of the VETS program, either by consolidation with ETA or movement to the VA.

New Issues/Concerns

1. World War II End Commemoration. Commemoration of the end of World War II continues through November 11, 1995. The President will travel to Honolulu in early September for VJ Day activities.

2. Korean War Veterans Memorial. On July 27, the new Korean War Veterans memorial will be dedicated. President Clinton and South Korea President Kim will participate in the dedication, and it is estimated that close to 100,000 Korean War veterans will participate in commemoration ceremonies in Washington. An Interagency Coordinating Group under the National Security Council is working on the event.

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MINUTES OF THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON
VETERANS' EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING
MEETING ON DECEMBER 15, 1994

Preston Taylor, Assistant Secretary for Veterans' Employment and Training, welcomed everyone and presented an overview of the accomplishments of the Veterans' Employment and Training Service (VETS) and the reinvention of VETS with the customer in mind. Assistant Secretary Taylor then introduced Ronald Drach who will be the Chairman of the Committee.

Mr. Drach welcomed everyone to the first meeting and thanked Secretary Reich and Assistant Secretary Taylor for appointing him as Chairman. He first covered the history of the Committee and how it evolved to an Advisory Committee through statutory changes.

Mr. Drach asked that each person on the Committee send him a biography. He would like to establish four or five task forces to look into various aspects of veterans' employment and training. He envisions there will be a lot of things coming out of the Committee that Secretary Reich and Assistant Secretary Taylor may not embrace but hopes they will embrace more than they won't. The Committee should consider what is in the best interest for employment and training programs for veterans.

Mr. Drach introduced Robert Shapiro of the Department of Labor's Solicitor's Office. Mr. Shapiro covered the legal ramifications and indicated his office was the parliamentarian for the Committee. In the packets of material were a brochure on Federal Advisory Committees and information on the Roberts Rules of Order for Advisory Committees. Members were reminded that personal notes on any of the meetings should not be shared. The Committee has the authority to establish Subcommittees and they must report directly to the Committee. Mr. Shapiro indicated if any issue comes up and a decision is wanted, the Solicitor's Office will be glad to help. He also thanked everyone for service to this Committee. In response to a question it was indicated that minutes are not required of any subcommittee meeting. All members of the committee are representatives of outside groups and, therefore, are not subject to the disclosure laws and other ethics requirements of Federal employees. Ex-officio members are Federal employees. Anyone who finds an issue they think may affect their outside organization may want to talk to the Solicitor's office. The chances of any direct conflict of interest are remote. No formal business can be conducted following the end of the meeting. Mr. Shapiro's office can be reached on 202-219-8201.

Shirley Snyder of the VETS National Office covered administrative matters regarding travel to the Committee meeting. Anyone that incurs expenses such as taxi fare, parking, or travel from outside the D.C. area may be reimbursed if requested through

her. Transportation from outside the D.C. area must be arranged through a Travel Authorization and then contact may be made with Omega Travel, 1-800-424-2877. When receipts are received, a Travel Voucher will be prepared in order to get reimbursement. Anyone traveling should keep good records regarding their travel to the meetings. Ms. Snyder may be reached at 202-219-8421.

Chairman Drach asked that the directory of membership in the packet be reviewed and if there are any changes to let him know. Also in the packet were the Advisory Committee brochure, Federal Register notice, Advisory Committee Charter, Advisory Committee Guide package, and Reprint of Title 38. Section 4110 of Title 38 pertains to the Advisory Committee.

Chairman Drach discussed future meetings, encouraging all members to attend if possible. Richard Johnson, Non Commissioned Officers Association, moved that we adopt that as a rule a vote be limited to the individual who agreed to serve. It was seconded and passed. An alternate may attend and participate but cannot vote. Ex-officio members do not have a vote.

Minutes of the Committee meetings have to be approved by the Chairman. They will be sent to members and then adopted at the next meeting.

In response to a question, anyone may bring other members of their organization with them to the meeting--they just cannot sit at the table. Different places to hold future meetings were discussed, including taking the Committee out to the field; perhaps holding a public forum on Local Veterans' Employment Representatives and Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program specialists, as well as employers and placement under the Voc Rehab; and possibly to the National Veterans Training Institute in Denver, Colorado.

Regarding vacancies on the Committee or if an organization wants to change their representative, they are filled by going back through the normal process to the White House for clearance before a change may be made.

For the next meeting possible items for discussion include:

1. Rewrite of the Dictionary of Occupational Titles with MOS reference. Task Force members to look at this issue and report back at the next meeting as to what they did include Ruth Fast, OccuSystems; Bob Brown, Blinded Veterans Association; San Garza, Counter Technology; Diane Disney, Department of Defense; and Alan Lafferman, Employment and Training Administration, DOL. Ms. Disney indicated DOD was developing something on this issue with Brooks Air Force Base. Ms. Fast will head up the group.

2. Task Force members on the issue of employee unions not recognizing quality military training in the private sector so they can get accreditation will be Bill Casstevens, UAW; Ed Simmons, New York State; and Dick Johnson, NCOA.
3. Task Force members on women veterans' issues that need to be looked at include Betty Dooley, Women's Research and Education Institute; Len Gilmer, Disabled American Veterans; Diane Disney, DOD; Joan Perry, Department of Veterans Affairs; and Cornelia Moore, Women's Bureau, DOL.
4. Task Force members on minority veterans and low income (to include the homeless and dislocated workers) include Tom Wynn, National Black Veterans; Ron Armstead; and Carlos Martinez, American G.I. Forum.
5. Need an overview of all the training programs that currently exist. Need to find out information from the Department of Labor.
6. Standards indicators used by the Department of Labor regarding those in service to veterans.
7. Information breakdown on Job Training Partnership Act IIA and used for serving veterans. It was felt that they are not aggressively hiring veterans. Will find out the information for the next meeting, including all of Title II and III because veterans are not targeted in any way.
8. Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs will be asked to come to a meeting.

After discussion, it was decided that the next meeting will be on March 14 and 15, 1995. The meeting will start at 9:00 AM and go to approximately 4:00 on the first day and from 8:30 AM to approximately noon on the second day. Chairman Drach asked that everybody be flexible until we get a sense of how everything works.

In response to a question regarding appointing a Vice Chair to sit in the absence of the Chair, it was decided to deal with it when a need comes up.

Gregg Bresser, Military Order of the Purple Heart, moved that we adjourn. It was seconded and passed at 12:35 pm.

Following adjournment of the Committee meeting Secretary Reich greeted all at the meeting, thanking them for serving. Secretary Reich indicated he is looking forward to the report in July. Group photographs of those attending and the Secretary were taken.

