

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON MILITARY AND VETERANS' AFFAIRS

March 15, 2022

1:08 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Representative Chris Tuck, Chair
Representative Andi Story
Representative Geran Tarr
Representative Matt Claman
Representative George Rauscher
Representative Laddie Shaw
Representative David Nelson

MEMBERS ABSENT

All members present

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 32

Encouraging the United States Congress to establish hiring goals for apprentices and veteran apprentices.

- HEARD & HELD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: HJR 32

SHORT TITLE: HIRING OF APPRENTICES/VETERANS

SPONSOR(S): REPRESENTATIVE(S) NELSON

02/16/22	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
02/16/22	(H)	MLV
03/15/22	(H)	MLV AT 1:00 PM GRUENBERG 120

WITNESS REGISTER

KYLE KAISER, President
Viper Transitions
Peters Creek, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Gave invited testimony during the hearing on HJR 32.

JASON WALL, Case Manager
Alaska Helmets to Hardhats

Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Gave invited testimony during the hearing on HJR 32.

PAUL FUHS, Secretary Treasurer

Arctic Warfare Museum

Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HJR 32.

DON ETHERIDGE, Lobbyist

American Federation of Labor - Congress of Industrial Organizations;

Alaska Works Partnership

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HJR 32.

MANUAL ACUNA, representing self

Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HJR 32.

BENNO CLEVELAND, President

Alaska Native Veterans Council

Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HJR 32.

BRAD BALDRIDGE, representing self

Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HJR 32.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[1:08:14 PM](#)

CHAIR CHRIS TUCK called the House Special Committee on Military and Veterans' Affairs meeting to order at 1:08 p.m. Representatives Shaw, Tarr, Claman, Story, Rauscher, Nelson, and Tuck were present at the call to order.

HJR 32-HIRING OF APPRENTICES/VETERANS

[1:09:03 PM](#)

CHAIR TUCK announced that the only order of business would be HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 32, Encouraging the United States Congress to establish hiring goals for apprentices and veteran apprentices.

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REPRESENTATIVE NELSON, as prime sponsor, presented HJR 32. He read the sponsor statement [included in the committee packet], which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

HJR 32 encourages the United States Congress to introduce and pass legislation requiring each offeror for a domestic United States Department of Defense construction project to establish goals that not less than 10 percent of the total workforce employed in performance of the project are veterans in a qualified apprenticeship or postsecondary program; and require each contractor and subcontractor for a domestic United States Department of Defense construction project that employs apprentices or postsecondary students are veterans of the armed forces of the United States.

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REPRESENTATIVE STORY voiced her support for the proposed resolution. She asked for the percentage of apprentices and post-secondary students who are veterans working on projects for the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD).

REPRESENTATIVE NELSON deferred the question to the invited testifiers.

REPRESENTATIVE STORY, in reference to the percentage of the workforce, questioned why 10 percent was chosen.

REPRESENTATIVE NELSON answered that the 10 percent figure is from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). He reiterated his understanding that the veteran population in Alaska is 13 percent. In response to a follow up question, he shared that the nationwide veteran population is under 20 million people, or 6.6 percent of the population.

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REPRESENTATIVE RAUSCHER asked if the proposed resolution would only apply to jobs on military bases.

REPRESENTATIVE NELSON answered that the bill would pertain to any domestic DoD construction projects.

REPRESENTATIVE RAUSCHER recounted that there was a previous bill which pertained to [veteran] preference and asked whether HJR 32 meshes with this bill.

REPRESENTATIVE NELSON responded that he is not familiar with the previous legislation. He stated that HJR 32 primarily applies to federal contractors.

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CHAIR TUCK confirmed that about two years ago there was a bill which allowed veteran preference. He said that the state currently has a veteran hiring preference, and this option is also open to private companies. In response to Representative Rauscher's previous question, he pointed out that there is no minimum requirement spelled out in the state hiring code. He said that HJR 32 would put a requirement at the federal level for DoD projects.

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REPRESENTATIVE NELSON, in response to Representative Rauscher, answered that the bill would establish a goal of 10 percent of DoD contractors be veterans.

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REPRESENTATIVE NELSON, in response to Representative Claman, reiterated that, according to VA, the percentage of adults in the nation who have served in the military is 6.6 percent.

