

Senator Sherrod Brown

Remarks to the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee on DoL/DoD/VA Collaboration and Cooperation to Meet the Employment Needs of Returning Servicemembers.

June 13, 2007

Thank you Mr. Chairman.

Two weeks ago, while the Senate was in recess, I spent the week talking with veterans in roundtable meetings around Ohio.

I want to briefly mention two of the young veterans I met in Canton, Ohio.

I met with about 25 veterans from around the Summit County area that allowed for an open conversation about what veterans are facing regarding mental health and homelessness.

These roundtables tend to form a life of their own and the conversation weaves its way to issues that are most on the minds of those in attendance.

Two of the participants at this particular roundtable were younger men who had recently returned from Iraq. One had been back for about a year, the other for a little less than that.

These men told me about their experience after returning from combat and transitioning from military life to civilian life.

Like most of our soldiers returning, they were left without much guidance and were unaware of the programs that were there to help them, they knew nothing about.

In Ohio, each county has a Veterans Service Commission and the Commission is run by a chief officer. This officer oversees a staff that is dedicated to assisting veterans in their daily lives.

They truly are on the front lines. Some counties like Hamilton have very large commissions and staff, while others, because the commissions are locally funded, are very small.

The two veterans I met with told me that they went to their Veterans Service Officer and asked how they could find jobs. They weren't asking for anything from the government; weren't asking for anything more than other men and women their age.

All they wanted was an opportunity to get a good job and build a good life. The Veterans Service Officer for their county told them about the Helmets to Hardhats program.

Helmets to Hardhats is a national program that connects National Guard, Reserve and transitioning active-duty military members with quality career training and employment opportunities within the construction industry. The Center for Military Recruitment, Assessment and Veterans Employment administers Helmets to Hardhats.

These two veterans now have good, stable, union construction jobs that capitalize on the skills they developed in the military.

While this is a success story, both veterans told me that many of their colleagues haven't been so fortunate. We need to do more.

I am interested in learning what our government is doing to improve the transition from active service to civilian life.

Veterans bring unique skills and perspectives to the work force, and if we don't do everything we can to capitalize on these skills and knowledge, then our economy and our nation suffer as we under-serve those who have served us.

I know the administration is trying to improve the transition programs, but trying isn't good enough. Just as it rushed to war unprepared, this administration has been unprepared to handle those coming home from war and returning to civilian life.

We are spending more than \$2 billion a week on this war, so the small amount of money needed to make transition programs effective to all those who have served, including the National Guard and Reserve, is a small price to pay to

We must ensure these returning heroes are given an opportunity to reach for the American Dream of a quality job, a secure future, and home ownership.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.