

## SECTION 1

# Introduction

### Background

President George W. Bush established the *Task Force on Returning Global War on Terror Heroes* through Executive Order on March 6, 2007. A copy of the Executive Order is provided in Appendix A.

The President appointed Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Secretary R. James Nicholson to serve as Task Force Chair. Other members of the Task Force included the Secretaries from the Departments of Defense, Labor, Health and Human Services, Housing and Urban Development, and Education as well as the Director of the Office of Management and Budget, the Administrator of the Small Business Administration, and the Director of the Office of Personnel Management.

### Mission

The mission of the Task Force, as outlined in the President's Executive Order, was to:

- (a) identify and examine Federal services and benefits currently provided to returning Global War on Terror (GWOT) servicemembers;
- (b) identify existing gaps in such services;
- (c) seek recommendations from appropriate Federal agencies on ways to fill those gaps as effectively and expeditiously as possible using existing resources; and
- (d) ensure that, in providing services to these servicemembers, appropriate Federal departments and agencies are communicating and cooperating effectively and facilitate the fostering of such agency communications and cooperation through informal and formal means, as appropriate.

## Requirements

The Task Force was given 45 days to submit a Government-wide Action Plan consistent with applicable law that outlines Federal services and benefits for GWOT service men and women, veterans, and families. The charge to the Task Force was to address gaps and to ensure that services and benefits are delivered effectively and as expeditiously as possible. Recommendations of the Task Force were to be constructed within existing executive authority and resources.

## Scope

The Task Force review covered the services and benefits currently being provided by the member agencies of the Task Force. The review did not include services and benefits provided at the state and local levels.

## Methodology

The Task Force employed a multi-faceted approach to determine the manner and extent to which services and benefits are currently being provided (or should be provided) to GWOT servicemembers, veterans, and families. The primary analytical tool utilized was a gap analysis, a three step process that:

- (1) defined what exists,
- (2) identified what is needed or desirable, and
- (3) determined the process to achieve the identified need.

Several targeted announcements to active duty servicemembers, veterans, family members, and others were posted on VA and Task Force websites and disseminated on VA employee pay statements. The Task Force web page explained the Task Force mission to the public. The site invited the public to provide comments and to share ideas to improve Federal services and benefits to GWOT servicemembers with an emphasis on timeliness, ease of application, and efficient delivery. Communication channels were provided: e-mail, dedicated facsimile, and mailing address. Other entities that sponsor web sites frequented by servicemembers and veterans provided a link to the Task Force web page on their sites. Task Force staff reviewed incoming comments and entered comments into a tracking database. Comments within the scope of the Task Force were arrayed by type of service or benefit.

Task Force members conferred with subject matter experts who either work with or represent servicemembers and veterans to gather insight into the gaps they perceived in the timeliness, ease of application, and efficient delivery of services and benefits. The Task Force also received briefings from the Social Security Administration, the Department of Defense, and the Department of Veterans Affairs on Federal disability processes.

The Task Force established seven work groups composed of representatives from member agencies. These work groups focused on services and benefits in the areas of employment, housing and homelessness, education and vocational rehabilitation, outreach, veterans' health care, veterans' benefits, and VA/DoD collaboration. Based on the gap analysis, the work groups developed preliminary recommendations on ways to quickly and effectively fill identified gaps in service and benefits. Recommendations specify a lead agency along with participating agencies as well as implementation strategies with target dates. A Government-wide Action Plan was developed to advance progress of implementing Task Force recommendations.