

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE**  
**HOUSE LABOR AND COMMERCE STANDING COMMITTEE**

January 23, 2026

3:15 p.m.

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

Representative Zack Fields, Co-Chair  
Representative Carolyn Hall, Co-Chair  
Representative Ashley Carrick  
Representative Robyn Niayuq Frier  
Representative Dan Saddler  
Representative Julie Coulombe  
Representative David Nelson

**MEMBERS ABSENT**

All members present

**COMMITTEE CALENDAR**

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 20

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

- HEARD & HELD

**PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION**

BILL: HJR 20

SHORT TITLE: HIRING OF APPRENTICES/VETERANS

SPONSOR(S): REPRESENTATIVE(S) D.NELSON

04/14/25	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
04/14/25	(H)	MLV, L&C
05/06/25	(H)	MLV AT 10:15 AM BARNES 124
05/06/25	(H)	Heard & Held
05/06/25	(H)	MINUTE (MLV)
05/13/25	(H)	MLV AT 10:15 AM BARNES 124
05/13/25	(H)	Moved HJR 20 Out of Committee
05/13/25	(H)	MINUTE (MLV)
05/14/25	(H)	MLV RPT 5DP
05/14/25	(H)	DP: GRAY, NELSON, HALL, SADDLER, EISCHEID
01/21/26	(H)	L&C AT 3:15 PM BARNES 124
01/21/26	(H)	-- MEETING CANCELED --

01/23/26

(H)

L&C AT 3:15 PM BARNES 124

**WITNESS REGISTER**

REPRESENTATIVE DAVID NELSON  
Alaska State Legislature  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** As prime sponsor, introduced HJR 20.

KYLE KAISER, President/Founder  
Viper Transitions  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of HJR 20.

MICHAEL SMITH, International Representative for Veteran Affairs  
International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of HJR 20.

MIKE KUFCHAK, Director of Veterans Affairs  
International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of HJR 20.

**ACTION NARRATIVE**

[3:15:13 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR FIELDS called the House Labor and Commerce Standing Committee meeting to order at 3:15 p.m. Representatives Nelson, Coulombe, Frier, Carrick, and Fields were present at the call to order. Representatives Saddler and Hall arrived as the meeting was in progress.

**HJR 20-HIRING OF APPRENTICES/VETERANS**

[3:15:29 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR FIELDS announced that the only order of business would be HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 20, Encouraging the United States Congress to establish hiring goals for apprentices and veteran apprentices.

[3:15:39 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE DAVID NELSON, Alaska State Legislature, as prime sponsor, introduced HJR 20. He explained that the proposed

legislation would encourage the United States Congress to establish hiring goals for apprentices and veteran apprentices. The resolution aims to assist veterans and those preparing to transition from the armed forces to civilian life. He noted that according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), in 2024, 60 percent of unemployed veterans were aged 25 through 54, meaning most unemployed veterans are in their prime working age. These veterans are rigorously trained by the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD), making them skilled and motivated, and therefore highly valuable in the workforce. By passing HJR 20, it would encourage Congress to establish hiring goals for domestic DoD construction projects, specifically for individuals who are participating in qualified apprenticeships or post-secondary programs. These hiring goals would be no less than 10 percent of the total workforce employed in the performance of the project, with no less than 10 percent of those being veterans.

REPRESENTATIVE NELSON said that promoting the inclusion of veterans in DoD funded construction projects would enhance the workforce with individuals accustomed to working in complex and demanding environments. He stated, "This would create a solid foundation for countless individuals who have protected and served our great country." He urged committee support for the proposed legislation.

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CO-CHAIR FIELDS announced the committee would hear invited testimony on HJR 20.

[3:18:05 PM](#)

KYLE KAISER, President/Founder, Viper Transitions, provided invited testimony in support of HJR 20. He said that as an army veteran and former Airborne Infantryman, transitioning from the Armed Services to a civilian career can be difficult. Apprenticeships are often a desired route for many veterans looking to enter their next career field. He said it makes sense to have this type of language implemented on a national level, especially with DoD. He explained that veterans already undergo background checks and security clearances, which make it easier to get them on base. They are trainable, and there are many reasons why it would make sense for DoD to adopt policies like this and for the legislature to create statute to support these initiatives. He explained that partnerships are crucial because apprentices do not need prior knowledge; this is the purpose of an apprenticeship.

