



DEE MARGO
MAYOR

August 28, 2020

House Committee on International Relations & Economic Development
Representative Rafael Anchia, Chair and Representative John Frullo, Vice Chairman
Via email to jeff.madden_hc@house.texas.gov

Re: Interim Charge 5: Review the connection between the economic vitality of business and industry and the economic vitality of our military veterans transitioning into the workforce. Specifically, the committee should analyze barriers to military veterans transitioning from active duty to civilian life, the effectiveness of government transition and training benefits, and current and ongoing demand for veteran and military spouse employment from industry in Texas.

Dear Chairman Anchia, Vice Chairman Frullo and Committee members:

As the Mayor of the City of El Paso, I want to thank the Committee for allowing the City to submit this information in relation to the above interim charge. I appreciate the efforts of the Committee, during these extraordinary times, to continue with their legislative work. El Paso, as a military community and home to Fort Bliss, supports the efforts of this Committee to address the needs of veterans as they transition from military service to civilian life. The City provides the following information concerning the above interim charge.

The City's human resources department has identified barriers to military veterans transitioning from active duty to civilian life and workforce. The military has more than 7,000 jobs across more than 100 functional areas which many have a direct civilian-job equivalent. Through their military service, transitioning service members have gained subject matter expertise, years of on-the-job training and advanced skills in such fields as information technology, transportation logistics, supply-chain management, public relations, medical, security and safety operations, and management level leadership skills that translate to careers and jobs within the civilian workforce. In fact, veterans acquire what human resource refers to as intangible skills that are productive and highly sought after skills in the civilian workforce such as leadership and teamwork, mission driven, problem-solving and decision making skills, ability to adapt quickly to unexpected situations, high standards in ethics, safety and security, and ability to work with large, diverse groups of people. However, because these intangible skills are hard to define and difficult to translate into civilian employment forms, this creates a language barrier.

The following quote from former President George W. Bush expresses this problem more clearly, “Hiring managers tend to look for many of the same skills in job candidates. ... However, ‘sniper’ doesn’t tend to be one of them.” Chances are, “the vice president of human relations is going to say, ‘We don’t need one this year.’ ” Conversely, had that veteran “put on the application form that they have a lot of experience dealing with pressure, that they’re a team player, that they’re loyal to a cause greater than themselves, [that] they understand how to follow instructions, that they’re a responsible citizen, [the] vice president would be more likely to say, ‘That’s the kind of person we want working for us.’ ... Veterans and employers have a hard time translating military experience. There’s a language barrier.”

The civilian employers’ (public and private) perception of veterans’ skills and abilities is one of the biggest obstacles to veteran hiring. It is critical that human resource professionals and hiring officials understand military skill sets and how these skills translate to the industry to ensure that this talent pool is tapped into for employment opportunities. Human resource professionals must become educated and bring awareness to their companies about the difficulties that transitioning service members face as they try to maneuver through the public/private employment industries and their specific employment practices and procedures. Such as: how and where to conduct job searches, creating resumes that translate their military experience to the civilian workforce jobs (veterans may not know how to express their military experience or education that will get them noticed by hiring officials), often their interview skills may be inadequate and may not meet expectations of civilian hiring officials. Additionally, human resource departments need to lead and promote initiatives to hire veterans within their organization and educate hiring officials on the benefits of hiring veterans.

Recommendations

1. Improve or create programs within the organization that provide “cultural sensitivity” training or awareness for employees that will be interacting and working with veterans. These programs should provide for a better understanding of the specific issues and difficulties that veterans, who are transitioning into the civilian workforce, may have and the differences of working with civilians as opposed to military soldiers.
2. Allocate recruitment resources strategically by tracking which job fairs and other recruitment efforts that target transitioning veterans and spouses. Attending job fairs is important, but also providing internal human resource services to this group where they can obtain information on application and hiring procedures, job opportunities that align with their experience and education and best fits their career goals. Provide resources on creating resumes that apply to civilian jobs, and provide educational sessions/resources to improve or develop their interviewing skills to adapt to the civilian “job” interview.
3. Take advantage of federal resources to connect with and train veterans early in the transition process as well as creating partnerships with established community based programs or centers that help connect military job seekers and employers such as the Texas Workforce Commission and military spouse employment programs.

4. Invest resources in onboarding, career development and retention once the veteran is hired to ensure that organization gets their return on investment – do not just focus on recruitment.

5. Track veteran recruitment, performance and retention metrics to gain a deeper understanding of which strategies are most effective and which offer the greatest return on investment.

In summary, a better understanding by recruiting and hiring personnel of how the knowledge, skills and experience gained through military service translate into civilian workforce skills would allow for a more successful transition from military service into the civilian workforce. However, it is also important to understand that the transition does not stop once a veteran is hired. There needs to be an awareness that transitioning efforts should continue so that the veteran can effectively succeed once hired.

If additional information is needed on this issue, please contact the City's legislative attorney, Lupe Cuellar, at 915-555-1702 or at CuellarG@elpasotexas.gov. Thank you for your leadership and efforts in preparing for the upcoming legislative session in these most difficult of times. Such efforts will keep the great State of Texas safe and strong.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Dee Margo". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Dee" and last name "Margo" clearly distinguishable.

Dee Margo
Mayor, El Paso, Texas