REPRESENTATIVE CLAMAN pointed out that the resolution calls for a veteran hiring goal of 10 percent, but the national figure of adults who served is 6.6 percent; therefore, he questioned whether 10 percent would be a realistic figure for contractors.

REPRESENTATIVE NELSON responded that he would rather have 10 percent as a goal because working for military construction projects is a highly sought job for military veterans.

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CHAIR TUCK introduced invited testimony.

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KYLE KAISER, President, Viper Transitions, shared that he is a U.S. Army veteran, having served in the airborne infantry in Iraq and Afghanistan in the Apache Company, which was the first of the 501st Airborne Infantry out of 425's brigade combat team in Fort Richardson. Following his deployment to Iraq, he stated that he was selected to attend the U.S. Army sniper school in Fort Benning, Georgia. As an infantryman, he said that he was trained and taught to accomplish the mission at all costs. He explained that, in the military, members learn to follow the guidance of leadership and trust direction given to them, as this could mean the difference between life and death. He said that progression in rank teaches to "lead from the front" and prepare to make decisions which could cost a soldier's life. He stated that part of the noncommissioned officer's creed is to accomplish the mission while maintaining the welfare of the soldiers. He stated that this will always be at the forefront of his mind. He stated that military service is selfless service to the country. He expressed the importance of elected leaders who understand the mindset of veterans.

MR. KAISER expressed support for HJR 32 because it relates to veteran suicide. He reported that in 2021, there were 20 veteran suicides a day. He said that Viper Transitions was created to ensure veterans a smooth transition to civilian careers, while connecting the members to services they may need. He pointed out that mental-health crises result from exposure to violence and traumatizing events; however, he expressed the opinion that the bigger issue relates to the feeling of being outcast, neglected, disrespected, and dishonored by countrymen. He explained that when a member is in uniform, people know the person is in the military and will help them in some way. Such acts are greatly appreciated; however, he expressed the opinion that when the uniform comes off, the public looks upon the member as a "has been." He explained the most common remark members receive when looking for a job is to be thanked for their service; however, they are often told they are overqualified, underqualified, or their resume will be kept on file. He said these statements can be summed up as "thank you for your service, but we don't care." He stressed that this is not a rant from a disgruntled veteran but truths which have been ignored. He argued that HJR 32 would be a massive step in assisting veterans who are searching for their next career. He outlined three main career paths for veterans nationwide: the federal government, state or city government, and construction. By supporting career development, he said, the resolution would call for lawmakers to take real action for veterans after the uniform comes off.

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REPRESENTATIVE RAUSCHER recounted that on base many of the construction jobs are union. He asked how the proposed resolution would mesh with union jobs. He questioned whether the members would need to go through apprenticeships, or whether members would receive a bypass.

CHAIR TUCK responded that, when the Alaska Native Hospital was built in Anchorage, there was a Native-hire preference. In a military scenario, he said there would be a veteran-hiring preference until the contractor met the 10 percent figure, and that once the books are cleared of all the veterans, the contractor would move to open hiring. He added that dispatch rules would need to be changed to reflect this process. He stated that HJR 32 would help all contractors have a hiring preference.

REPRESENTATIVE RAUSCHER asked if journeyman requirements would be waved.

CHAIR TUCK answered that during the apprenticeship interview and application process, the paperwork typically describes the member's military experience; however, each apprenticeship program has its own standards of credit. He said there could be a performance test to verify hours. He clarified that he can only speak for the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW). He asked Mr. Kaiser to share his affiliation.

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MR. KAISER explained that HJR 32 does not have a union or nonunion focus, but rather it pertains to contractors who are bidding on projects to hire veterans. He further explained that each apprenticeship has its own approved U.S. Department of Labor standards, and the standards ensure that the people are being trained and brought up to journeymen. He said that HJR 32 would direct any contractor with apprenticeships to bring veterans into the program under the contractor's standards. On the percentage requirement, he said that 10 percent would be applied to one specific job.

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REPRESENTATIVE RAUSCHER asked if there is a percentage of union versus nonunion contractors on military bases.

CHAIR TUCK suggested that the building trades or the American Federation of Labor - Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) might have data on that.

