

# House Committee on Veterans' Affairs: Economic Opportunity Chairman Van Orden calls for interagency TAP coordination for transitioning servicemembers during oversight hearing

Posted on Thursday, May 18, 2023

>> **WisPolitics is now on the State Affairs network. Get custom keyword notifications, bill tracking and all WisPolitics content. [Get the app or access via desktop.](#)**

**WASHINGTON, D.C.** – Today, Rep. Derrick Van Orden, (R-Wis.), the Chairman of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity, delivered the following opening remarks, as prepared, at the start of the Subcommittee's Oversight Hearing to examine steps to ensure success for servicemembers entering civilian life:

The Subcommittee will come to order.

I want to thank our witnesses for being here today to discuss the Transition Assistance Program and the role that each department plays in helping servicemembers take this monumental step in their lives.

As a former Navy SEAL who served this country for 26 years, I have firsthand knowledge of the difficulties that can come with making this change.

Over 200,000 military personnel leave the service each year. For many servicemembers, this can be a time to take on new challenges and build a promising new future.

For others, this year-long process is filled with uncertainty and anxiety.

Having had a job, a strong community, and a sense of purpose for many years, these servicemembers must redefine who they are and what their new purpose will be the minute they step off that base or ship.

If they do not have a well thought out plan in place, they can find themselves without the necessities of life-income, food, shelter- very quickly.

As we learned at our field hearing in San Diego earlier this month, there are approximately 33,000 homeless veterans in the United States. This should not happen. One homeless veteran is one too many. We owe these men and women who sacrificed so much for us more than that.

Especially when we think of veterans being thrown out of lodging to make room for illegal immigrants. That is shameful.

I am committed to solving this problem and doing right by our veterans. The Transition Assistance Program is a big tool in our tool box to address this problem.

Servicemembers who have a job lined up after separation from the military or a clear path for their future are much less likely to experience homelessness.

Servicemembers who are aware and have already signed up for the benefits they are entitled to and understand how to access them are much less likely to end up in dire straits. And servicemembers who have community or family support are less likely to end up in a state of mental distress and commit suicide.

The current TAP program, while well-intentioned, is not meeting the needs of our servicemembers. Too many of them are falling through the cracks. We must do better by helping them build a concrete plan for life after the service.

In 2019, this Committee worked incredibly hard to modernize the Transition Assistance Program. Many of these proposals were thought of during a hearing much like the one we are having today.

However, what Congress intended and what the Department of Defense implemented ended up being different, so we are here again today with the same organizations in the room, discussing an improved TAP, but also a program that still is not up to spec for our servicemembers.

While some veterans speak highly of TAP, we have heard many more veterans refer to the current TAP program as nothing more than a resume writing workshop. While having an up-to-date resume is an important tool for finding a job, there are so many other tools we can build into TAP to ensure an easier transition process.

We have heard of the success of the Skillbridge program in helping transitioning servicemembers connect with employment. We have heard of the need for more mental health counseling. We have heard of the need for more individualized training sessions, and we have heard of the need for a warm handoff of servicemembers that are at risk of being homeless and food insecure.

We need to be creating more connections like these for our servicemembers.

We also need to ensure that the transition process is started when it is legally required to ensure servicemembers can take advantage of all the tools that are offered to them. It is my understanding that 70 percent of the servicemembers are not beginning this process a year in advance. Delaying the start of transition puts these servicemembers at a distinct disadvantage. It is a disservice to those who have risked their lives for our wonderful country.

Finally, we need to be building in more one on one counseling for transition. This should not be a check the box situation. It should be dedicated to helping each individual servicemember have the tools they need to successfully transition. We owe it to each one of them.

I hope to hear from each of the witnesses in the first panel about what has improved since 2019 and what still needs work.

It is important that the agencies, as well as Congress, works together, especially on this issue.

I also welcome the second panel later this afternoon and hope to hear about what improvements we can make to TAP from their perspective.

As I said during my first hearing as Chairman back in March, this Subcommittee is not bipartisan, it is nonpartisan. This topic reflects that more than any topic I can think of.

I now yield to the Ranking Member for his opening remarks.