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

Mr. Drach called the meeting to order at 9:05 a.m. He reminded everyone that although alternative representatives were welcome to attend Advisory Committee meetings, they were unable to vote.

Mr. Drach then introduced Tom Keefe, who is the Designated Federal Official for the Advisory Committee and Assistant Secretary for Veterans Employment and Training, U.S. Department of Labor, Preston Taylor, Jr.

Upon a motion made and seconded, the Advisory Committee unanimously accepted the minutes from the previous meeting.

WELCOMING REMARKS

Assistant Secretary Taylor opened his remarks with an overview of current programs within the Veterans Employment and Training Service. He supplied the Advisory Committee with a copy of his March 9, 1995 remarks before the Senate Veteran Affairs Committee.

According to a recent survey of veterans and employers, the majority of new vets are earning \$20,000 a year or less. This low wage data could be the result of many vets with service experience often have to become certified in the civilian work world. An exception to this would be vets with computer skills.

In fiscal year 1994 2.5 million vets were looking for work. Employment Services offices placed 580,000 vets in jobs. However, the current nationwide trend shows that fewer vets are being assisted under Wagner-Peyser Act funds and that more vets are being served by DVOP (Disabled Veterans Outreach Program) and LVER (Local Veterans Employment Representatives) representatives. Assistant Secretary Taylor noted that this trend needed to be reversed.

In regard to Vocational Rehabilitation programs, the current Memorandum of Understanding between the Departments of Veterans Affairs and Labor is being updated. Assistant Secretary Taylor noted that in this current revision, the mission and charter of the Advisory Committee; changing the trend of low wage jobs to higher wage jobs; and the quality of rehabilitation versus the quantity of rehabilitation are items to be focused on.

Assistant Secretary Taylor then focused on training programs for DVOPs and LVERs. There are about 3,000 reps nationwide which are currently overloaded by the Wagner-Peyser shortages. Assistant Secretary Taylor noted that a good place to start looking at training issues would be to review the curriculum at the National Veterans Training Institute in Denver.

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Because of the current downsizing efforts (280,000 to 300,000 active duty losses each year) and mission change in the Armed Forces, Assistant Secretary Taylor noted that changes are needed in current law to protect the civilian jobs of current National Guardsmen and Reservists. This could be achieved by highlighting the fact that their jobs are related to national security.

As to the budget deficit deliberations in Congress, Assistant Secretary Taylor noted that the homeless program for vets has lost funding. OMB has declared that there will be no inflation adjustment for federal grants to states. The Advisory Committee could request that the Secretary of Labor ask the Congress for full funding

OPEN DISCUSSION

Mr. Drach led the discussion by informing the Advisory Committee that pending legislation in the House (H.R. 1120) would abolish the DVOP and LVER programs.

The Military Order of the Purple Heart offered to purchase the coffee and donuts provided to members at this meeting.

Mr. Drach summarized the Federal Advisory Committee Act and passed out an attendance record. He reminded the members that they need to send a current biography to him as soon as possible.

REWRITE OF THE DICTIONARY OF OCCUPATIONAL TITLES

Donna Dye of the Department of Labor provided an overview of a new computer system called O*NET which will replace the Dictionary of Occupational Titles. She provided an informational piece to members detailing O*NET.

O*NET is an operational prototype providing a comprehensive overview of the world of work and will be accessible to users via the Internet and World Wide Web.

O*NET will help people find jobs and help businesses find people; facilitate training and educational opportunities; and foster the development of high-performance workplaces. O*NET will also be used to identify skill requirements, support human resources applications, and create job orders.

O*NET will provide comprehensive information about work and workers in a common language useful to students, educators, employers and workers.

The current time schedule for implementation is: test the prototype ('95); available to some users ('96); and full system completion ('97 to '99).

ONE-STOP SHOP

Richard Larson of the Department of Labor presented an overview of One-Stop Shops to the members. Mr. Larson provided members with copies of the slides he used in his presentation.

One-Stop Shops will bring a fragmented array of programs and services into a coordinated information and service delivery system. One-Stop Shops stress service to all populations, customer choice, integration of available programs. They are performance driven and outcome based.

In 1994 six states received grants to open One-Stop Shops. In 1995 three states received grants and there are 19 planning development grants currently out.

Although the primary focus of One-Stop Shops is not to serve only veterans, many veterans will be able to access programs and services through them.

Committee members expressed several concerns, which include:

- there is a common intake for employment service with no priority given to veterans
- there is no language in grant documents providing for veteran priority
- Department of Defense has programs and databases complimentary to One-Stop Shops

DISLOCATED WORKER PROGRAM

Mr. Eric Johnson, Program Manager, Office of Retraining, Department of Labor provided an overview of the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) to members. Eligibility for JTPA funds for dislocated workers is based on being terminated or receiving a notice of termination. Approximately 2.3 million people are considered "dislocated." Although the Department provides technical assistance and direction, the states are provided funding under a block grant. All states serve some veterans, but no goals or performance standards are set.

Mr. Johnson also discussed funding under Title III programs which serve to assist people in cases where the local economy is at risk. Some examples of this would be base closures, flood, fire, plant closings, and mass layoffs. These grants are accessed by request from states.

ADJOURNMENT

At 4:00 p.m. the meeting was adjourned, to be reconvened at 9:00 a.m. on March 15, 1995.

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DAY TWO -MARCH 14TH AND 15TH, 1995

WELCOME AND OPENING REMARKS

Mr. Drach called the meeting to order at 9:10 a.m. on March 15, 1995. He informed the Advisory Committee that the OFCCP Briefing scheduled on the agenda was cancelled in order to facilitate committee discussion.

Dates for the next meeting were set for May 25th and 26th, 1995. The meeting on May 25th would be from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. and the meeting on May 26th would be from 9:00 to 12:00 noon. Further details would be provided to committee members.

Discussion among the members focused on the pending legislation, H.R. 1120 which would repeal authority of the Wagner Peyser Act and consolidate training programs. Other pending legislation, H.R. 511, was also discussed which would repeal the LVER and DVOP programs. Other programs at risk include: Chapter 41, Chapters 30, 31, 32 and 35, Title 38, Montgomery G.I. Bill, Vocational Rehabilitation, VEAP, and Department of Education assistance programs.