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REPRESENTATIVE SHAW pointed out that transition programs via apprenticeships exist within the military. He said that HJR 32 would expand the programs, and in looking at the resolution's letters of support, the apprenticeship programs cover every area. He provided the opinion that the growth of the program and opportunities for veterans is substantial.

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JASON WALL, Case Manager, Alaska Helmets to Hardhats, shared that he was in the U.S. Marine Corps for eight years as a machine gunner, five years in the U.S. Army as a paratrooper, and currently serves in the Alaska National Guard. He expressed appreciation for the bill sponsor's work to take care of veterans. He expressed support for tangible assistance to service members who are in transition and seeking stable work.

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CHAIR TUCK questioned why DoD does not make veteran hire part of procurement policy.

MR. WALL expressed uncertainty.

CHAIR TUCK added that DoD has a robust procurement structure.

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REPRESENTATIVE STORY asked the numbers of veterans currently in apprenticeship programs.

MR. WALL expressed uncertainty on this number; however, he stated that there were 70 applicants last year, with 30 accepted into construction apprenticeships. He said the typical acceptance rate is 15 percent to 20 percent.

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MR. WALL, in response to a question from Chair Tuck, explained that Helmets to Hardhats is a national organization which

networks veterans with the trades. He stated that the Alaska branch goes further by offering free introductory level construction training, as well as interviews and resume writing development, along with other services.

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MR. KAISER added that Viper Transitions and Helmets to Hardhats work together in Alaska providing resources to veterans. He explained that Viper Transitions is a DoD skill-bridge program, and it is broader in terms of job placement and networking.

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CHAIR TUCK opened public testimony on HJR 32.

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PAUL FUHS, Secretary Treasurer, Arctic Warfare Museum, shared that he is a veteran and served in the 97th Delta Military Intelligence in the Vietnam War. He said that the museum's mission is to recover, restore, and display artifacts. He stated that through an agreement with Viper Transitions, when a veteran works on such artifacts, the experience is counted toward apprenticeship requirements. He relayed that the average age of an aircraft mechanic is 57 years old. He said the driving force of the museum is the issue of veteran suicide, and he thanked the bill sponsor for introducing the resolution. He explained that there is a need for facilities, and one of the best facilities would be the Kulis Air National Guard Base hanger at the Ted Stevens International Airport, which has been designated as a national historic site because of its military service and role during natural disasters. He stated that the hanger had almost been destroyed, but those plans have currently changed. He shared that the museum has identified several artifacts in the Aleutian Islands, including up to 12 P-40 airplanes and a PBY Catlina. He reiterated that veterans are included on these projects for the museum as part of apprenticeship training. He added that some veterans enter the apprenticeship program even before they leave service, making the transition in their spare time. In response to the question from Representative Rauscher regarding union involvement, he answered that the program will be satisfied if it is considered neutral, with the only requirement being the person is a veteran.

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REPRESENTATIVE CLAMAN asked where the P-40 aircraft were found.

MR. FUHS answered that the planes were found in the Aleutians; however, he gave no further details because of looting concerns. He shared that the museum has been working with the governor's office on a piece of legislation seeking to provide further protections towards these artifacts. He explained that the artifacts are under the control of the [Office of History and Archaeology]. He added that there is other equipment in the Aleutian Islands, including a PBY Catlina aircraft in perfect condition at the bottom of a lake in Adak, as well as several Japanese Zero planes, which have not been retrieved. He said the museum is currently working on a Douglas DC-3, with FedEx providing a corner of its hanger toward refurbishing the plane. He said the agreement is good until August, underlining the need for the National Guard hanger.

questioned whether.

MR. FUHS, in response to Representative Claman, stated that the P-40s were never flown.

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DON ETHERIDGE, Lobbyist, American Federation of Labor - Congress of Industrial Organizations; Alaska Works Partnership, stated that the resolution would not preclude a veteran from being in a union. He explained that the first requirement to be trained would be that the apprentice shows up on time and takes up instructions. He added that veterans have already learned this. He stated that, if the veterans are provided with good jobs, there might be less military suicide and homelessness.

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REPRESENTATIVE STORY asked how many veterans are in apprenticeship programs.

MR. ETHERIDGE responded that he does not have this data. He explained that the Helmets to Hardhats program is part of the Alaska Works Partnership.

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REPRESENTATIVE RAUSCHER asked how many veterans are unemployed.

