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Veterans Opportunity to Work Act—Part 2

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9.0--Miscellaneous

On July 7, 2011, Chairman of the House Committee on Veteran's Affairs, Representative Jeff Miller, introduced H.R. 2433, the proposed Veterans Opportunity to Work Act (VOTWA) of 2011. On October 12, 2011, the bill passed the House of Representatives by a vote of 418-6. In the Senate, the bill has been referred to the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs. I am optimistic that the bill will pass the Senate and be signed into law by President Obama.^[1]

Here are the items in VOTWA that are designed to address the employment needs of young, recently separated veterans:

Improve the Transition Assistance Program (TAP)

VOTWA seeks to improve TAP, which has been ongoing for almost 30 years. The bill would require the Department of Labor (DOL) to contract with a private entity or entities to provide specified counseling, employment, and training services.

Will contractors provide better service than federal employees have provided? Maybe. Or maybe this becomes just another opportunity for somebody at DOL to steer contracts to favored entities.

One criticism of TAP, as it has been conducted in recent years, is that within a single TAP class there may be a whole range of departing service members—everything from E-4s leaving active duty after four years to O-6s retiring after 29 years of service. The TAP program would likely be more effective if it were better targeted to the specific needs of the individual service member leaving active duty.

Modify credentialing program for separating service members

Under current law, the Assistant Secretary for Veterans' Employment and Training (ASVET) is to have a demonstration project involving at least ten military occupational specialties (MOSSs). The idea is to facilitate the recently separating veteran entering into a civilian occupation that is similar to his or her MOS on active duty. VOTWA would change “at least ten” to not less than five nor more than ten” and thus water down the program. The bill would also limit funding for this program to \$180,000 per fiscal year.

The bill would also require the ASVET to “enter a contract with an appropriate entity representing a coalition of state governors to identify credentialing, certification, and licensing requirements incorporating the necessary skills for such specialties.” I disapprove of such congressional micro-managing. There is probably only one “entity” that meets these criteria, and this legislation would effectively require the ASVET to contract with that organization. I think that it is generally more effective to give Executive Branch appointees, regardless of party, the discretion to select the most qualified contractor for a function. If the political appointees select poorly, they can be called on the carpet at congressional oversight hearings.

Clarify DVOPS and LVERs duties and services to focus on veterans

Under VOWTA, full-time disabled veterans' outreach program specialists (DVOPS) and local veteran's employment representatives (LVERs) would be prohibited from performing non-veteran related duties and services beyond the scope of their specified duties. DVOPS and LVERS are state employees who are funded with federal funds, through the ASVET. VOTWA would clarify the federal requirement that LVERs and DVOPS spend substantially all of their time assisting veterans. As state budgets are strained, state employment services are often tempted to misuse the DVOPS and LVERs.

Assessment

These provisions are useful, but we should not expect that the enactment of these modest provisions will measurably reduce the very high unemployment rate among young veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan.

Don't forget the older veterans

VOTWA would also direct the Secretary of Labor to establish a new program for unemployed veterans between the ages of 35 and 60. Selected veterans would get up to 12 months of federal financial assistance for education and training.

[\[1\]](#) On November 21, 2011, President Obama signed this bill into law. It is now Public Law 112-56.