

## 10.11.17 Testimony re: H.R. 3018, Veterans' Entry to Apprenticeship Act to the HVAC Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity

Subcommittee Chairman Arrington, Ranking Member

O'Rourke, and members of the subcommittee on Economic Opportunity: thank you for having me here today to speak about an issue of immense importance to our servicemembers: the transition from service life to civilian life. Having served in the United States Air Force myself for 26 years, I know how difficult it can be to navigate the job search as a private citizen. My bill, the Veterans' Entry to Apprenticeship Act (H.R. 3018), will ease this process for our outgoing servicemembers by allowing them to use the education benefits they have already earned to participate in pre-apprenticeship programs that are proven to increase the likelihood of gainful employment. At a time when our veterans are seeing daunting rates of underemployment and our national skills-based workforce is shrinking, we must find creative solutions to bolster the resources we are offering our veterans.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates that, in 2016, the annual unemployment rate for post-9/11 veterans was 5.1 percent, compared to the national average of about 4.6 percent.<sup>1</sup> Although we have seen unemployment rates decrease veterans overall since 2011, their rate of underemployment is actually increasing. In fact, in 2016, more than 27,000 veterans were getting help from grantees – a 23 percent growth over 2015.<sup>2</sup> In other words, while more veterans are finding jobs, they aren't finding the *right* jobs that allow them to take care of their families, advance their careers, or find new career paths. Many veterans today have to work two or even three jobs just to make ends meet.

What's worse is that we know that businesses and organizations *want* to hire veterans. According to a 2016 report by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce's Hiring Our Heroes program found that veterans were ranked third on employers' list for priority recruitment, behind women and candidates with advanced degrees. But while evidence shows that businesses across the country want to hire and train veterans, many cannot attract

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<sup>1</sup> [BLS, 2016](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Military Times, March 2017](#)

untrained veterans to their programs due to basic fees the veterans are unable to pay out of pocket after they return from service.

Additionally, our nation is facing a growing shortage of qualified skills-based and trade-based workers. According to a study conducted in 2012, 53 percent of skilled US workers were 45 years or older and 20 percent were over the age of 55. This shortage is even greater for employees in highly technical fields, like cybersecurity.

It's imperative that we attract a new, younger workforce willing to apply themselves in these highly technical fields if we hope to remain competitive in the global economy.

A way to fix this problem is to make it easier for veterans to take advantage of apprenticeship programs in skills-based fields. In particular, the Department of Labor has endorsed pre-apprenticeship programs as a path to helping individuals learn about new careers, acquire new, trade-based skills, qualify to meet minimum standards for other federal apprenticeship programs, and get a leg-up on apprenticeship applications.

However, currently, GI Bill benefits may not be used to supplement the cost of Department of Labor approved pre-apprenticeship training in skilled industries. This simply does not make any sense.

the Veterans' Entry to Apprenticeship Act would remedy this issue by requiring the Department of Veterans Affairs to allow post-9/11 GI Bill benefits to be used to cover costs of pre-apprenticeship programs in addition to apprenticeship programs.

This is a common sense step that would provide veterans with additional resources to acquire new skills, give businesses a cost-effective path to a younger, willing workforce, and provide a pipeline of new workers in highly technical fields for the future workforce.

With an increasing number of post-9/11 veterans looking to enter the workforce and an estimated 453,000 veterans facing unemployment, now is the perfect time to encourage our warfighters to pursue careers in high-demand occupations. Expanding job training opportunities for veterans not only makes sense for our veterans, but is also a win for businesses.

Again, thank you for allowing me to speak on this important issue for our veterans and for our national economy.

Additionally, I would like to thank the 13 other cosponsors, many of which are members of this committee, as well as the various outside groups including: the National Guard Association of the United States, the Reserve Officers Association, the Enlisted Association of the National Guard of the United States, the National Roofing Contractors Association, the National Association of Home Builders, and the Associated General Contractors of America for their support.