The Advisory Committee noted that:

- an advocate on the Hill should be solicited
- H.R. 1120 may come up for vote on March 24
- all members should continue individual lobbying efforts
- the GAO report may have been misleading and a representative from GAO could be invited to present the findings to the members
- once a letter is sent to the Secretary from the Advisory Committee it becomes a matter of public record and may be utilized as such
- the committee get a ruling from the Solicitor's Office regarding sending carbon copies of committee correspondence to the Secretary of Labor

The Advisory Committee members, by motion made and seconded, unanimously agreed to direct the Chair write a letter to the Secretary of Labor and go on record opposing H.R. 1120. Points to be included in the letter include (see last item in summary for further points to be included):

- JTPA program helps veterans
- restrict the recommendation to H.R. 1120
- request veteran employment and training programs be strengthened and not weakened

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TASK GROUP REPORTS

Betty Dooley and Georgia Sadler (observer) provided a report on the Task Force on Women Vets, which met on March 3, 1995. The Task Force would like to enlarge itself and invite volunteers from the House, Senate and federal agencies to attend meetings.

Goals and recommendations from the Task Force are as follows:

- hold regular meetings
- educate employers via a public relations campaign to hire women vets
- act as locus for interagency cooperation on women vet issues
- make a recommendation to the Secretary of Labor on the issue of educating employment agencies as to womens' possible veteran status (this is not normally a standard question posed to women looking for employment)

Ms. Dooley also noted that May 19th and 20th is scheduled to celebrate the 75th anniversary of the Women's Bureau.

It was recommended by the Advisory Committee that the Task Force go forward and the Chair directed the Task Force to determine the number of women vets that currently hold federal preferences.

The report of the Minority Task Force was given and the Advisory Committee recommended that a letter be sent to the Secretary requesting the Secretary to replace funds lost in H.R. 1158 with Title III funds.

CLOSING

The Advisory Committee, in summary, recommended:

- that a letter be sent to the Secretary regarding H.R. 1120 as agreed to by the members
- that the letter include language such as: the G.I. Bill for American Workers should not go forward as it relates to veteran activities because it implies that veteran problems are no longer continuing
- that the letter include acknowledgement of 1995 being the 50th anniversary of the end of World War II
- that grant solicitation funds for One-Stop Shops include language granting preference to veterans
- the One-Stop Shop grant selection process include LVER participation, priority services for those vets recently separated, veteran priority as set out in the Wagner-Peyser Act

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- the Secretary of Labor undertake to assure universal treatment for unemployment compensation (i.e., drill pay deduction in benefits in some states for Guard and Reserve)
- the Secretary of Labor undertake to assure uniform treatment for spouses of military personnel who move (voluntary departure versus geographic relocation)
- the Secretary of Labor direct the Bureau of Labor Statistics to adjust household data cards regarding veteran status information

The Advisory Committee agreed to place on the agenda for the next scheduled meeting the following:

- DOL to report on veteran status for employment
- DOL and GAO to report on the duplication of services across agencies in the hope of establishing collaborative efforts
- OFCCP briefing
- legislative update
- task force reports (if any)

ADJOURNMENT

Upon motion duly made and seconded, Mr. Drach adjourned the meeting at 12:00 p.m.

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Although VA and HHS share common research interests with respect to various human diseases and in health services research, VA efforts are directed to areas of particular importance to veterans and VA's health care system. For example, research on alcoholism and its treatment receives special emphasis in VA because alcoholism afflicts a large portion of the veteran population treated at VA medical centers. VA research also capitalizes on unique opportunities to conduct multi-site trials, which can produce more definitive results than might otherwise be possible. For example, an important prostate cancer research trial being jointly funded by VA, the National Cancer Institute, and the Agency for Health Care Policy and Research, is being conducted in VA medical centers.

VA and HHS efforts to coordinate their research agendas, to avoid overlap, include the following:

- o The AsCMD for Research and Development, and the Service Directors within R&D participate on many interagency forums on health research that include senior HHS officials responsible for program direction. For example:

- o Several senior members of R&D staff are members of committees and subcommittees of the National Science and Technology Council, responsible for setting the research agenda for the nation for the next ten years. The Director of Medical Research is a member of the Basic Science subcommittee of the Committee on Fundamental Science. The Director of VA HSR&D Service co-chairs the Subcommittee on Health Services and Systems Research of the Committee on Food, Safety and Health. These committees meet regularly to ensure continued coordination of federal activities.

- o VA's Under Secretary for Health is a member of the Agency for Health Care Policy and Research Advisory Council; HSR&D Service represents the Under Secretary at these meetings which include discussions of ongoing activities and all research proposed for funding. This provides an opportunity for both VA and AHCPR to review each other's health services research and to coordinate as appropriate.

- o VA invites appropriate HHS members to participate in discussions about research directions--for example, the AHCPR Administrator participated in a recent strategic planning session for VA's HSR&D Management Decision and Research Center

- o VA HSR&D Service sponsors synthesis-development conferences around selected themes toward enhancing mutual understanding of researchers and practitioners, and ensuring that research agendas reflect the most pressing priorities in key areas.

o All VA funded research projects have been peer reviewed. In submitting to peer review, VA investigators must identify areas of potential overlap between the research they propose for funding and any other projects for which they are funded or are seeking funds (from any sources). They also must describe how their work relates to other completed and ongoing research. One of the responsibilities of peer reviewers includes ensuring that research is both scientifically sound (including that it is not inappropriately duplicative) and important to the VA mission. This process avoids project overlap.

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VA's EFFORTS TO REDUCE THE BACKLOG AT THE BOARD OF VETERANS' APPEALS

The Department's efforts to reduce the backlog at the Board of Veterans' Appeals (the Board) are of three types: internal administrative initiatives; a select panel; and legislative initiatives. In addition, the Chairman has ensured that the veterans service organizations are informed of the Department's efforts in this matter.

Administrative Initiatives

Over the past several years, the Board has introduced administrative initiatives to meet the challenges resulting from judicial review in order to improve the service that it provides to veterans and their families. These initiatives have included the complete revision of decision analysis and format (1991); the use of single member hearings as opposed to panel hearings (1992); the introduction of a "trailing" hearing docket (1993); improvements in customer response and response to Congressional and other inquiries (1993); and the consolidation of all BVA employees in the Washington, DC, area in one building (1993).

In 1994, the Board implemented a number of initiatives specifically aimed at reducing the backlog and increasing productivity:

- o We limited the preparation of certified lists of relevant evidence--for a time prepared for every Board decision--to those cases for which a Notice of Appeal has been filed with the Court. Anecdotal information indicated that counsel spent an additional 4 to 6 hours on each case to identify and list each item of relevant evidence. Board members also expended additional time in reviewing, considering, and acting upon each item listed.
- o We revised internal administrative procedures to expedite the processing of paperwork, including allowing the processing and forwarding of documents containing non-substantive clerical deficiencies such as minor typographical errors.
- o We reduced the length of the "Introduction" section of Board decisions to minimize the time-consuming restatement of the history of each case.
- o We implemented revised docketing procedures, permitting cases to be placed on the Board's docket as soon as a "substantive appeal" has been filed, rather than when the appeal folder is received at the Board. The effects of these revised procedures will greatly reduce the need to transfer records between the Board and the RO's, thereby reducing the time and staffing consumed by responding to case status inquiries and the case transfer and tracking process. In addition, the revised procedures will permit VA to comply with the Court's decision in *Ebert v. Brown*, 4 Vet.App. 324 (1993) by providing the RO access to a veteran's records to act on

new claims while the veteran's appeal of an earlier decision remains in appellate status.

