

The following is based on recommendations from Task Force Members and Veterans and has been blended into combined responses

STATE:

The Utah Department of Veterans Affairs - This is the only state agency that is totally qualified and dedicated to assisting Veterans in all aspects of obtaining benefits and services earned due to military service.

The Utah Department of Workforce Services - Is a multi-faceted agency servicing the entire population. Their service to veterans is fragmented and split between several competing priorities. As their income stream is derived from different areas, they necessarily divide resources in order to meet the differing requirements and priorities.

Health and Human Services - agencies that services the entire population and doesn't have the Veteran and his or her needs as a primary concern.

Department of Education - A huge beneficiary of the monies that Veterans being as a result of their service (GI Bill). They also provide a tremendous foundation for transitioning service members that are starting civilian careers but once again they are multi-faceted, not only within each institution but are not coordinated within the state. Each has their own priorities and values with regards to Veterans.

There are other state agencies that could be addressed but the conclusion to be drawn is that Veterans are a side business or after thought for all but one state agency. If the veterans of this state are to receive the service the leadership professes they deserve then the resources need to be consolidated under one office. This would require dedicated support resources and personnel that are capable of providing veterans with all necessary information and support need to be identified, trained and located on a permanent basis throughout the state. One agency should be responsible for the coordination and professional competency of those professing to be resources for veterans.

Veterans throughout the state should have one local point of contact to go to for assistance whether it is to apply for disability benefits, register with the Veterans Health Care Administration, obtain employment assistance,

be introduced to local educational opportunities, seek counseling, etc. One POC in a community would be a significant improvement in alleviating the confusion that exists within the veteran community and undoubtedly improve the service provided.

Federal agencies should have only one POC for providing resources to Utah veterans and that should be the only one that would know the needs of the entire veteran's community

The services the State of Utah provides to Veterans is fragmented and lacks collaboration. To a great degree, the state agencies function in silos that create inefficiencies resulting in increased tax burdens to the tax payer and an uncoordinated approach to supporting the Veterans. The lead state agency for Veterans issues, Utah Department of Veterans Affairs (UDVA), provides outreach services to veterans to make them aware of the resources that are available and assist the veteran in applying for the benefits that they have earned. In addition, the UDVA outreach workers also provide information on employment opportunities through the Utah Veterans and Military Employment Coalition. The staff support for UDVA is limited and UDVA does not have funding for a formal public affairs/relations officer even though much of what they do is outreach and education.

The Department of Workforce (DWS) services is the lead state agency for employment matters and also employs outreach workers to provide information on employment opportunities for Veterans. Many of these employees are assigned Veterans duties for 50% of their time and the remainder of their time is spent on social services for non-veterans. Some of the staff assigned to the Veteran's division are not veterans themselves which creates barriers between the Veterans community and DWS. This is similar to asking a Caucasian employee to conduct outreach services with a minority/refugee community. There is no common understanding/ground between the service provider and their client.

Recognizing the growing problem of veterans and guard/reserve unemployment, a number of community members began meeting in 2012 to address the problem. Rather than introduce another program, the group felt Utah could be most successful by creating a coalition of Federal, State, local government agencies and the private sector and local chambers of commerce. The purpose of the coalition was not to take charge, but to create a collaboration forum for all of the entities involved in veterans employment issues to work together to address the issue and leverage the resources that each brings to the table. In May 2011 the Utah Veterans and Military Employment Coalition was officially launched. The coalition included members from DWS, UDVA, VA, ESGR, the Salt Lake, Davis, Ogden/Weber and United States Chambers of Commerce as well as representatives from local businesses and education to name a

few. An underlying hope of the coalition was to bridge the gaps between the state agencies and find more in the way of efficiencies.

Thoughts regarding Utah's approach to its Veterans being reintegrated from military to civilian life:

Utah allocates very little funding for veterans service as a proportion of its overall budget. Most other states provide significant monetary and manpower resources for this purpose. Because of such small funding, the Utah Department of Veterans Affairs has to resort to outside groups (DAV, American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars, Military Order of the Purple Heart) to provide OUTREACH efforts to make veterans aware of the federal and state benefits they have earned through their service. Because of the funding shortages, this means very few of the vets in outlying areas are aware of the services they have earned.

The US Department of Labor sends over one million dollars to Utah every year for veterans outreach efforts. These funds are mostly allocated to the Utah Department of Workforce Services, and are used for Disabled Veterans Outreach Program specialists (DVOP) and Local Veterans Employment Representatives (LVERs). All these folks are to be housed in Employment Centers (EC's) around the state. The early federal model for their use was to provide Veterans only advice and services. Most of these folks would spend considerable time each week visiting employers, trying to scare up meaningful jobs to be set aside specifically for Veterans.

