

READER COMMENT

Reader Comment: Veterans education and workforce development

Sen. Mike Crapo



Veterans serve on the front lines of our national defense, sacrificing for country, community, family, friends and fellow soldiers. Many people's thoughts may go directly to how we can honor this service by better supporting our troops in combat or in memory; however, there is another component that equally deserves our consideration: supporting service members when they leave the service and return home.

As veterans know, military service is not a one-time event—it is a defining part of a veteran's life and identity, a dedication to service that can continue to be drawn on to benefit their communities. With our nation's economic growth accelerating by the day and Idaho at the front of growth as the fastest growing state, one would expect those who gained such valuable skills and leadership experience in the military would have limitless opportunities after leaving military service. While a service member's potential is boundless, many still face disproportionately higher levels of unemployment and challenges to transitioning to civilian life, which can lead to joblessness, homelessness, and loss of hope and identity.

Research and anecdotal evidence point to the transition period between a service member's military service and civilian life as a critical juncture that can significantly impact the trajectory of their life after service. It is therefore crucial we hone in on this period of a veteran's life to ensure they receive training, guidance and assistance needed to make the most of their opportunities.

This work touches a multitude of agencies and community players. For this reason, I have been proud to lead a group of stakeholders representing veterans, military branches, labor specialists, employers, and others, to explore ways we, at the community, state and federal levels, can improve post-service support and outcomes for transitioning veterans and make our state more than just veteran-friendly, but veteran-ready. The dedicated members of this group, the Veterans Education and Workforce Development Coalition, formed earlier this year, have

already been making an impact on the lives of service members and veterans both within and outside Idaho.

In November, I took part in an event to highlight some of the coalition's work to increase opportunities for jobs and education for veterans in the state. The impact includes a 65-percent increase in applications by Idaho businesses to establish apprenticeship and on-the-job training programs in Idaho for veterans; more than 40 Idaho businesses trained in how to be "vet-ready" to recruit, retain and support employees who are veterans; several separating service members receiving jobs in Idaho; and progress in state-wide efforts to develop a standard crosswalk for applicability of military experience to academic pursuits and civilian careers.

The concept of the coalition emerged after a meeting my staff had with the Idaho National Lab about how to connect job-seeking veterans with in-demand Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) positions, for which they are often well-suited because of their military background. I incorporated the coalition's feedback and supplemented its efforts with the introduction of two bills: 1) S. 3299, to improve the federal program that helps service members transition from military service back to civilian life; and 2) S. 3310, to support community-based organizations that act as "hubs" of services and assistance to transitioning service members and their families.

When a veteran transitions to Idaho after the military, he or she should receive more than just a warm welcome with words—we as a community should also step up to provide them a ready network of community, information and assistance to support their ambitions and help them start a new life. Together, we can make Idaho a better, veteran-ready home for those who have given us so much.