

Testimony on HB-259 for House Business & Labor Committee

January 24, 2013

Mr. Chairman, committee members, my name is Dan Ellison and I live in Helena where I serve as a City Commissioner. I appear today as a veteran encouraging your support for HB-259.

By way of background, in 1966 I left the family ranch in the Bitterroot Valley to attend the Naval Academy. That was the beginning of 26 years on active duty as a helicopter pilot and staff officer. My last tour of duty was serving at the Pentagon as Legislative Assistant to General Colin Powell when he was Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Then, as now, veterans experienced difficulty finding work as their enlistments and service commitments ended. Although I'm sure you are aware of the labor statistics, it bears repeating that veterans nationally have a significantly higher rate of unemployment than the population at large. And with $\frac{3}{4}$ of a million unemployed veterans, this disparity is magnified among the 18-24 year age-group whose rate of unemployment currently exceeds 18%. Not only are many of these men and women highly employable, many jobs are available that veterans could fill if only their experience and education could be validated as meeting the essential elements of open positions.

In my own experience, returning to Montana after completing active duty, I contacted businesses and placement firms seeking work. One of those contacts stands out in memory. The hiring official told me that while I had a very attractive resume, and interesting experiences, he was not able to match my skills and abilities with any positions within his listings. Then he suggested expanding my search to the larger cities on the east or west coast. Needless to say, this was not an encouraging interview.

Eventually I found a position with a business in Helena. But what my job search didn't include were the trials of returning from a lengthy, overseas, combat-zone deployment which is the rule rather than the exception for many service members today. With Montana having the 2nd highest rate per capita in the nation for military service, our veterans are very much in need of your help

in making their considerable skills and professional abilities understandable to employers in Montana.

Some of you are veterans and have first-hand knowledge of the difficulty our state's men and women in uniform experience in transitioning back to civilian life. Given the challenges they face, and the sacrifices they willingly make on our behalf, facilitating their job searches is a sensible, much-needed action. Passage of HB-259 would be a positive step in that process. It will help veterans and businesses match relevant military skills and education, credits for degrees and professional certificates with licensing standards in Montana.

States, such as Colorado, Washington, and Tennessee have already taken steps to match veteran qualifications with their state requirements. Those states recognize the dual benefits that accrue by helping their veterans with job placements while strengthening the businesses which hire them by adding highly skilled, motivated, and ready to work employees to their staffs.

In closing, HB-259 will do that for Montana, and I strongly encourage you to pass the bill out of committee, and to support it as it comes before the full House.

From a local government elected official, thank you for your service to Montana.

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