Ongoing administrative measures include the prompt dissemination of the Court's decisions within the Board and the provision of guidance in response to individual Court decisions; an increase in the attorney staff which prepares draft decisions; the institution of a formal, comprehensive training program for staff counsel; the introduction of computer equipment to produce decisions and track cases and other data; and the inclusion of staff physicians in quality review activities.

We also have a number of administrative measures in progress:

- o We are revising hearing scheduling procedures so that case hearings are conducted nearer to when cases are reached on the Board's docket.
- o We are examining BVA's current staffing to eliminate or combine positions not directly associated with the generation of decisions, thereby permitting the hiring of additional Board members and counsel without exceeding existing limits on the number of BVA employees authorized.
- o We are attempting to expand programs to reward exceptional performance and special contributions by BVA employees, thereby providing incentives for more efficient decision production.

Select Panel on Productivity Improvement

In February 1994, Chairman Cragin advised the Secretary that, while the administrative initiatives implemented by BVA, in the aggregate, will help improve productivity and response time, they would not restore these traditional measures of organizational effectiveness to historic levels. Long-term measures must be developed that would, to the extent possible within this new legal environment, address the underlying causes of the backlog.

Accordingly, the Chairman suggested that the Secretary establish a Select Panel charged with exploring new approaches that would enable us to fundamentally redefine the way BVA operates and develop and consider any and all changes that may enable the Board to more effectively meet the challenges posed by the current adjudication and appellate environment. Given the experience of the Blue Ribbon Panel, which was convened last year to deal with a similar problem in the Veterans Benefits Administration, we thought that such intensive, concentrated effort, would provide significant insight.

In response, in March 1994, the Secretary chartered the Select Panel on Productivity Improvement at the Board of Veterans' Appeals. The Panel was chaired by Guy McMichael, the Chairman of the Board of Contracts Appeals and included the Under Secretary for Benefits, representatives from the leading veterans service organizations, the

Social Security Administration, the General Counsel's office, the Board, a former Chairman of the Board and a former VA Chief of Staff. It was charged with "conduct[ing] a systematic review of the Board of Veterans' Appeals and its relationship with other Departmental elements, and mak[ing] recommendations regarding the mission, structure and operations of the Board that will result in more timely processing of claimants' appeals."

The Panel explored a variety of approaches and presented 12 specific recommendations to the Secretary in June 1994. The recommendations, which were subsequently approved by the Secretary, reflected a consensus, if not unanimity, of the group. At least in part, the recommendations involved not only the Board, but other elements of the Department. We at the Board are now in the process of implementing each of these recommendations.

First, the Panel recommended that the Department revise its timeliness measurement system to address the claimants' real concern -- the total time from the filing of a claim to the receipt of a final VA decision. The Board has begun to implement such a new timeliness measure, in addition to others that address budgetary and future planning needs.

The Panel also advised that the Veterans Benefits Administration continue its aggressive efforts to implement the recommendations of the Blue Ribbon Panel that, in 1993, examined the problems causing delay in the adjudication process at the Regional Office (RO) level. The Panel stressed that VBA should continue to give a high priority to its efforts to improve the development of evidence at the RO, which would ultimately reduce the number of cases remanded to the RO by the Board for needed development. In addition, the Panel counseled that expedited treatment be afforded to cases that have been remanded to the RO by the Board. The Under Secretary for Benefits directed that this latter measure be implemented immediately.

The Panel also recommended that the Board be granted the authority to perform an initial review or "prescreening" of appeals in advance of the time when that case would ordinarily be considered and decided in docket order. This procedure would enable the Board to discern any deficiencies in the record to be identified and corrected at the earliest possible time when the case was still awaiting final consideration on the merits based on its place on the docket. Language amending 38 U.S.C. § 7107 to specifically authorize such prescreening procedures is included in Public Law 103-446 (November 2, 1994), described in more detail below.

The Panel's recommendations also included providing better and more comprehensive training and performance measurement for BVA staff counsel; modifying the Form 9 to encourage appellant consultation with a service representative; seeking legislation to increase hearing options by authorizing the conduct of BVA hearings, at the claimant's option, by a RO official acting as an agent for the Board; exploring the possibility of expanding the geographic locations at which hearings may be held by use of

teleconferencing; improving the training and methods of evaluating performance of staff counsel; increased use of technology, including a pilot project employing document imaging, as well as the expanded use of CD-ROM and other on-line technology; and resolving attrition problems at the Board resulting from the loss of pay equity between ALJs and Board members and the imposition of terms on the Board member position.

Perhaps the most interesting recommendations of the Panel focused on redefining the Board's role in the VA benefits adjudication system. The Panel concluded that the Department should increase individual accountability in the appellate adjudication process to insure the highest quality consideration of a claim's merit and improve timeliness. It recommended that the Secretary promulgate regulations granting the Board complete authority to develop, consider and dispose of an appeal once the substantive appeal (or "Form 9") is filed. This represents a significant change from the current procedure for dealing with cases in which the record is insufficient for appellate adjudication on the merits, which generally require that the Board must remand such cases to the agency of original jurisdiction, which is charged with developing the record and then readjudicating the claim.

The Panel suggested that the new procedure, which would permit the Board to directly obtain evidence or otherwise develop the claim without the necessity of remanding the case to the RO for needed development and readjudication, be perfected in a trial or pilot program. Claimants would have the ability to "opt out" of the revised system and continue to have their appeals processed in the current manner.

Legislative Initiatives

FY 1994 was year of enormous legislative accomplishment for the Board. The President signed into law two measures that will fundamentally change decision-making at the Board and which will ensure that the Board is able to retain the best and brightest of its members.

On July 1, 1994, the President signed S. 1904, the "Board of Veterans' Appeals Administrative Procedures Improvement Act of 1994," into law as Public Law 103-271. This measure, which resulted in part from the personal involvement of the Secretary and the Chairman, ends the 60-year requirement of decisions by a panel of three members, authorizing instead Board decisions by single member. We expect that this change will result in a 25 percent increase in productivity at the Board and significantly reduce response time. The bill also (1) eliminates the statutory limit on the number of Board members (previously 67, including the Chairman and Vice Chairman); (2) authorizes the use of various electronic media to conduct hearings; (3) bars the original decision-making member(s) from reconsideration decisions; (4) provides an exception to docket-order hearings in cases of severe financial hardship or illness; and (5) essentially bars the Chairman from partisan political activity.

