

GI JOBS

States are helping veterans find good jobs based on the training and education they received in the military.

BY JAMES B. REED

When millions of veterans flooded home after World War II, the federal GI Bill helped them pay for their education, find a job and survive unemployment. Most agree the legislation fueled job growth, helped the economy absorb the new workers and created a new cadre of entrepreneurs. The economic boom that followed lifted millions of Americans into the middle class.

Today, tens of thousands of service men and women are returning home from the Middle East and the post-9/11 GI Bill helps them assimilate, as do many other services offered by all levels of government, nonprofit organizations and private businesses.

The real key to veterans adjusting to life back home is finding a good job. But even with the support, the tough job market and sluggish economy makes that difficult. Veterans and their wives and husbands face some unique obstacles in finding and retaining civilian jobs, even when they have marketable skills.

Many have received specialized training in the military for jobs that would require a state occupational license or credential in the civilian world. But military preparation isn't always recognized or valued in the civilian world.

And that's where state lawmakers are trying to make a difference.

Experience Counts

"Montana is working hard to get separating and retiring service members to work," says Senator Elsie Arntzen (R) of Montana, adding that the state's unemployment rate for post-9/11 veterans is 17.5 percent, while the state average is only 5.7



Senator
Elsie Arntzen (R)
Montana

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—REPRESENTATIVE DAN SADDLER (R) ALASKA

percent. "It is critical that we give recognition for military service and training for state licensing, to help these Montanans transition into jobs in the private workforce."

Several state legislatures have made changes to occupational licensing requirements to more readily recognize and accept military training, education and experience, particularly in jobs related to military specialties.

States regulate hundreds of occupations, mostly in the health field, through various boards and agencies. Typically, to qualify for a license, four elements are considered: a person's formal education, work experience, score on the licensing exam, and basic qualifications such as citizenship and residency.

Maryland lawmakers, in 2007, passed some of the first legislation requiring state licensing agencies to work together to identify barriers veterans face in using their military health care training and experience to qualify for state licenses. Since then, most state legislatures have considered how best to ease the red tape for veterans in their states.

The most common policy change, made so far in 34 states, has been to allow military training, education and



Health Care Vets

Few military health care licenses transfer to civilian jobs, making it surprisingly difficult for veterans to find jobs even though states face shortages in the health care workforce. Army medics, for example, receive national emergency medical technician certification—recognized in 46 states—yet often are required to meet additional requirements to obtain a valid state license.

The U.S. Department of Labor anticipates significant growth in health care jobs by 2020, including more than 1.2 million jobs for registered nurses and nearly 370,000 for licensed practical nurses. Health care aides, pharmacy technicians, physical therapists, physical therapy assistants and physician assistants are also expected to be in high demand.

To streamline the transition from military to civilian health care professions, lawmakers in at least eight states have passed legislation requiring state boards of health to consider relevant military education, training and experience.

Utah and Virginia are focusing on emergency medical technicians, while Oregon, Virginia and Washington are targeting various medical professions.

Georgia developed specific nurse licensing requirements for former military medical corpsmen and paramedics. Iowa and Maryland directed their departments of veterans' affairs to focus on helping direct veterans to fields where there is a shortage of workers. And 32 states offer loan repayment programs to primary care providers—both former military and civilian—who commit to working in medically underserved areas for at least two years.

—Megan Comlossy



Representative
Dan Saddler (R)
Alaska



Representative
Tanya Pullin (D)
Kentucky



Representative
Tom Sloan (R)
Kansas



Senator
Ed Harbison (D)
Georgia

experience to count when considering an occupational license. Another nine states are still considering the issue.

“Americans in military service receive world-class training, education and experience during their time in uniform, assets that shouldn’t be lost to them or to our communities as they transition to civilian careers,” says Alaska Representative Dan Saddler (R). His legislation, enacted this year, requires most state licensing boards, the University of Alaska and vocational education facilities to accept relevant military training and experience when making occupational licensing decisions and granting educational credits.

“I think we have an obligation to find ways to give veterans every opportunity to apply their military experience to academic credit, job certification or vocation training credits.” Kentucky Representative Tanya Pullin (D) believes in doing “more than talk of hiring veterans.” She sponsored successful legislation this year to ease licensing requirements specifically for firefighters and emergency medical technicians. She chairs the House Veterans Military Affairs and Public Safety Committee, which will conduct hearings during the interim to assess the progress of boards and commissions in recognizing military training.

Kansas Representative Tom Sloan (R) sponsored successful legislation this year to, among other things, better evaluate certificates and training curriculum provided by the U.S. Department

of Defense. State officials are working with staff from the DoD to train state regulatory agency staff on the new requirements.

A similar bill has passed the House in Georgia and is now under consideration in the Senate. Senator Ed Harbison (D) is “encouraged by the efforts of both the legislative body and the governor’s office to remove unnecessary obstacles” to the licensing of military members and their spouses.

Several private sector efforts also focus on helping veterans find good jobs. A few include:

- ◆ The “Troops to Energy Jobs” program spearheaded by the Center for Energy Workforce Development.
- ◆ Walmart’s commitment to hire 125,000 veterans over the next few years.
- ◆ The U.S. Chamber of Commerce’s “Hiring Our Heroes” program that holds job fairs in 400 communities annually.