MR. ETHERIDGE suggested that the Department of Labor and Workforce Development might have this data.

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CHAIR TUCK commented that, in past studies comparing union and nonunion apprenticeship programs, the union programs have a higher success rate in providing viable careers.

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MANUAL ACUNA, Self, shared that he served 13 years in the U.S. Air Force as an aircraft maintainer. He said that by the time he left the military, the skills he had acquired were not transferable into the civilian world. Upon finding out about the Helmets to Hardhats program, he is now a fifth-year wireman apprentice in IBEW. He said he can attest to how his own experience in the military is translatable to the construction industry. He said he worked many federal jobs because of past experience, which included working on F-22s, F-16s, F-15s, and NA-10s aircraft. He said he still has military security clearance, which has helped make employment as a contractor easier.

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CHAIR TUCK asked Mr. Acuna whether if, before being accepted into an apprenticeship program, he had been nonunion.

MR. ACUNA answered no. He explained that service is also about the camaraderie and being in a union relates to this. He expressed the desire to be in the union for the money, benefits, and camaraderie.

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BENNO CLEVELAND, President, Alaska Native Veterans Council, shared that he is a retired member of the Plumbers and Pipefitters Local UA 375 in Fairbanks, as well as a retired member of the civil service. He shared that he had served in the U.S. Army from 1968 to 1970 and had served one year in Vietnam. He further shared that he is a purple heart recipient. He said that, once the veterans come home, they have nothing to do. He explained that once a veteran is accepted into an apprenticeship program, they go through five years of training, and during the training the veteran receives healthcare, on-the-job training, and pay. He said that his past service helped him

get work on Eielson Air Force Base from 1989 to 1991 and at Fort Wainwright from 1991 to 2016. He stated that, concerning apprentices in the trades, the federal government has moved away from hiring apprentices; instead, it has been using private contractors. He added that these contractors will often hire union members. He said that through the apprenticeship program, a veteran can provide for himself and his family. He expressed the opinion that, once out of the military, veterans are lost and feel no reason to live, and this brings thoughts of suicide. He stressed that the suicide rate is high at the military bases in Alaska. He thanked the sponsor for introducing HJR 32 and the committee.

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BRAD BALDRIDGE, Self, expressed support for HJR 32. He shared that he is an IBEW member. He said that asking for 10 percent of the workers to be in the military is not asking for much, and the figure should be closer to 50 percent. He added that HJR 32 would encourage apprenticeships to employ more veterans.

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REPRESENTATIVE CLAMAN expressed agreement with the percentage in the proposed resolution.

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REPRESENTATIVE RAUSCHER expressed the opinion that questions do not always relate to contention, rather they may relate to scope.

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CHAIR TUCK concurred with the statement. He questioned Mr. Baldrige whether he would support 50 percent veteran hire in the proposed resolution.

MR. BALDRIDGE answered yes, adding he supports the people who serve the country.

[2:04:12 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE STORY suggested that, with good data on the number of veterans being currently hired, the correct percentage could be determined.

CHAIR TUCK concurred and said that when he served on the apprenticeship interview committee, veterans tended to be admitted into the programs.

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CHAIR TUCK, after ascertaining that no one else wished to testify, closed public testimony on HJR 32.

[2:05:47 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE NELSON moved Amendment 1 to HJR 32, labeled 32-LS1381\A.1, Klein, 3/8/22, which read as follows:

Page 2, following line 3:

Insert new material to read:

"WHEREAS veterans transition training program have successfully reduced incidences of veteran suicide, and"

CHAIR TUCK objected for the purpose of discussion.

[2:06:12 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE NELSON explained that the amendment would highlight why veteran transition programs are important.

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CHAIR TUCK commented that registered apprenticeship programs create a culture, and this is a benefit. He referred to Mr. Acuna, who testified that the reason he had joined an apprenticeship program was because of the camaraderie.

CHAIR TUCK shared that a family member has recently been accepted into an apprenticeship program, which helped the person not only to develop a trade, but also character. He stressed that having camaraderie helps veterans make the transition. He removed his objection. There being no further objection, Amendment 1 was adopted.

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CHAIR TUCK announced that HJR 32 was held over.

[2:08:41 PM](#)

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the House Special Committee on Military and Veterans' Affairs* meeting was adjourned at 2:09 P.M.