On November 2, 1994, the President signed H.R. 5244, the "Veterans' Benefits Improvements Act of 1994," into law as Public Law 103-446. That bill, actively supported by the Board and the Department, contains a number of measures affecting the Board.

Title II of the bill resumes the practice of pay equity between Board members and federal administrative law judges (ALJs), ends terms for Board members, and institutes performance standards for members. Until 1990, both ALJs and Board members were paid at the same level. Beginning in 1991, ALJ pay was increased by about 20%. In addition, since passage of the Veterans' Judicial Review Act in 1988, Board members have been subject to terms of nine years, while ALJs were not. The net result was a loss of the most experienced Board members to the ALJ ranks--more than 15% during the period July 1993 through July 1994. Title II sets Board member pay at the same level as ALJs, and eliminates terms. At the same time, the bill requires "recertification" of Board members at least once every three years under performance standards developed by the Chairman with the approval of the Secretary. Title II also permits the Chairman to continue to serve after the expiration of his appointment--with the approval of the Secretary--until a successor is appointed.

Title III of Public Law 103-446 permits the Board to "screen" appeals to determine the adequacy of the record for decisional purposes or to remand the case immediately for additional development. This was a recommendation of the Select Panel on Productivity Improvement for the Board of Veterans' Appeals. Title III also requires the Secretary to provide expeditious treatment by the Board of any case remanded by the Court of Veterans Appeals.

Finally, title IV of the new law establishes the "Veterans' Claims Adjudication Commission," designed to examine and make recommendations concerning the entire claims-processing system, including the Board. The Commission will be composed of nine members, only one of whom will be a VA employee. A preliminary report is due in November 1995, with a final report in May 1996.

Liaison with Veterans Service Organizations

Throughout the year, the Chairman made presentations to representatives of numerous veterans service organizations, both at the Board's offices and at various conventions. In early February, for example, he held individual meetings with senior officials of The American Legion; the Disabled American Veterans; the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States; and the Paralyzed Veterans of America to discuss the steadily increasing delays faced by veterans in appeals processing and the Board's efforts to improve productivity and timeliness through a series of administrative and legislative actions. In addition, the Chairman addressed or participated in 15 conventions and seminars held by VSOs (both national and state) from Waterville, Maine to Phoenix, Arizona.

2A. "The Department will present a status report on its' efforts to reduce the claims backlog at VBA."

Status of Initiatives to Reduce Claims Backlog

(a) Service Medical Records Center

As of the Spring of 1994 the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, and Air Force are sending the service medical records for new separatees to our SMRC at St. Louis. This greatly speeds the process of transferring those essential records to the appropriate regional offices when new veterans file claims for VA benefits based on disabilities incurred or aggravated during active military service.

(b) Automated Medical Information Exchange (AMIE)

This computer exchange of information between medical centers and regional offices enhances our ability to address individual claimant's needs who are requesting reconsideration of their service connected disabilities, or even filing original claims for benefits.

(c) Automated Records Management System (ARMS)

This automated system has all relevant regulations, manuals, and other guiding information that claims examiners must have available for ready reference when adjudicating claims. This automated system saves hundreds of direct labor hours that formerly were lost in filing changes to the reference material.

(d) Blue Ribbon Panel

This special panel of experts on the processing of claims for veterans' benefits identified three major areas where actions were required to address the escalating claims backlog. The group recommended 43 specific countermeasures for action. As of this date 20 of those action items have already been completed with several more nearing completion.

(e) Under Secretary's Special Project to Reduce Original Claims Backlog

At the beginning of June 1994, the Under Secretary for Benefits established a special project to reduce both the volume and age of original compensation, original pension, original death pension, and original death compensation claims. Of the more than 536,000 claims pending at that time, over 113,500 were in these four claim categories, and 30.7 percent of them were over six months old. As of the end of October, the volume of original claims is under 84,950 with just 15.2 percent of them more than six months old. The project will continue to the end of Fiscal Year 1995 with the target of reducing the pending workload to under 390,000 claims.

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DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

- Reaching Out to Help Homeless Veterans - Special Update

About a third of the adult homeless population has served their country in the armed services. On any given day, as many as 250,000 veterans are living on the streets or in shelters, and perhaps twice as many experience homelessness over the course of a year. Many other veterans are considered at risk because of their poverty, lack of support from family and friends, and precarious living conditions in cheap hotels or in overcrowded or substandard housing.

Although veterans who served in combat do not appear to face any higher risk of homelessness than those without combat experience, the number of homeless Vietnam veterans today is greater than the number of U.S. servicemen who died during the Vietnam war, and a small number of Desert Storm veterans are also showing up in the homeless population.

Almost all homeless veterans are male (about two percent are female), and the vast majority are single. Homeless veterans tend to be older and more educated than homeless non-veterans. But, similar to the general population of homeless adult males, about 40% of homeless veterans suffer from mental illness and (with considerable overlap) slightly more than half suffer from alcohol or other drug abuse problems. About 10% suffer from post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Nearly 50% are African-American or Hispanic.

Homeless veterans are eligible for a variety of benefits, health care, and other support services from regular or mainstream VA programs. Using conservative estimates, these VA programs annually direct several billion dollars of assistance to hundreds of thousands of at-risk and homeless veterans. For example, many veterans currently receiving VA benefits or residing in VA hospitals, nursing homes, or domiciliaries would be homeless or at risk if they did not receive this help.

To supplement the homeless assistance from its mainstream programs, VA offers an array of special programs and initiatives specifically designed to help homeless veterans live as self sufficiently and independent as possible. In fact, VA is the only Federal agency that provides substantial hands-on assistance directly to homeless persons. Although VA's assistance is limited to veterans and their dependents, VA's major homeless-specific programs constitute the largest integrated network of homeless treatment and assistance programs in the country.

VA Mainstream Program Assistance

Inpatient Health Care. Each year, 171 VA hospitals and other facilities provide about one million episodes of inpatient care to veterans, including tens of thousands of homeless veterans. This inpatient care provides at least a temporary alternative to shelters or the streets -- and often serves as a starting point for more extensive rehabilitation.

Discharge Planning. VA's Social Work Services Homeless Coordinators help homeless and at-risk veterans leaving VA inpatient care avoid homelessness by providing referrals to VA and non-VA community care and housing and employment assistance, ensuring receipt of available benefits, linking up the vets with family and friends, and providing post-discharge follow-up.

