

**STATEMENT OF
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ADMINISTRATION
DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS (VA)
BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY AND
GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS, SUBCOMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT OF
GOVERNMENT MANAGEMENT, THE FEDERAL WORKFORCE, AND
D.C.**

MAY 9, 2012

Chairman Akaka, Ranking Member Johnson, and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today on our efforts to build and maintain an effective human resources workforce at the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). I am proud to serve as Secretary Eric K. Shinseki's Chief Human Capital Officer at VA, an agency of 317,000 employees that stands ready to serve the Nation's 22 million Veterans, their families and survivors through the delivery of authorized benefits and services.

Introduction:

To deliver high quality service to Veterans in the 21st Century, the VA requires a highly skilled and competent workforce. A core foundation for this VA workforce is a cadre of 4,000 plus human resources (HR) professionals. In this testimony, I will share some of the challenges HR professionals face and describe what VA is doing to help them to meet those challenges. I will then review VA's overarching strategy for investing in its human capital.

New Challenges Faced By The Federal HR community

For federal HR professionals, there is a heightened urgency to address the changing human capital needs of government. HR must help agency leaders to hire more quickly; enhance employee and leadership training and development; promote productive labor-management relations; and provide the organization with ways to transform service delivery to the American public.

HR professionals are often called upon by their agency leadership to ensure compliance with various legislative and Presidential directives. In recent years, this has

included Presidential Directives regarding Hiring Reform, diversity and inclusion initiatives, Veterans' employment, Telework, and student and recent graduate internship programs.

Human Resource offices are also increasingly expected to advise leadership on how to best lead and manage amid an environment of great change. Key areas of change include: budget; technology; generational and demographic shifts; and increased retirements. Generally speaking, the public sector is under great pressure to meet higher expectations, while demands are increasing and resources are constrained. Considering the wide array of challenges, the HR workforce must be trained and given the appropriate resources to thrive in this dynamic environment.

VA's Approach

To deliver high quality service to a growing population of Veterans with changing needs, President Obama charged Secretary Shinseki to transform VA into a 21st Century organization. VA developed major initiatives spanning the activities of the entire department. The success of these initiatives requires a well-led, well-staffed, and well-trained workforce. One of the major initiatives is to transform human capital management through the development of the Human Capital Investment Plan.

Human Capital Investment Plan

As the Assistant Secretary for Human Resources and Administration, I support VA's transformation by addressing its human capital needs. This required a VA leadership strategic commitment to invest in the training and development of our employees, including VA's HR community.

VA implemented a comprehensive Human Capital Investment Plan designed to advance employee training and development as well as enhance the work environment to enable high performance across the Department.

VA's strategic investments have provided training courses, created delivery systems and built an infrastructure to address the mission-critical skills gaps and other workforce challenges faced by the Department. Some important achievements include:

- Executing a corporate approach to employee and leadership training and development through the creation of an *HR Academy*, and the *VA Learning University (VALU)*;

The *HR Academy* offers a wide range of courses for HR professionals, using online webinars and in-class instruction on such topics as staffing, recruitment, labor management relations, and IT systems. In addition, the Academy provides an integrated suite of features such as information on emerging trends and developments in HR, industry-leading best practices, peer-to-peer knowledge sharing, and HR-specific career mapping resources.

VALU is representative of the integrated holistic strategy used by HRA and has become the centralized source for institutional approaches to training and development, providing hundreds of thousands of skills-building opportunities every year across VA. *VALU* is truly a “university without walls”, delivering high-quality, multi-modal training to VA employees at all levels and locations of the organization. *VALU*'s corporate approach includes smart planning, robust IT capability, personalized services for skills building and career development, and ongoing analysis.

- Using a competency-based training model based on skills and competencies needed for mission critical and other cross-cutting occupations;

VA conducted extensive agency-wide competency assessments to enable VA to target its training efforts to areas where it is most needed, such as financial and budget management, resulting in the development of numerous training initiatives to fill key competency gaps and creating benefits key business functions. The results of these various assessments led to the creation of *MyCareer@VA*.

- Creating *MyCareer@VA*, a game-changing career path online tool for employees, including HR professionals, to map and manage their careers which helps VA improve recruitment and retention;

MyCareer@VA is innovative, web-based systems with a people-centric approach to VA's investment in employees' professional growth, helping established employees seek advancement or search for horizontal opportunities or scaled-back responsibilities due to unplanned challenges in their personal lives. *MyCareer@VA* also serves as a key retention tool and a recruitment tool that helps potential job applicants to identify careers and career paths within VA.

- Establishing a *Talent Management System (TMS)* that delivers high quality educational programs via an award-winning online platform to VA employees nationwide;

The *Talent Management System (TMS)* combines a variety of on-site, remote, and online learning options that serve a diverse and geographically-dispersed audience. TMS also offers robust capabilities for employees and their supervisors to manage their training, course curricula, performance reporting, and career development plans.

- *VA for Vets* is focused on training HR professionals and hiring managers to increase Veteran employment within the VA through recruitment, retention and reintegration strategies.

VA for Vets was designed specifically to assist Veterans to translate their military skills and experience into a successful civilian career at VA and elsewhere in the Federal Government. *VA for Vets* is high-tech and high-touch. High-tech refers to the online platform for Veteran employment resources including resume builders, a military skills translator, virtual collaboration tools, self assessments, career matching reports. High-touch means Veterans who may need additional assistance can access a live coach who will support them through the entire process.

Leveraging Partnerships:

The VA leverages a wide array of collaborative work groups to ensure we capture numerous perspectives and best practices. Working groups involving VA Human Resources include: the Human Capital Assessment and Accountability Framework (HCAAF) Restructuring Taskforce; Strategic Human Capital High Risk Initiative; Veterans Employment Council; Hispanic Employment Council; and the Partnership for Public Service's Emerging HR Leaders program.

Leveraging partnerships with the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) and other federal agencies to help develop OPM's HR University as well as active engagement in working groups on Hiring Reform and Veterans Employment established under the Chief Human Capital Officers Council will continue to play a key role in developing VA's HR workforce. Partnerships with OPM have proven very beneficial for several reasons. First, VA benefits from hearing about the experiences of other federal

agencies who are wrestling with some of the same challenges as VA. Second, VA is able to provide information, including lessons learned and best practices in implementing human capital solutions. VA can leverage in-house expertise to support new initiatives and provide additional insights that can strengthen federal-wide solutions.

The Way Forward

Ultimately, I believe investment in HR must be a priority for the Federal Government even in the most challenging fiscal times. We will not achieve a leaner government, or more effective operations, without trained professionals at the helm. HR is a critical enabler in an organization's ability to recruit, train, and lead the federal workforce.

VA's efforts to build and maintain an effective human resources workforce have centered on human capital management that directly supports the strategic direction of the Department. The ultimate goal of our training and development strategy is to enable employees to better serve Veterans. We will continue to invest in the courses, the systems and the infrastructure that builds and strengthens the core of our organization – our people.

Thank you again for the opportunity to share VA's experience with building and maintaining an effective human resources workforce. I am prepared to answer your questions.