MR. KAISER said given his experience, without an apprenticeship, transitioning from Airborne Infantry to a career as an electrician would not have been smooth or easy. He had no prior knowledge of the trade, and apprenticeships only work if an employer has work available for apprentices. He said that veterans typically enter apprenticeships when these employers have "a place to send them." He concluded by stating that this legislation is good for the country, good for veterans, and good for building a strong workforce.

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MICHAEL SMITH, International Representative for Veteran Affairs, International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, testified in support of HJR 20. He said that he represents thousands of veterans in his organization. He said that as a former training director who oversaw apprentices at an apprenticeship school, there is a clear understanding of where opportunities can arise. He noted that when it comes to veterans, they want structure and apprenticeships provide structure. He explained that it keeps them on task and on track. Veterans have a lifestyle very similar to what they experienced in the military. He said that there is full support for this resolution from the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW). He noted that setting a goal of 10 percent of veteran apprentices on DOD projects is a great step forward and makes life easier for transitioning veterans. He said transition can be hard and getting veterans working in places they are familiar with such as military and federal installations is a good thing.

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MIKE KUFCHAK, Director of Veterans Affairs, International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, testified in support of HJR 20. He began testimony by highlighting that he served in the military for 32 years, all of which were active duty. He said that the electrical industry and many other trade unions have discovered that veterans bring unique qualities to their employment. This includes reliability, dependability, accountability, and responsibility. He said that military personnel are groomed to work as a team and this team dynamic is an important factor in the trades. He said that the military exceeds all standards regarding safety regulations and veterans understand safety as it relates to trades. He remarked that many military occupational specialties (MOS) are aligned with industry standards. He said many military members have been

formally trained and gained real-world experience while in military service. He said this could include a United States military apprenticeship program or even certificates of completion from DOD. He remarked that veterans are well suited to work in military installations given this previous experience. They understand the culture, terminology, the rank structure, and rules of federal operations.

MR. KUFCHAK said that the bottom line is that apprenticeships offer careers for veterans that can provide the intangibles that they became accustomed to while in the military. Additionally, if a veteran has a career, then they can provide for themselves and their family, which reduces depression, stress, and suicide rates. He concluded by reiterating that he was in full support of the proposed legislation.

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CO-CHAIR FIELDS commented that he works for a labor union for his private sector job that had apprenticeships and members that work on military installations and much of this work is done by veterans.

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REPRESENTATIVE COULOMBE thanked the committee for bringing the legislation forward since her sons and husband all served in the military and their transition to civilian life was challenging. She asked for clarification with the intent of the legislation.

REPRESENTATIVE NELSON responded that the resolution's intent is to urge Congress to establish hiring goals for contracts. He said that when a DOD project is put up for bid, the goal is to reach 10 percent representation of military veteran apprentices on those types of contracts.

REPRESENTATIVE COULOMBE asked for clarification of whether this pertained to the DoD or the U.S. Department of War (DoW).

REPRESENTATIVE NELSON noted that according to DoD, DoW is a secondary title for DoD. He said that it would take an act of Congress to change the name from DoD to DoW.

REPRESENTATIVE COULOMBE said that she assumed that DoD contracts already have a union agreement in place. She asked for clarification for an instance where someone was a veteran but not associated with a union.

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CO-CHAIR FIELDS responded that the apprenticeship system has both union and nonunion participants and the resolution is drafted to support the registration of apprenticeships. He said that there are many nonunion apprenticeships in Alaska.

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REPRESENTATIVE NELSON added that the resolution also includes those who are in post-secondary programs. He said there was a little bit of separation but as Co-Chair Fields had clarified, the resolution supports both union and nonunion individuals.

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REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER noted that Sergeant Major Kufchak had referred to the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). He said that having HJR 20 apply to any federal military construction project and not just those funded by NDAA was ideal.

REPRESENTATIVE NELSON responded that this would be up to Congress, but the intent of the resolution is to be as open and accommodating as possible.

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CO-CHAIR FIELDS announced that HJR 20 was held over.

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There being no further business before the committee, the House Labor and Commerce Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at 3:27 p.m.