Outpatient Health Care. VA health facilities also annually provide over 40 million clinic stops of outpatient health care, including basic medical care, alcohol and substance abuse treatment, mental health care, vocational rehabilitation, referrals, and counseling. Many of the assisted veterans are homeless or at risk. VA's 202 Readjustment Counseling Service Vet Centers offer special outpatient social services, counseling, and referrals to war zone veterans, and their Homeless Veteran Coordinators serve over 10,000 homeless veterans each year.

VBA Benefits. The Veterans Benefits Administration annually provides more than \$17 billion in VA pensions and benefits to about four million veterans -- many of whom are homeless or at risk, or would be without the benefits. To reach more homeless veterans, special homeless coordinators at VBA's 58 Regional Offices annually make over 3,000 visits to homeless facilities and over 3,500 contacts with non-VA agencies working with the homeless, and provide over 12,000 homeless veterans with benefits counseling and referrals to other VA programs. VBA has also instituted new procedures to reduce the processing time for homeless veterans' benefits claims. Special VA Homeless Assistance Programs & Initiatives

VA's specialized homeless treatment programs have grown and developed since they were first authorized in 1987. These programs strive to offer a continuum of care that includes:

- aggressive outreach to those veterans living on the streets and in shelters who otherwise would not seek assistance;
- clinical assessment and referral to needed medical treatment for physical and psychiatric disorders, including substance abuse;
- long-term transitional assistance, case management and rehabilitation
- employment assistance and linkages with income supports, and;
- supported permanent housing.

HCMI Program. VA's 57 Homeless Chronically Mentally Ill Veterans program sites provide extensive outreach, physical and psychiatric health exams, treatment, referrals, and ongoing case management to homeless veterans with mental health problems (including substance abuse). As appropriate, the HCMI program places homeless veterans needing more intensive treatment into one of its roughly 125 contracted community-based facilities. The program serves over 19,000 homeless veterans each year, with over 3,000 receiving residential treatment. The average length of stay in community-based residential care is 72 days, and the average cost per day is approximately \$38.00. Eleven Health Care for Homeless Veterans (HCHV) outreach teams provide similar HCMI-type assistance to another 3,700 veterans, but without the residential care component.

Homeless Dom's. VA's 33 Domiciliary Care for Homeless Veterans program sites provide biopsychosocial treatment and rehabilitation to homeless veterans. Treatment takes place in approximately 1,500 dedicated beds at VA medical center domiciliaries. These homeless dom's annually provide residential treatment to over 3,000 homeless veterans with health problems. The average length of stay is 130 days.

CWT/TR. In VA's Compensated Work Therapy/Therapeutic Residence program, disadvantaged at-risk and homeless veterans live in one of 40 community-based supervised group homes while working for pay in a VA Compensated Work Therapy program (also known as Veterans Industries). Veterans in the CWT/TR program work about 32 hours per week, with average earnings of \$580 per month. Veterans pay an average of \$142 per month toward maintenance and upkeep of the residence. The average length of stay is 136 days.

HUD-VASH. In this joint Supported Housing program with the Department of Housing and Urban Development, VA staff at 29 VAMCs provide ongoing case management and other needed assistance to homeless veterans in permanent housing supported by 1300 specially-designated HUD rental assistance vouchers. HUD has recently made an additional 700 vouchers available. VA will dedicate case management staff at 11 new sites and expand staffing to accommodate additional vouchers at 9 sites.

Drop-In Centers. These programs provide a daytime sanctuary where homeless veterans can clean up, wash their clothes, and participate in a variety of therapeutic and rehabilitative activities. Linkages with longer-term assistance are also available. VA currently operates nine drop-in centers

SSA-VA Joint Outreach. At eleven sites, the Social Security Administration and VA's HCMI and Homeless Dom staff coordinate outreach and benefits with SSA staff to increase the number of veterans receiving SSA benefits and otherwise assist in their rehabilitation. In this demonstration project, both applications and benefit awards have increased significantly and the processing time has decreased dramatically.

Acquired Property Sales for Homeless Providers. This program makes all the properties VA obtains through foreclosures on VA-insured mortgages available for sale to homeless provider organizations at a discount of 20 to 50 percent, depending on time on the market. Some of these properties are now available for lease, as well.

Comprehensive Homeless Centers. VA's Comprehensive Homeless Centers (CHCs) place the full range of VA homeless efforts in a single medical center's catchment area and coordinate their administration within a centralized framework. With extensive collaboration with non-VA efforts, VA's CHCs in Brooklyn, Cleveland, Dallas, Pittsburgh, San Francisco and West Los Angeles work to create a comprehensive continuum of care to reach out to homeless veterans and help them escape homelessness.

Homeless Providers Grant and Per Diem Program. This new program allows VA to provide grants and per diem to assist public and non-profit entities establish and operate new supportive housing and supportive services for homeless veterans. Grants may also be used to purchase vans to do outreach and provide transportation for homeless veterans. VA has set aside \$6 million in funding for this program in Fiscal Year 1995.

VBA-VHA Special Outreach and Benefits Assistance. Under a provision of Public Law 102-590, VHA is funding eleven Veterans Benefits Counselors. These specially funded staff provide outreach, benefits counseling, referral and additional assistance to veterans applying for VA benefits. This special initiative is in addition to the VBA's ongoing efforts to assist homeless veterans.

VA Creates Partnership with National Service Corporation. VA and the National Coalition for Homeless Veterans (NCHV) are working under a grant from the Corporation for National Service. Under this grant AmeriCorps members are working with local VA Medical Centers, Regional Benefits Offices and community based groups in Houston and Los Angeles renovating housing, doing street outreach, helping to find employment and assist in providing ongoing case management to homeless veterans. Half of the AmeriCorps members recruited in these cities are veterans themselves. In Washington NCHV is going to hold a Stand Down the weekend of October 27-29, 1995.

VA Assistance to Stand Downs. VA programs and staff have actively participated in each of the over 50 Stand Downs for Homeless Veterans run by local coalitions in various cities each year. In wartime stand downs, front line troops are removed to a place of relative safety for rest and needed assistance before returning to combat. Similarly, peacetime stand downs give homeless veterans 2-3 days of safety and security where they can obtain food, shelter, clothing, and a range of other assistance, including VA-provided health care, benefits certification, and linkages with other programs.

VA Surplus/Excess Property for Homeless Veterans Initiative. With support of GSA and DoD, VA's Office of Acquisition and Material Management and Mental Health and Behavioral Sciences have initiated a program to distribute Federal personal property such as hats, gloves, socks, boots, sleeping bags, furniture and other items to homeless veterans and homeless veteran programs. In less than two years this initiative has distributed more than \$6 million worth of surplus goods and has more than \$1 million in inventory. A newly established Comprehensive Work Therapy program employs formerly homeless veterans to unload, inventory and ship these goods across the country from its Lyons, New Jersey location.

