By Karen Parrish
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, May 15, 2012 - Unemployed veterans ages 35 to 60 can apply for up to 12 months of paid training through a new program sponsored by the Departments of Labor and Veterans Affairs.

VA officials said the population the Veterans Retraining Assistance Program will serve is particularly in need. Of about 900,000 U.S. veterans who are unemployed, nearly two-thirds are between 35 and 60, according to the Labor Department.

The program, which began today, provides 12 months of training assistance equal to the monthly full-time payment rate under the Montgomery GI Bill-Active Duty program, which currently pays $1,473 per month.

Participants must be enrolled in a community college or technical school program approved for VA benefits. The program must lead to an associate degree, non-college degree or certificate.

To qualify, a veteran also must:

-- Be unemployed on the day of application;

-- Have a discharge that is not dishonorable;

-- Not be eligible for any other VA education benefit program, such as the Post-9/11 GI Bill or Montgomery GI Bill;

-- Not receive VA compensation for being unemployable;

-- Not be enrolled in a federal or state job training program; and

-- Pursue a program that leads to employment in one of 210 occupations the Labor Department designates as high-demand.

The list of occupations, available on the VA website, includes jobs in construction, machine operation, transportation, preschool education, health care and many other fields.

The program will fund up to 45,000 participants between July 1 and Sept. 30, and an additional 54,000 participants from Oct. 1, 2012 through March 31, 2014. Labor officials said the department will offer employment assistance to every veteran who completes the program.

The retraining program is funded under the VOW to Hire Heroes Act of 2011. The law expanded education and training for veterans, strengthened the Transition Assistance Program for service members returning to civilian life, and provides tax credits for employers who hire unemployed or disabled veterans.

Eligible veterans may call 800-827-1000 to learn more about the program, or visit the websites listed below.

Related Sites:

Veterans Retraining Assistance Program [http://gibill.va.gov/benefits/other_programs/vrap.html]

Veterans On-Line Application [https://www.ebenefits.va.gov/ebenefits-portal/ebenefits.portal?

_nfpb=true&_portlet.async=false&_pageLabel=ebenefits_myeb_vonapp1
]