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Serving our military and veterans with statewide job fair

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Late last month I had the honor of hosting a statewide roundtable discussion on military employment, featuring our senior U.S. senator Jack Reed and U.S. Armed Services committee co-chair; our adjutant general Kevin McBride, and representatives of the federal government and academia. At the very same time, I co-hosted a statewide job fair for military/ veterans and their families, with the participation of mayor Fung of Cranston and senator Reed, and the employer support for the Guard and Reserve, Hero 2 Hired, the Greater Providence Chamber of Commerce, Workforce Solutions of Providence/ Cranston, the Rhode Island Broadcasters Association and the RI Department of Labor and Training.

Hundreds of people and more than 100 vendors participated in the day-long events, which gave witness to our collective respect and deep gratitude to those who have and continue to protect our freedoms - sometimes at the ultimate cost to themselves and their families, as they serve this great nation of ours.

The job fair grew out of a unique partnership between my city and that of neighboring Cranston, which we began in late winter to address the common problem of unemployment. Hosting a series of free, monthly industry-specific job fairs, we align businesses that are actually hiring employees with talented and available workers. The military job fair was one specifically dedicated to women and men in uniform and our veterans and their families - who statistics show bear the biggest hurdles in finding employment. It was an opportunity for us to serve those who serve us so bravely all year-long.

The policy roundtable was a natural outgrowth of this job fair, and gave us a chance to bring together the best minds on the issue: Senator Reed, professor Paul Harrington of Drexel University, U.S. assistant secretary Jane Oates, adjutant general Kevin McBride, and others from military, academic, business and industry and labor backgrounds. It was a lively and informed conversation about what the issues are and how we - as a community - can give back to those who give their lives for us.

We have a solemn obligation to support our veterans and service members - as a community and as a nation. Part of this support includes helping our men and women in uniform find employment when they return home from duty.

Senator Reed, who helped pass the VOW to Hire Heroes Act, which provides incentives for businesses to hire veterans by offering tax credits, job training workshops and education and training opportunities for unemployed veterans said, "Our veterans and service members have valuable leadership and technical skills that will help improve our workforce and economy. We want to do everything we can to link them with training and jobs so they can successfully transition from military service to civilian life."

Assistant secretary Oates said "We're seeing promising signs that veterans especially post 9/11

veterans - are finding and keeping jobs in larger numbers as our overall economy continues its steady recovery, but the fact remains that far too many of our returning service members struggle to make the transition from the military to a civilian career. With one million service members making this transition in the next five years, we must be prepared to deliver timely and effective services that lead them to the job opportunities they have earned."

The adjutant general and commanding general of the Rhode Island National Guard said that "Never in the history of the National Guard has so much been asked of our men and women in uniform. I am proud of their sacrifice and the unwavering support they have received from their families and our state."

To demonstrate our commitment to the Guard and Reserve, we all were privileged to sign individual Statements of Support for the Guard and Reserve, affirming our commitment to enforce the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Act (USERRA.)

Creating jobs and building commerce is a fundamental goal of my administration and helping create opportunities for those jobs, building our workforce, tapping into the enormous talent and experience of our veterans and military members will only help this nation strengthen its economy and guarantee its prowess worldwide.

I know I join my colleagues who participated that day in saying, "Thank you," to the members of our Armed Forces for giving us our freedoms and this treasured Democracy of ours.

Angel Taveras is the mayor of Providence.

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