

November 7, 2012

Senator Peter Knudson, Senate Chair
Representative Paul Ray, House Chair
Veterans Reintegration Task Force
P.O. Box 145115
Salt Lake City, Utah 84114

Dear Chairmen Knudson and Ray,

Please find attached the preliminary report and recommendations of the Veterans Reintegration Task Force's Workforce Services/State Agencies subcommittee.

The subcommittee includes representatives from multiple branches of the military, spanning the Vietnam era to current. Many of the members are in leadership positions with Military and Veterans organizations including; the American Legion, Student Veterans Association, Enlisted Association of the National Guard of Utah, Top of Utah Military Affairs Committee, Military Order of the Purple Heart, Disabled American Veterans Association, and Utah Veterans Advisory Council. Subcommittee members were asked to solicit input from their respective organizations prior to attending the first meeting. They have subsequently been asked to share this report with their organizations for additional comment, and some organizations may choose to take formal action (vote of support/non-support) on these recommendations.

The committee has met in person on two occasions and conducted extensive additional research outside of the meetings. The first meeting was a roundtable discussion of the issues and ideas from the different constituencies. After the discussion, committee members were provided copies of the Veterans and Military subcommittees' reports, and reports from the departments of Workforce Services, Veterans Affairs, Human Resource Management, and Higher Education. The second meeting consisted of a review of the reports, further discussion of the issues, and the drafting of this document. Agendas and minutes from the meetings have been provided to the legislative analyst's office.

The committee will continue to meet over the coming weeks with the different agencies to further refine these initial recommendations and will update you on our progress accordingly. We are also prepared to present our findings during the Task Force's November meeting if you would like.

If you have any questions please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Brian Garrett", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Brian Garrett
Workforce Services/State Agencies subcommittee chair

Education

- 1) The subcommittee supports Higher Education's efforts to develop a Post Secondary MOU standardizing Veteran's support and services between Utah's public institutions. The subcommittee also recommends:
 - a. The language in the MOU be more prescriptive than passive when referring to transferability of military credits and veteran's services.
 - b. Higher Education report back to the task force on their progress in promulgating the MOU in the spring of 2013.
 - c. Department of Veterans Affairs publish a list of the institutions that have signed the MOU, listing them as "Veteran Friendly".
- 2) The subcommittee applauds the University of Utah's National Center for Veteran's Studies efforts to develop a consortium to coordinate a range of services directed toward student veterans, with the goal of not only improving the overall quality and breadth of services offered, but also efficiency. Greater coordination will reduce unnecessary duplication and can also help distribute best practices across all campuses in Utah.
- 3) The subcommittee recommends that all higher education institutions implement an active Veterans Support Office for student Veterans. Additionally, the subcommittee strongly recommends that higher education institutions consolidate all Veteran's services in their Veterans Support Offices and provide adequate facilities to do so.
- 4) The subcommittee applauds Salt Lake Community College and Weber State University's Veteran programs and suggest that higher education institutions look to these programs as a "best practice"

Employment

- 1) The subcommittee applauds the Utah Department of Human Resource Management's existing efforts to employ Veterans and encourages them to explore additional programs/initiatives to provide more employment opportunities for Veterans with the State of Utah.
- 2) The subcommittee recommends the consolidation of all state veterans support/service assets and resources under the direction of the Utah Department of Veterans Affairs.

Services for Veterans

- 1) The subcommittee recommends the creation of Veterans Support Centers in selected DWS, DVA, and UTNG facilities statewide to facilitate the delivery of services to Veterans in a more holistic manner than at present.
- 2) The subcommittee suggests that the State of Utah create an internal Veterans Services Advisory Council, Chaired by the Executive Director of the Department of Veterans Affairs. The purpose of the council is to bring together cabinet level representatives from across state government to discuss and collaborate on Veteran's issues and programs.
- 3) The subcommittee recommends that the legislature provide funding for a minimum of two additional FTE for the Department of Veterans Affairs.
 - a. One position to function as a database administrator to develop, implement and manage an accurate data base of Veterans in the state.
 - b. A second FTE to serve as senior level public affairs officer to develop a more thorough outreach strategy, educational programs, and implement a marketing plan that includes webservices.

Overview

A number of student veterans were asked to visit Department of Workforce Services' offices and the Department of Veterans Affairs in an effort to acquire some primary research on the veterans' experiences in dealing with these two agencies. This was not a scientific sampling of offices and therefore, the results cannot and should not be viewed in that light. The results have been collated and reflect their experience with these two important agencies.

Department of Workforce Services

Location:

Date:

Interviewer:

Time:

1. Did you notice any visible signage directing you to Veterans Services or Veterans Agents? If so, describe.

Most locations had a sign somewhere near the entrance that stated there was a Veteran Representative in the building. There were no directions on how to get to the office. You have to wait in line to speak with someone at the Taylorsville location. After you have waited in line and it is your turn, they direct you where you need to go and the person to whom you need to speak.

2. When you presented yourself to an agent and identified yourself as a veteran, did the agent provide you with any information on veteran-specific programs and/or services? Describe the programs and your experience:

The main agents at the various locations knew where to direct the veteran. They did not offer any advice other than where to find the Veteran Representative. This was beneficial because there was no contradictory information being given out by the DWS employee at the main desk when compared to information being given out by the Veteran Representative.

