

**STATEMENT OF
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DEPUTY DIRECTOR
OFFICE OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT**

Before the

**SUBCOMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT OF GOVERNMENT
MANAGEMENT, THE FEDERAL WORKFORCE AND THE
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY AND
GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS
UNITED STATES SENATE**

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Background

Good morning Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee. I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss veterans' preference in the Federal Government.

This Administration and the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) are committed to ensuring veterans receive all rights and benefits to which they are entitled under Federal employment laws. Veterans' preference lies at the heart of OPM's mission. We administer veterans' entitlements under the United States Code, in both title 5, which includes veterans' preference in employment and reduction in force, and title 38, which covers reemployment rights for Federal employee veterans called to active duty.

The veterans' preference laws have long been a cornerstone of the Civil Service. OPM has been, and continues to be, at the forefront of efforts to preserve and protect veterans' preference in Federal employment. Today I will focus on OPM's efforts to promote veterans' preference throughout the Federal Government, work with veterans to educate them on opportunities for employment with the Federal Government, and implement and promote veterans' preference within OPM.

Governmentwide Activities

Issuing regulations and guidance is one way in which OPM promotes the application of veterans' preference throughout Government. We have also partnered with our colleagues in various Departments and agencies for a more "hands-on" approach to safeguarding veterans' preference entitlements. For example:

- We work closely with the Department of Defense to ensure veterans' preference entitlements are preserved in the creation of the National Security Personnel System, including veterans' preference in reduction-in-force situations.
- We work with the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to revise, simplify or even eliminate the dozens of different form

letters that VA was using to document service-connected disabilities, which are used for preference determinations. This work has and will continue to make it easier for veterans to claim their preference and for agencies to grant it.

- In 2002, we issued a Memorandum for Heads of Executive Departments which strongly encouraged agencies to assist employees called up to active duty by paying both the Government and employee shares of the Federal Employees Health Benefits premium. We specifically asked agencies to pay both shares of the premium in support of the reservists called up to support military operations such as Operations Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom. I am pleased to say that all 114 agencies surveyed agreed to pay both shares.
- We routinely partner with our colleagues at the Department of Labor's Veterans' Employment and Training Service (VETS) office to help resolve veterans' preference and veterans' reemployment rights issues.
- We are improving our USAJOBS website to make it more veteran-friendly by providing prominent home page links to

veterans' employment information and web resources at agencies and elsewhere.

Regulatory Functions

As a part of our regulatory responsibilities we are engaged in numerous programs. For example:

- Right now we are currently revising our rules to reflect recent statutory changes to veterans' preference contained in the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2006. These changes grant veterans' preference to certain individuals serving on active duty on September 11, 2001, or later, and clarify veterans' preference eligibility for individuals released or discharged from active duty.
- In February 2006, we issued a memorandum to the Chief Human Capital Officers Council informing them of these statutory changes and updated our guidance on the OPM website.
- We published regulations in January 2006, which make violations of veterans' preference in alternative rating and selection procedures, or category rating as it is commonly known, a prohibited personnel practice.

- We continue to update, when necessary, our veterans' employment guidance, contained in VETGUIDE and the Delegated Examining Operations Handbook, and our website contains extensive guidance describing the rights and benefits of reservists called to active duty.
- We have also published a set of Frequently Asked Questions on military leave, in recognition of the vast number of Federal employees currently serving in Iraq and Afghanistan.

OPM has also made several improvements to our web-based veterans' products in an effort to provide better customer service to veterans who are seeking Federal jobs. Last year we revised and streamlined our most used Federal form (*Standard Form 15 Application for 10 Point Veteran's Preference*) by aligning it with current policy of the Department of Veterans Affairs and making it more user-friendly for both veterans and the agencies that hire them. This form is used nationally by all disabled veterans seeking Federal employment.

Regulatory Compliance

In terms of compliance with veterans' preference laws, OPM considers any violation of veterans' preference by a covered agency to be a serious matter and will direct any agency to take appropriate action to correct veterans' preference violations. Towards this end, we conduct periodic, systemic reviews of agency hiring practices. More specifically, our oversight office has been directed to give increased emphasis to veterans' reemployment matters in reviewing agency personnel actions.

