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Dear Leaders:

As members of Congress work to craft legislation for future coronavirus relief packages and related bills, the Union Veterans Council, AFL-CIO, would ask you to consider key provisions by taking a multi-committee, multi-agency approach aimed at supporting the men, women and families who have served in our armed forces. We believe these key actions will better prepare the veteran community for the likelihood of high unemployment and job loss, as well as support thousands of military service members using their GI Bill educational benefit to help supplement their income.

The proposed provisions outlined below will enable Congress to provide early engagement with multiple agency support, specific to veterans and military families training-to-placement and hiring practices. Early commitment to these actions will assist our service members and veterans in recovering from post-COVID-19 fallout. We must learn from the past to inform and implement a proactive response to mitigate the economic impact COVID-19 will have on veterans and military families.

To paraphrase President Abraham Lincoln, *we must care for all those who have borne the battle* - today the battlefield is on the home front, and the enemy is a virus and an economic fall-out that threatens the stability of our veteran's community. Together we can live by those words by ensuring these brave Americans and their families every opportunity to live the American Dream they served to protect.

Extension of GI benefits for veterans utilizing OJT and apprenticeship training

Thousands of former military service members have transitioned into quality careers in the construction industry. Many are using their GI Bill educational benefit to supplement their income while working in construction apprenticeships. If these men and women experience unemployment, they lose their paycheck as well as the Monthly Housing Allowance (MHA). We propose extending the GI Bill educational benefits for all former service members utilizing any Registered Apprenticeship Program (RAP) or On-the-Job Training (OJT) program of the Department of Labor (DOL) at their current graduated rate, regardless of whether they have on-the-job hours to report.

These nontraditional students learning skilled trades through the DOL's Registered Apprenticeship and OJT programs deserve the same support as traditional student veterans attending colleges and universities through the GI Bill. Modernization of the Veterans Affairs' OJT/apprentice program portion of the GI Bill is desperately needed. This will better support service members seeking career pathways in high-paying, highly skilled occupations.

Funding for the Department of Labor's Registered Apprenticeship Program (RAP) for veterans

COVID-19 will have an impact on all industries. Future stimulus bills must contain funding in support of Registered Apprenticeship Programs that include a paid, work-based learning component and a required educational or instructional component resulting in the issuance of an industry-recognized credential, and that meet appropriate quality assurance standards. Extended stimulus funding to these programs will provide service members and veterans immediate opportunities.

Helmets to Hardhats is just one program designed to help military veterans and service members successfully transition to civilian life by offering the means to secure quality careers in the construction industry. The participating trade organizations create "earn while you learn" apprenticeship training programs. Funding for multiple agency support for existing veterans training programs should include the following:

- Funds to advance veterans DOL Registered Apprenticeship Program (RAP) efforts. Utilize multiple agency support to fund an expansion of DOL apprenticeship programs for veterans.
- Funds to expand veterans DOL apprenticeship programs through federal and state workforce appropriations. Utilize federal Employment and Training Administration (ETA) and federal funding for state employment and training programs specifically for veterans applying to DOL apprenticeship programs.
- Funds to expand SkillBridge, a successful and transformational program that fast-tracks service members into Registered Apprenticeship Programs and civilian careers. Appropriating dedicated funding to service members, which today includes spouses, through DOD SkillBridge programming, provides service members with the opportunity to enter RAP (civilian labor apprenticeships) while still on active duty, creating clearer pathways for their futures.
- Extend Title 10 U.S Code 1143. Employment assistance to members of the Coast Guard.

Funding to increase skilled training programs and support for existing veterans employment programs

Millions of veterans are at risk of unanticipated job loss and long-term unemployment due to the fallout from COVID-19. A recent study from the Bob Woodruff Foundation shows that COVID-19 "creates a 'perfect storm' that threatens the mental health of many veterans, particularly those with preexisting mental health conditions."

Funding for new and existing training programs that guarantee employment opportunities or are direct-hire programs must be part of any federal government response to COVID-19. These programs have successfully supported both transitioning service members and underemployed veterans since the economic crisis of 2008. Appropriating funds to support public-private partnerships with industry partners, institutions and government agencies will streamline employment opportunities to veterans and military family households. Funding for new and existing training programs should include:

- Funds to appropriate federal agencies to be distributed to industry organizations and veterans service organizations that provide direct pathways into gainful employment opportunities.
- Funds for state veterans workforce development.
- Funds to DOD SkillBridge/U.S. Military Apprenticeship Program (USMAP) programs and training for transitioning service members.
- Funds to community colleges to develop extended veterans skills training-to-placement programs.


Streamlining licensing and credentialing for transitioning service members

As veterans transition during the coming years, we must do everything possible to ensure they have stable economic footing as they enter the civilian workforce. One example is military medics who save lives on the battlefield but because of crediting reciprocity issues lack the ability to reinforce frontline healthcare workers fighting COVID-19. Further policies and oversight are needed to establish and maintain effective resources for active-duty and separating service members and spouses who pursue industry-aligned credentials. Please consider recommendation to:

- Allocate manpower and funding for agency reviews of federal and state regulations to create exemption/fast-tracking to licenses and credentials for specialty skilled service members, including welders, aviation mechanics, truck drivers, specialty health care workers and medics, construction workers with specialty operating skills, and other licenses and credentials.
- Establish an interagency task force to create partnerships with state credentialing agencies in order to expand civilian-military credential translation equivalents and reciprocity.

Thank you for your leadership as we address this crisis, and for considering these important veteran worker protections as we craft future legislation. The Union Veterans Council, AFL-CIO, our workforce development task force, affiliated unions and the labor movement stand ready to support and assist. I look forward to working with you and can be reached directly at wattig@unionveterans.org or by phone at 202-251-6773.

Sincerely,



William Attig, U.S. Army (Ret.)
Executive Director
Union Veterans Council, AFL-CIO

The Union Veterans Council represents over 3 million veteran members, providing a unified bi-partisan voice to working-class veterans on the issues that impact us most, especially the socioeconomic issues that face our community every day.