3. Did you feel the agent was knowledgeable about the programs and services for Veterans? Explain

The Veteran Representatives were very knowledgeable about the programs and benefits offered on the state and national level.

4. What instructions were you given for applying for a job?

See below

5. What direct assistance were you given for applying for a job?

The assistance given with respect to applying for a job varied by location. Some Veteran Representatives were much more helpful when it came to getting set up on DWS' website while others just advised the respondents on how to access the website. Some Veteran Representatives would open a job posting and offer an explanation of what was listed and why the opening was listed as "Veteran Friendly". Other Representatives were not as thorough with describing either the DWS website or job postings.

Each respondent was given times and dates for job seeking workshops that were being held by DWS at multiple locations. The DWS Veteran Representatives were adamant that each respondent register their status as a veteran on the state website. Each respondent who spoke directly with a Veteran Representative was given a business card.

6. Was any type of Veterans preference offered?

The Veteran Representative advised each respondent about veterans' preference and a brief overview of what it took to qualify for each level. The Veteran Representative was respectful when it came to asking about the point level and if there was documentation to support what point level was requested.

7. Were you referred directly to a Veteran Representative? If so, what assistance were you given by the Veteran Representative? If not, what were you told to do?

After waiting in line at some locations, the DWS employee at the front desk would point out the direction to the Veteran Representative's location. Others would have another employee walk you to the area where the Veteran Representative was located. One respondent was walked directly to the desk of the Veteran Representative and then told by another DWS employee that they were in an "employees only" location of the building and were asked to wait somewhere else. At several locations, the Veteran Representative was not at his or her desk and could not be located by other DWS employees.

The Veteran Representative gave a brief overview of the benefits that are available and about "Veteran Friendly" employers.

8. On a scale of 1 - 5, (1 being Very Difficult and 5 being Very Easy) how would you rate your experience in working with this agency in terms of ease of navigation of the various programs and benefits available?

Average score 2.6 - The general consensus on this question is that if a Veteran Representative was not present, there were not very many options that were easy to find on the DWS website. The job search had "Veteran Friendly" employment icons, but the main focus of the DWS website was to register with the state. No confirmation was sent that registration was a success or that any person would be in contact with you about registering.

<http://jobs.utah.gov/jobseeker/veteran.html>

9. On a scale of 1 – 5, (1 being Not Valuable At All and 5 being Very Valuable) how would you rate the services provided by this agency in terms of finding a job?

Average score 2.3 – As with question 8, a significant emphasis on registering your veteran status with the state was evident. You were given an overview of veterans' benefits in the state, but told that most job searches were conducted online. Each respondent was advised of the Hiring Our Heroes job fair this month, but not much other information was given about hiring fairs.

10. On a scale of 1 – 5 (1 being Not Likely At All and 5 being Very Likely), how likely are you to return to DWS for assistance in finding a job?

Average score 1.3

11. On a scale of 1 – 5 (1 being Not Likely At All and 5 being Very Likely), how likely are you to return to DWS for other Veterans programs or benefits assistance?

Average score 2

Some of the veterans indicated that they would not go back to DWS simply because there was not an abundance of information provided. Depending on the time of day, there was a wait just to get to the main desk and then be directed to the Veteran Representative, who often was not there. They indicated that waiting would not be a problem if the Veteran Representative was guaranteed to be there.

Additional Comments:

One of the worst experiences with a Veteran Representative was at the Taylorsville DWS location. The veteran called repeatedly and went to the location several times as well. Each time, the veteran was unable to meet with a Veteran Representative directly. After leaving several voice messages, the veteran was contacted several weeks later by phone at which time the Veteran Representative left a voice message and telephone tag ensued for a number of weeks.

Finally, the veteran gave up leaving messages and tried to navigate the DWS information on his own. The veteran has registered with the state but has never received confirmation for doing so.

The veteran did receive his first email from DWS early in October advising him of the Hiring Our Heroes job fair. Prior to that, he had not received correspondence from DWS about any other job fair in the Salt Lake Area.

Department of Veterans Affairs

Location:

Date:

Interviewer:

Time:

1. When you presented yourself to an agent and identified yourself as a Veteran, did the agent provide you with any information on Veteran-specific programs and/or services? Describe the programs, materials provided and your experience:

See below

2. Did you feel the agent was knowledgeable about the programs and services for Veterans?

Each respondent spoke with a person who was very knowledgeable in the benefits that are offered by the state. The Veteran Representative pointed out all of the programs the state has to offer. Most representatives spoke about education and job benefits offered by the Department of Veterans Affairs.

3. When you asked about employment resources or benefits, what information were you provided?

Each respondent was given several areas to look for employment within and outside of the state. The respondents were advised of the benefits that they were able to receive if they were not receiving benefits at the time. There was information given about what the state was trying to do for veterans in the future. Each respondent was pointed to the website which contains a ton of information.

4. On a scale of 1 – 5, (1 being Very Difficult and 5 being Very Easy) how would you rate your experience in working with this agency in terms of ease of navigation of the various programs and benefits available?

Average score 3.6 - The website offers much more help than the DWS website. It is easier to navigate and offers much more information in an easy to understand format.
<http://veterans.utah.gov/>

5. On a scale of 1 – 5 (1 being Not Likely At All and 5 being Very Likely), how likely are you to return to this agency for other Veterans programs or benefits assistance?

Average score 3.3