Apart from our regular oversight schedule, OPM occasionally takes a more focused look at veterans' employment around the Federal Government. For example, in June 2004, we issued a "Veterans' Employment Audit Report" in which we identified potential barriers, issues, or practices that could have a negative impact on the hiring of veterans. We posted this report on our website and shared it with the Chief Human Capital Officers Council, as well as the Veterans Service Organizations (VSOs).

We publish an annual report to Congress on the employment of veterans in the Federal Government, sometimes referred to as the DVAAP report, which includes highlights of agency's efforts to recruit, train, and provide career advancement for veterans.

OPM's Outreach Activities

Now, I'd like to tell you about OPM's efforts to work with veterans to educate them on opportunities for employment with the Federal Government. In 2003, OPM created the Veteran Invitational Program (VIP). This is an educational and recruitment initiative that provides veterans, military personnel, stakeholders and Federal hiring officials with timely, accurate, and useful information on veterans' rights and employment opportunities with the Federal Government. The program helps Federal agency representatives understand how to hire veterans through special appointing authorities and inform veterans and military personnel on what jobs are available and how to apply for Federal employment.

As part of the Veteran Invitational Program, OPM created brochures, wallet-size information cards, wall posters and a veterans' preference DVD entitled "*What Veterans Need to Know About Veterans' Preference.*" The DVD offers a comprehensive 40-minute video seminar of veterans' preference rights and eligibilities. OPM sends this material to the Veterans Service Organizations (VSOs), the Department of Labor Veterans Employment and Training Service

(VETS), and Federal agencies (e.g., VA Regional Offices and military separation offices throughout the country).

OPM staff frequently visit veteran medical facilities and military installations to speak with transitioning military service men and women to encourage them to continue to serve their country in the Federal Government and educate them on the benefits available in Federal service. At these visits, OPM human resource specialists provide training sessions on how to navigate the USAJOBS website; resume writing and interviewing techniques; and hiring under veterans' preference and special appointing authorities. OPM provides similar training and job assistance to veterans at job fairs and career days that OPM participates in across the country. We used the momentum from the positive feedback we received from these visits to provide similar training to the Department of Labor's Local Veterans Employment Representative (LVER) staff and DOL's Disabled Veterans Outreach Program (DVOP) staff in the State of Virginia, and will offer training to LVER and DVOP staff in the State of Utah this summer.

Last year, OPM opened an office at the Walter Reed Army Medical Center (WRAMC). Our office provides a variety of services

to military members and their families at the Center. These include serving as a point of contact for other Federal agencies interested in providing employment opportunities to veterans and providing military personnel transitioning out of the armed services with Federal employment and educational information and one-on-one employment counseling. We plan to expand this outreach effort to other military hospitals in 2006 and 2007.

In June 2004, OPM sponsored a special veterans' employment symposium for over 250 Federal agency human capital leaders, human resource supervisors, and program managers on veterans' preference recruitment which focused on advancing existing policies and strategies to recruit veterans into the Federal workforce. The symposium highlighted the importance of effective leadership and agency programs that help managers and human resources professionals understand the benefits of recruiting and hiring veterans.

OPM meets quarterly with the Veterans Service Organizations (VSOs) to address important veterans' issues and to provide an opportunity for the VSOs to share their concerns. We work closely

with the VSOs to ensure that veterans' preference rights are honored and protected throughout Government.

These are some of the outreach efforts OPM has undertaken to promote veterans' preference.

OPM's Achievements

Now, I'd like to tell you about some of the things OPM, as an employing agency, has done and the results our efforts have produced. Within OPM itself, we review each recruitment request and work with the employing office to determine the appropriate source of candidates. When it is determined that hiring from outside the current Federal Government workforce would be a logical source of qualified applicants, we accept applications from all United States citizens. We ensure that OPM vacancy announcements contain explicit instructions to veterans for completing all necessary forms and submitting the necessary paperwork in order to claim veterans' preference as appropriate. As a result, in Fiscal Year 2004, **27 percent of OPM's new hires were veterans and 10 percent of OPM's new hires were disabled veterans.** These were the highest percentages among independent Federal agencies.

OPM is proud of its efforts to preserve and protect veterans' preference. These efforts, in part, have helped make the Federal Government the Nation's leader in veterans' employment. I'm happy to answer any questions you may have. Thank you.