A Federal Push

A U.S. Department of Defense task force, created in 2012, is working to close gaps between military training and civilian licensing requirements as well. Working with state legislators, regulators, educators and business leaders, the group

A Source for Ideas

Kansas Representative Tom Sloan (R) says his idea to study the Department of Defense’s materials and requirements in order to better evaluate how similar and transferrable they are to state requirements was a “direct result of the NCSL-DoD partnership and the Military & Veterans Affairs Task Force.”

These NCSL groups are a great way for lawmakers and staff to receive information from NCSL targeted to their interests, as well as share sensible solutions, talk about successful strategies and learn lessons from colleagues dealing with the same challenges around the country.

is trying to find an effective way to determine equivalence between military and civilian training programs, particularly for bus and truck drivers, emergency medical technicians, paramedics and licensed practical nurses.

“Fast Track to Civilian Employment,” a February 2013 report by the Executive Office of the President, outlines the barriers and makes the case that skills learned in the military are transferable to civilian jobs. “Our veterans bring an important set of skills to the job market,” says Frank C. DiGiovanni, senior director of Training and Readiness Strategy at the Department of Defense. “Among them are extraordinary leadership skills, finely tuned problem solving capabilities and working harmoniously as a member of a team.”

He goes on to say how essential state involvement is to the mission’s success. “To this end, state legislators have been outstanding partners,” he says, by introducing bills that recognize the value of military training.

Although few object to helping veterans find employment, state licensing agencies or professional organizations that administer the certifications or exams have expressed concern about how to evaluate military training fairly, for both the veterans and the other professionals who took the civil route to credentials.

A lack of common standards for both training routes as well as a lack of experience by colleges and technical schools on how military programs might translate into academic credits can hinder efforts. Without common standards, it is more difficult for state licensing agencies and academic institutions to evaluate the equivalency of military training and experience accurately.

Professions such as doctors, dentists and certified public accountants have opposed some of these efforts. The Hawaii Association of Public Accountants, for example, testified against a bill this year, expressing concern that, “Self-vetting by military-affiliated applicants by affidavit while others must undergo regular vetting for protection of the public will create an unacceptable two-class system.” Such opposition compelled the Hawaii committee considering the bill to expressly not apply the bill’s intent to CPAs.

Double Trouble

Spouses with state-specific licenses (about a third of all) face similar challenges because of frequent transfers to other states where requirements often differ.

About 15 percent of military spouses move across state lines in any given year, often requiring them to get re-licensed or recertified, depending on their occupation. Teaching and nursing are the top two occupations for military spouses and both require state-specific licensure.

Thirty-eight states have either laws or executive orders requiring an expedited license process for military spouses.

At the federal level, a study by the U.S. Departments of Treasury and Defense recommends that states:

- ◆ Support the endorsement of a current license from another jurisdiction as long as the requirements are substantially equivalent.
- ◆ Provide a temporary license to allow time to fulfill any missing requirements.
- ◆ Expedite application procedures by simplifying approvals and streamlining needed documentation.

Two more ways states can help servicemen and women is to allow members of the National Guard and Reserve to keep their occupation licenses while serving on active duty. Twenty-five do so now and nine more states have pending legislation. Six states allow reciprocity of licensing by granting a valid but temporary license. 

Keep on Truckin’

Logical jobs for many veterans who have learned to maneuver Hummers, tanks and other military vehicles through the rough terrain of Iraq and Afghanistan are professional truck and bus drivers.

The nation is expected to need about 300,000 more truck drivers by 2020, according to the White House Council of Economic Advisers. Close to 10,000 military truck drivers left the service last year, with more coming next year. Civilian truck drivers earn a median hourly wage of about \$18, well above the nation’s average median wage.

After a federal rule was issued in 2011, states were allowed to accept two years of military driving experience in lieu of the behind-the-wheel driving test. Forty-six states so far have chosen to do so, and two are considering it. Applicants must still pass the written exam to receive a commercial driver’s license.

Virginia created the “Troops to Trucks” program in the Virginia Department of Motor Vehicles to work with military bases to train new drivers. It targets those with less than the required two years’ experience driving a commercial vehicle.

Another new federal law allows states to exempt military personnel from state residency requirements for commercial drivers. Texas lawmakers recently passed legislation to allow this.

—Alice Wheat

GI Bill

Signed into law by President Franklin D. Roosevelt on June 22, 1944, the GI Bill allowed millions of soldiers returning from World War II to go to college and buy houses, thanks to its generous grants, subsidies and home loan guaranties.

It also softened the impact on the job market by steering some returning soldiers into college.

Unemployment assistance was the most controversial benefit to get included and ended up being the least used among veterans. They collected less than 20 percent of the funds set aside for it.

But the other provisions were history-making, according to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. By 1952, the Veterans Administration had backed nearly 2.4 million home loans, and by the time the original GI Bill program ended in 1956, almost half the veterans (7.8 million of 16 million) had participated in an education or training program.

The GI Bill was revamped in 1984 and again in 2008. The Post 9/11 GI Bill’s enhanced educational benefits for those who were serving on or after Sept. 11, 2001, include up to 36 months of tuition, a living allowance, money for books and the ability to transfer unused educational benefits to spouses or children.

—Mary Winter

ONLINE

For more information on NCSL’s resources on veterans’ issues as well as partnerships and task forces, go to www.ncsl.org