On August 20, 2008, the Labor Department launched America's Heroes at Work, an online resource that will assist employers in hiring military veterans who have traumatic brain injuries or post-traumatic stress disorder, two increasingly common post-battlefield conditions.

Labor Secretary Elaine L. Chao stated the purpose of the program is to “help these transitioning veterans succeed in the workplace” by establishing “a comprehensive Web site” that “educates employers, human resources professionals, and the workforce system” in how to assist veterans to “return to full, productive lives through work.”

The new America's Heroes at Work Web site (http://www.americasheroesatwork.gov) is intended to provide information for employers about TBI and PTSD as well as guidance on implementing workplace accommodations for affected employees. In addition, it will supply information about job coaching and mentoring programs. The Web site also includes contact information for the Job Accommodation Network, which gives employers personalized assistance with job accommodations for disabled veterans.

“What you’re seeing is a recognition that each war is different. Each war has ‘its signature injuries,’ and TBI and PTSD are those of Iraq and Afghanistan, where service is characterized by successive deployments and ‘frequent blasts’ from roadside bombs.”

Charles S. Ciccolella, Assistant Labor Secretary for Veterans’ Employment and Training

“Approximately 225,000 veterans return from active and reserve military duty each year. Since 2001, American service members have sustained approximately 10,000 traumatic brain injuries, of which 80 percent were relatively minor concussions.

David S. Chu, Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness

Approximately 20 percent of service members returning from Iraq and Afghanistan have symptoms of PTSD or depression, according to a brochure distributed at the press conference.
Vertigo, sleep disturbances, short-term memory loss, and poor concentration are some examples of problems exhibited by people with traumatic brain injuries and post-traumatic stress disorder, speakers said.

**An Understanding Employer**

Mike Bradley, an Army veteran who returned from Iraq in November with TBI and PTSD, credits his success at the national security firm of Halfaker & Associates to having “an employer who understands.” He said company, which was founded by a disabled veteran, allows him to take frequent short breaks, which he said he needs because he often gets “frustrated.” Many accommodations, he said, related to “simple little things to help us relax.”

Neil Romano, assistant labor secretary for disability employment policy, agreed that “the most important accommodation is understanding.” Romano explained that many accommodations are relatively short term and could be as basic as providing a quiet room for an employee who has trouble concentrating or non-fluorescent lighting for an employee whose migraines are triggered by flickering lights.

Hiring veterans is “not just the right thing to do. It’s the smart thing to do.”

 Brigadier General Loree K. Sutton, Director of the Defense Centers of Excellence for Psychological Health & Traumatic Brain Injury

“What greater pool of talent is there than our returning service members? American’s HR professionals stand ready to welcome our returning service members.”

Shirley Davis, diversity director for the Society for Human Resource Management.

America’s Heroes at Work is managed jointly by DOL’s Office of Disability Employment Policy and Veterans’ Employment and Training Service in collaboration with other federal agencies, including the Defense, Veterans Affairs, Health and Human Services, and Education departments, and the Social Security Administration.

Often, on-the-job challenges of TBI and PTSD can be addressed with simple supports such as alarm clocks, scheduled rest breaks, memory/time management aids, adaptive technology and lighting adjustments. Other practices include job sharing, coaching and mentoring programs.

Go the America’s Heroes website link below. You can select from fact sheets and reference guides, presentations and training tools or just read about real-life success stories. There is also a section for commonly asked questions employers have regarding the hiring of our returning service members with TBI and/or PTSD. www.americasheroesatwork.gov/resources.html