Community Homelessness Assessment, Local Education Networking Groups (CHALENG) For Veterans. VA held a series of mini homeless summits at each VA medical center. This effort is not only providing needed information about the needs of homeless veterans but is bringing all relevant agencies and organizations together in each medical center's catchment area to energize new community-wide efforts to improve assistance to homeless veterans and develop new strategies. CHALENG (Community Homelessness Assessment, Local Education Networking Groups) for Veterans meetings will continue to be held for the foreseeable future.

Program Monitoring and Evaluation VA has built a strong monitoring and evaluation system to evaluate all of its homeless programs. The Northeast Program and Evaluation Center (NEPEC) at VAMC West Haven, CT provides important information about veterans served, the therapeutic and cost effectiveness of the specialized programs. This evaluation information is vital to assist program managers determine new directions to pursue in order to expand and improve services to homeless veterans.

Partnerships with Others. Despite everything described here, VA does not have the resources to assist every homeless veteran. Ending homelessness among veterans, or all homelessness, will take a combined effort by Federal, State, and local government, the private sector, and voluntary efforts. Toward this end, VA has developed numerous partnerships at the local level with public and private agencies and nonprofit organizations, including veterans service organizations.

Program Growth. VA directed almost \$76 million to its homeless assistance programs in FY 1995 (a \$10 million increase over FY 1994). Among other things, the new funds are supporting several new Homeless Chronically Mentally Ill programs, new Comprehensive Homeless Centers, and a \$6 million grant program for public and nonprofit providers serving homeless veterans.

Current Important News.

Application for VA's Homeless Providers Grant and Per Diem Program. More than 100 applications were received from public and non-profit entities requesting more than \$38 million. Application packages are being reviewed and \$6 million in funding is expected to awarded this summer.

More Information Regarding VA Homeless Assistance Efforts

To obtain more information about VA homeless programs and initiatives in your area, please call 1-800-827-1000 or your local VA Medical Center or Regional Office. For additional general information about VA homeless assistance efforts, please contact the VA Homelessness Office (075D), Department of Veterans Affairs; 810 Vermont Avenue, NW, Room 915; Washington, DC 20420 [Phone 202-273-5760 Fax 202-273-5716]..



AmeriCorps: A Fact Sheet for Veterans

AmeriCorps National Service

CORPORATION
FOR NATIONAL
★ SERVICE

AmeriCorps is the embodiment of the new national service movement that engages Americans of all ages and backgrounds in full or part-time civilian service that gets things done in communities across the nation. National service legislation encourages veterans to join AmeriCorps by allowing them to earn regular AmeriCorps benefits without diminishing those earned while in military service. AmeriCorps Members meet critical needs in education, human needs, public safety and the environment while earning a small living allowance of about \$600 a month and receiving limited health care benefits. After completing 1700 hours of full-time service, they receive an education award worth \$4,725 to be used as a tuition supplement, job training or loan repayment.

- AmeriCorps is designed to complement the outstanding work of the armed forces. So that military recruiting is not affected, AmeriCorps Members are drawn from a diverse pool of applicants of all ages, including people with disabilities and many others who do not meet the requirements for military service. The AmeriCorps education award was set significantly lower than Montgomery GI Bill awards in recognition of the greater sacrifice made by those who serve in our Armed Forces.
- AmeriCorps' commitment to work in partnership with the Armed Forces veterans has resulted in projects with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and the National Coalition for Homeless Veterans. AmeriCorps Members work with the Collaboration to Help Homeless Veterans (CHHV) to provide case management and a wide range of support services such as health care, substance abuse treatment and employment readiness counseling for homeless veterans. AmeriCorps case managers and veterans also are rehabilitating houses in Houston and establishing a food service in Los Angeles. In Roxbury, Massachusetts, veterans train AmeriCorps*VISTA Members as trauma counselors for young gunshot victims.
- The National Civilian Community Corps (NCCC) is a special AmeriCorps program that involves 1,000 young men and women who serve in teams and reside at military bases that have experienced downsizing. Directed by Brigadier General Donald Scott, US Army (Ret.), AmeriCorps*NCCC combines the best methods of civilian service with Armed Forces experience in motivating and training American youth. AmeriCorps*NCCC teams have responded to special challenges such as fighting forest fires in Idaho and helping flood victims in Houston and California rebuild their homes and communications.

For additional information, please contact Andre Brown, Office of Public Liaison, the Corporation for National Service at (202) 606-5000, ext. 260.

1201 New York Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20525
Telephone 202-606-5000

Getting Things Done.
AmeriCorps, National Service
Learn and Serve America
National Senior Service Corps

AmeriCorps Collaboration to Help Homeless Veterans

Los Angeles, CA; Houston, TX

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"You always want to get started, but you don't know where to begin," says veteran Richardo Bustos. "AmeriCorps has given me the places to go. I think everyone here feels about the same."

AmeriCorps members in Los Angeles, California are working to help break the cycle that keeps more than 20,000 other veterans homeless. They serve at the L.A. Vets Westside Residence Hall, a 440-bed transitional housing and job development facility, providing case management and support services to 130 residents. They are helping residents go back to school, find jobs, and move to permanent housing. Members have also helped establish numerous programs and services for residents, including a facility library, a voter registration drive, a clothing room, a continental breakfast service, a legal services program, and a job resource center at Westside.

The Collaboration also serves veterans in Houston, where the homelessness rate is among the highest in the nation. There, AmeriCorps members serve through a range of veterans' organizations including the Stand Down Home residence and the Veterans Affairs Regional Office. They are renovating the Stand Down Ranch outreach facility and transporting veterans to medical appointments. The Federal Emergency Management Association deployed five AmeriCorps members from the Houston team to help veterans whose homes were damaged by the floods of 1994.

Perhaps one reason the program is working so well is that the AmeriCorps members understand the problems they are addressing firsthand — half are themselves veterans, and one third have been homeless at some time in their lives. The Collaboration to Help Homeless Veterans is a partnership between AmeriCorps, the U.S. Department of Veterans' Affairs, and the National Coalition for Homeless Veterans. Jesse Brown, Secretary of Veterans' Affairs, says military and civilian service go hand in hand. "Veterans have served America in times of need. Now, AmeriCorps members are serving homeless veterans during their time of need. This is what being an American is all about."

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Getting Things Done.
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U.S. Department of Labor Program Highlights



Fact Sheet No. OASVET 95-6

HOMELESS VETERANS' REINTEGRATION PROJECTS

The Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Projects (HVRP) program was established by the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act of 1987 and is administered by the Veterans' Employment and Training Service (VETS).

