

**Remarks Prepared for Delivery by  
U.S. Secretary of Labor Elaine L. Chao  
Salute to Veterans  
U.S. Department of Labor  
Thursday, November 10, 2005**

Thank you, Chick [*Ciccolella, Assistant Secretary, Veterans Employment and Training Services (VETS)*].

And let me thank Captain John Smathers for leading us in the Pledge of Allegiance and Daniel Austin for that beautiful rendition of our National Anthem.

Welcome, everyone, to the U.S. Department of Labor's annual Salute to Veterans.

I want to welcome General Errol Schwartz, the Deputy Commanding General of the D.C. National Guard, and William A. Chatfield, the Director of the U.S. Selective Service. Thank you both for joining us here today.

I want to thank the courageous soldiers who have joined us today from Walter Reed Army Medical Center. They are the very best our country has to offer and we are deeply honored to have them join us here today. Let's give them a warm welcome. [*The Secretary leads applause.*] Thank you.

And let me congratulate the United States Marine Corps on its 230<sup>th</sup> anniversary, which is today. Throughout our country's history, the Marines have led the way in the cause of freedom and democracy. We are very proud of them.

It is a great honor to salute our veterans every year, as we mark this special Veterans Day holiday. In fact, President Bush has declared this week National Veterans Awareness Week.

Our nation must never forget that veterans are the reason why we enjoy the freedoms we have today. I am especially proud to salute the more than 3,200 veterans, Reservists and National Guard members working here at the Labor Department. Some of you are in the audience today. We thank you for your service.

I also want to give a special salute to our country's active duty military men and women. They are serving in harm's way in Iraq, Afghanistan, in many other faraway places and across the homeland. When they are not defending freedom abroad, they are bringing comfort to many here at home, helping victims of the hurricanes. Along with the soldiers from Walter Reed, are there any other active duty military here today? Will you please stand, so we can see you? *[The Secretary leads applause.]* Thank you.

We are proud of our active duty soldiers and our veterans for the sacrifices they have made to defend and promote freedom and democracy. They have given us so much. Now, it's our turn to be there for them.

At the Department of Labor, we are doing everything possible to help veterans transition to the civilian workforce and to protect the rights of returning members of the National Guard and Reserves.

The Labor Department is responsible for enforcing the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Act (USERRA). That's the law that protects the jobs, health insurance coverage and pension benefits of our citizen-soldiers. And we're in the process of making this law more user friendly, so that employers and employees know in plain English just what protections the law provides.

Last month, the Department signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the National Committee for Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve (ESGR). This agreement strengthens our cooperative efforts to protect the jobs and benefits of National Guard and Reserve service members when they return from duty.

At that same event, it was my pleasure to join with war hero and former Senator Bob Dole to kick off the new "Hire Veterans First" campaign. We want employers to "Hire Vets First" when they're looking for highly skilled talent and workplace leaders.

And today I am pleased to make two announcements to strengthen the Labor Department's efforts on the behalf of our nation's veterans.

First, I want to announce a new feature to the REALifelines program launched last fall. REALifelines provides one-on-one employment counseling to wounded and injured service members as they return to civilian life. Through REALifelines, these soldiers are given the personal attention they need and deserve. In the past year, this personal service has helped many transitioning wounded and injured soldiers get jobs and job training.

We want to make this program more accessible to help even more soldiers. And so today, I'm announcing the e-Laws Real Lifelines Advisor. With this new online tool, veterans preparing to enter the civilian workforce can access helpful information and get customized advice to address their individual needs. This special service can be found on the VETS section of the Department's Web site at **[www.dol.gov](http://www.dol.gov)**.

Today, we are also announcing the *Key to Career Success* campaign. This will help veterans leverage the power of the nation's network of 3,500 One-Stop Career Centers. Vets who come into these centers will be given priority service to pursue employment and training opportunities. For those of you who aren't familiar with this network, let me give you a quick summary. It's a nationwide network of government-funded employment centers in every state and major community in our nation. It's staffed with caring professionals who want to help. Deputy Assistant Secretary Mason Bishop will share more about this new effort in a few minutes.

President George W. Bush, his Administration and this Department are *so* proud of our men and women in uniform. We recognize the tremendous debt that our country owes you, which can never be repaid. We also understand that the brave soldiers who serve in our nation's armed forces, do so voluntarily. You serve because you love this country. You are the champions of freedom, without whom the world would be a much more dangerous place. So, as we celebrate Veterans Day, let me reiterate this Administration's profound gratitude and our commitment to help you access the opportunities you have done so much to protect.

May God bless you. And may God bless America.

Now, it is my pleasure to introduce Linda Springer, the Director of the U.S. Office of Personnel Management.

As the President's chief human capital advisor, Director Springer is the steward of the Merit System Principles and Veteran's Preference. These principles help make the Federal workforce a welcoming environment for our nation's veterans. Director Springer brings a wealth of corporate experience and expertise to her role as OPM Director and this Administration is fortunate to count her as a member of the President's team.

She is also responsible for the operating status of the Federal government during national and/or natural disasters, including calling snow days. So, let's give her a very warm welcome.

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