LICENSING AND CREDENTIALING OF MILITARY SKILLS

The Department of Defense provides some of the best vocational training in the nation for its military personnel and there are many occupational career fields in the armed forces that can easily translate to a civilian counterpart; however, there are many occupations in the civilian workforce that require a license or certification. Every year, skilled service members leaving the armed forces miss out on the chance to quickly move into good, high-paying, career-building jobs because they must undergo lengthy and expensive retraining in order to meet civilian licensure and certification requirements, often for the same type of jobs they held in the military. This time-consuming and costly waste of valuable human resources costs the veteran through forced underemployment, costs business because skilled workers are unavailable, and costs the economy due to delayed job creation and consumer spending, and unnecessary unemployment compensation insurance payments.

In 1997, The American Legion commissioned a report entitled *Study of Civilian Licensure and Certification for Veterans*. The report detailed the problem of civilian credentialing of military training which veterans face, specifically focusing on the areas of aircraft maintenance and healthcare. In the past, the barriers have included resistance to credentialing from both the military and civilian sectors. The military once held the view that making it easier for troops to get out would reduce retention and hurt the military. The last few years, however, have seen a major cultural shift for the military, with top defense officials offering support, as well as expanded support, for veteran credentialing on Capitol Hill.

For example, in November, 2011 Congress passed the *VOW to Hire Heroes Act*, which requires the Department of Labor to take a hard look at how to translate military skills and training to civilian sector jobs, and will work to make it easier to get the licenses and certification our veterans need. Congress has also passed the *Veteran Skills to Jobs Act of 2012* which directs the head of each federal department and agency to treat relevant military training as sufficient to satisfy training or certification requirements for a federal license. The Department of Defense, at the President’s direction, has established a *Military Credentialing and Licensing Task Force*. The task force will focus its initial efforts on industries that have an identified need for more skilled workers and stand to benefit from military expertise and training, including: manufacturing, first responders, healthcare, information technology, transportation, and logistics. Within one year, the task force will: (1) identify military specialties that readily transfer to high-demand jobs; (2) work with civilian credentialing and licensing associations to address gaps between military training programs and credentialing and licensing requirements;
and (3) provide service members with greater access to necessary certification and licensing exams.

However, the federal government only plays a limited role in the certification and licensing arena; state and local governments and the private sector play a much larger role, issuing far more worker credentials affecting far more occupations and workers than the federal government. To make the largest impact possible for veterans, all the parties involved in credentialing must be included, which means the federal government, all branches of the military, 50 states and the District of Columbia, professional, business and association certifying entities, unions, the business community, community colleges, and technical schools.

Nevertheless, the federal government is uniquely situated and obligated to take the lead on this, not only to overcome old attitudes, but to set an example for state and local government agencies which grant occupational licenses and set certain professional standards.

Done right, these new initiatives will help ensure former servicemen and women’s specialized military training meets civilian standards for credentialing and licensing, which will save the government money and provide industry with a fully qualified and job-ready workforce. The American Legion encourages continued initiatives to build upon and help accelerate efforts to put returning veterans to work using skills developed in the military and stands ready to assist all parties in this process.

The American Legion continues its efforts to bridge the gap between military training and civilian licensing and credentialing through support of legislation, as well as roundtable meetings in which various sectors are able to gather and discuss coordination in this regard, including one at the 2012 convention, which included representatives from the Departments of Defense, Labor, and Transportation, the U.S. Office of Personnel Management, the National Governors Association, Congress and the public and private sectors.

The House recently passed legislation (HR 4057) which included a provision sponsored by Rep. Steve Stivers (HR 4115) that would make consideration of military training and experience for state licenses and credentials a condition of receiving Labor Department employment and training funds. Senator Mark Pryor has a companion bill (S. 3235). We encourage support for this bill.

Additionally, Representative Larry Bucshon (IN) has introduced HR 6456, the Military CDL Act, aimed at allowing military members to be issued commercial driver’s licenses. This bill is the House companion to S. 3624, which has already passed in the Senate. The American Legion urges support for HR 6456, which would continue the momentum toward the combating of veteran unemployment.