The emphasis on helping homeless veterans get and retain jobs is enhanced by linking with other providers, such as veterans' affairs offices and medical facilities, Job Training Partnership Act entities and social service agencies. These providers offer access to benefits, substance abuse treatment, job training, transitional housing and other services needed to stabilize the homeless veteran and remove such barriers to employment as lack of clothing, medical care and job skills.

The HVRP program uses veterans who have experienced homelessness themselves to reach out to homeless veterans. They go into the streets, shelters, soup kitchens, and other places to encourage homeless veterans to take advantage of available services and advise them of the HVRP program. The goal is to get homeless veterans off the street and into gainful employment, with emphasis on long-term job retention.

An important characteristic of homeless veterans, identified when the original program was designed, is their underutilization of existing services, benefits, and entitlements, including those available from the Department of Veterans Affairs, which could help them obtain employment and reintegration into the social mainstream.

The unique aspect of the HVRP program is the use of formerly homeless veterans who know how to approach and win the confidence and trust of other homeless veterans.

Past HVRP programs have provided participation data and survey information which indicate that unemployment, not lack of affordable housing, is the chief cause of homelessness. Six main barriers to employment were identified: (1) lack of transitional housing; (2) inadequate drug and alcohol treatment services; (3) transportation problems; (4) lack of job skills; (5) a depressed local job market; and (6) resistance to hiring the homeless.

For more information on the HVRP program and other Department of Labor efforts to help homeless veterans, write to:

Veterans' Employment and Training Service
U.S. Department of Labor
200 Constitution Avenue, N.W. (S-1316)
Washington, D.C. 20210

SIX YEAR HVRP TECHNICAL PERFORMANCE SUMMARY**(FY 1988 - 1993*; ALL PROGRAMS AGGREGATED)**

	TOTAL
1. NUMBER OF OUTREACH CONTACTS	72,992
2. NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS ENROLLED	34,648
3. REFERRALS TO AND ENROLLMENTS IN SUPPORTIVE SERVICES**	108,625
4. REFERRALS TO AND ENROLLMENTS IN EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING SERVICES**	29,660
5. PARTICIPANTS COMPLETING SOCIAL REHABILITATIVE SERVICES PLAN***	8,176
6. PARTICIPANTS COMPLETING EMPLOYABILITY DEVELOPMENT SERVICES PLAN***	5,436
7. DIRECT PLACEMENTS INTO UNSUBSIDIZED EMPLOYMENT	9,955
8. ASSISTED PLACEMENTS INTO UNSUBSIDIZED EMPLOYMENT	5,231
9. TOTAL PLACEMENTS (7 & 8)	15,186
10. NUMBER RETAINING JOBS FOR 13 WEEKS	6,616
11. RATE OF PLACEMENT INTO UNSUBSIDIZED EMPLOYMENT	44%

* Grantees funded with FY 1994 funds are currently in their third quarter of operations. The FY 1993 program is the most recently completed full program period.

** These goals reflect accomplishments in the first five years of the HVRP program. For the FY 1993 program they were replaced by the goals in items 5 & 6 above.

*** These goals became operational in FY 1993 and reflect one year of performance.

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2B. "The VA will report to the IVPG on the status of current DOD/VA program coordination efforts regarding physical exams, transfer of medical and pay records, and other management issues."

DOD/VA PHYSICAL EXAMS: A series of meetings have been held with VHA and Col (Dr.) David Suttle both at the request of the House Veterans Affairs Committee and on our initiative to determine the extent and feasibility of conducting examinations acceptable for rating purposes at the time of discharge. DOD has a draft health questionnaire which it intends to administer in a face-to-face interview between a service person pending separation and a licensed health care provider shortly before separation. This document will become a permanent part of the health record for the service person. VA and Army are in the final stages of agreement on the conduct of a test of discharge examinations which will be conducted at three sites. The sites and the characteristics of the tests are as follows:

Ft. Jackson: Soldiers who have identified health issues on the draft pre-discharge screen as well as those who complete an original claim for compensation benefits will be sent to the Columbia VAMC for a C&P exam in accordance with the current Physician's Guide.

Ft. Hood: Soldiers who have identified health issues on the draft pre-discharge screen as well as those who complete an application for benefits will be given a C&P examination in accordance with the Physicians Guide at Darnell Army Hospital by VA examiners from our Temple Texas VAMC. There is also some thought of fee basing some of these exams through Army's fairly extensive network of fee basis physicians who deliver services to family members and retirees through Ft. Hood.

Ft. Lewis: Soldiers who have identified health issues on the pre-discharge questionnaire as well as those who complete applications will be given C&P discharge examinations using the VA Physician Guide protocol at the Ft. Lewis Army hospital using Army health care providers.

This test is expected to begin in early calendar year 95 and run until an appropriate statistically significant sample size is accumulated from which to evaluate the test. Col Suttle does not envision the test running for more than 2-3 months.

TRANSFER OF MEDICAL RECORDS: All four services, Army, Navy, Air Force and Marine Corps have now completed transfer of service medical records to the VA SMRC in St. Louis for all new discharges. A contract has been let with SRA by the Army in which we are participating to look at the entire request for information process between VA and DOD. Members of C&P have been at meetings in St. Louis at ARPERCEN, in Virginia at SRA headquarters, in Central Office and at Randolph Air Force Base on these issues. Each service is looking at our instructions to insure that they conform with current practice in the services. Recently, at a meeting at SRA it did become apparent that each of the services is experiencing some situations where records continue to Interagency Veterans Policy Group come to them when they should be sent to SMRC. We are currently working with ARPERCEN on this issue with respect to Army. Marine Corps has sent an all station letter to their units to insure compliance with the new routing procedure. The other services are returning such records to the separation point for proper referral to SMRC.

DOD/VA TRANSFER OF PAY RECORDS: C&P Service representatives have participated on the VA-DOD Work Group on Military Retired Pay and VA Disability Compensation task force. That group was modified to include representatives from Treasury. The final report is being reviewed. We have provided comments on wording and expressed the belief that all post service issues to include the payment of retired pay should belong to VA. We believe that the report, which fails to demonstrate significant savings regardless of what action is pursued as long as it is restricted just to those cases where a claimant is in receipt of both retired pay and compensation, will set out the options without a recommendation.

ARPERCEN: A meeting was held with Army officials at ARPERCEN in early November regarding delays in obtaining records from that facility. Based on that meeting, a letter was sent to the Commander, ARPERCEN, Col. Frost for his concurrence regarding procedures that were worked out between the two organizations to expedite the processing of information requests from us to them.