When Utah consolidated its work-related efforts into the Department of Workforce Services, the first Director lobbied fiercely to have all federal dollars given to the state come in Block Grants; his wish was granted. Very shortly thereafter, the Department declared that all those who worked in the EC's would become specialists in EVERY function the EC's were tasked with, including the LVER's and DVOP's. Most of the visiting of employers by these specialists was stopped.

Invariably, when a veteran walks through the EC doors, he isn't sent to the LVER/DVOP, but instead to the next available case worker, who may or may not have the training and empathy to deal with the needs of the veteran. The September issue of the American Legion Magazine, on page 38, has a story about North Dakota's (ND) system of county Veterans officers. The County Commissioners, or their Chair, appoints the County Service Officer, provides in the county budget for office space, phones and supplies, as well as a stipend to the worker. Often, the county also provides a vehicle for the appointee, to travel within the county searching out vets to provide services to.

According to the story and my own on-site discussions with ND veterans, this system is working very well, especially in counties far removed from population centers. Most of the North Dakota population is located along the eastern border with Minnesota (a

river) or in the Northwest where private companies are drilling oil wells. A situation not unlike Utah's Wasatch Front and the oil industry currently burgeoning in the Vernal area. Over 15% of the workers in these areas are veterans coming from all over the United States. Since each of these workers is living and residing in North Dakota (because of their jobs), much of their Veterans Administration (VA) benefit dollars are spent in North Dakota.

If Utah were to adopt the North Dakota model of using local Certified Veterans Service Officers in most or all its counties, the task of providing information and claims assistance would be localized, the state would see a precipitous increase in veterans getting the benefits which the federal government makes available for them. Those federal dollars would be pumped into Utah's economy, making a significant difference to many of the rural counties' bottom line. Through implementation of the above, those rural vets who need medical services are mostly relying on local private providers. Often the veterans needs require specialized care and equipment. Mostly, those are not locally available. However, they can and should be met through the VA medical programs. This can only take place if the vet is made aware of the services available, and their FREE nature.

In short, Mr. Chairman, Utah vets have earned benefits through their military service, the benefits are available in Utah, if only the vet and their families knew about them.

RECOMMEND:

- That Utah DVOP's and LVER come under the control (and funding) of Utah Department of Veterans Affairs.
- That Utah county commissioners be encouraged to implement the North Dakota model of providing Certified Veterans Service Officers in each county.
- Unfortunately, the silos created by some of the state agencies, DWS in particular, have prevented the group from fulfilling its goal of maximum collaboration.

The Task force should consider a more thorough evaluation of services by DWS and UDVA and consider moving, or enhancing, services, programs, and functions to UDVA to create a more collaborative and holistic approach to serving our veterans.

Implementation of the following will have immediate and maximized impact on Veterans and their families.

Recommend Courses of Actions:

- State of Utah Higher Education
- Reevaluation of ACE College credits for Veterans.
- Establish Veterans Centers at each State college, and other colleges with a veteran population over 50 students (Use SLCC as a model)
- Hire VA Work Study Students, (Federal funded, SLCC has 10) at the College Veteran Centers to assist with coordination of tutors, enrollment etc. They supplement state funded enrollment staff. Larger colleges having 3 or 4 state workers you could have 2 with VA Work Study students.
- A full-time Veteran's liaison program manager at each college to assist and coordination transfer of military (ACE) credits to college credits and manage Veteran Center.
- Student Veteran's Centers should include:
- Study area with Computers; Outreach services for Employment; Job Club's; VA medical enrollment; VA mental health; Vocation Rehab; GI Bill; VRAP.
- Introduce of portions of Military One Source CE curriculum in to sociology, psychology, Social welfare classes to include faculty, staff and Graduate student.
- Department of Workforce Services
- 24hr Veterans Priority of Service when posting jobs
- All State agencies required to post jobs with DWS.
- Introduce of portions of Military One Source CE curriculum into employee training, annual veteran priority of service briefs and sustainment training.
- 360 referrals to local VA Vet Centers as an additional pathway to employment.
- Provide outreach assistance at new College Veteran Centers using labor market information and job search networking to establish Job Clubs and employment workshops

Veterans Team recommendations to VRTF Sept 5 2012

- Reevaluation of "Utah's Occupational Star Ratings" for training purposes to better serve Veterans and spouses. The largest barrier to employment for veterans and their families is an education.
- State Vocation Rehabilitation
- Training is also tied to DWS "Utah's Occupational Star Ratings"
- Utah Department of Health
- Introduce of portions of Military One Source CE curriculum into employee training, and annual sustainment training.
- Rural Outreach
- Additional outreach in rural areas (Utah Veterans Nursing homes, Veteran Centers and employment offices, etc.)
- Law Enforcement/Legal Services
- Introduce portions of Military One Source CE curriculum into academy training, sustainment training