

Ranking Member Richard Burr

Statement of Senator Richard Burr
Hearing before the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs
"Easing the Burdens through Employment"
November 18, 2009

Good morning Mr. Chairman. Thank you for convening such a timely and important hearing today.

With unemployment skyrocketing above 10% for the first time since the Recession of the 1980s, we here in Congress need to have a discussion on what we can do to help our fellow Americans – especially those who have served our nation bravely – find meaningful employment.

My home state of North Carolina has been one of the hardest hit by the economic downturn, with an unemployment rate higher than the national average. Many of the affected are men and women who served our nation proudly, and some were severely injured in the line of duty.

I have heard from veteran constituents who lost their civilian jobs in the middle of this crisis and many are in danger of losing their homes. These are good Americans who want an honest wage for honest work, but due to circumstances beyond their control, they are concerned that they won't be able to keep a roof over their families' heads.

These veterans, especially our newest veterans, are highly trained and skilled in occupations that should easily translate to the civilian world, with a dedication and work ethic desirable to public and private sector employers alike. However, our veterans of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq are experiencing an unemployment rate of 11.6%, which is higher than their civilian counterparts. This is unacceptable.

To that end, the Department of Labor Veterans' Employment and Training Service (VETS) office is charged with the task of assisting veterans find and maintain employment. They provide grants to the states to fund the Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program (DVOP) and the Local Veterans' Employment Representatives (L-VER).

However, these programs have been met with the criticism that they are not effective in providing job assistance for veterans. In this critical time, it is imperative to ensure that Federal dollars are going toward the most successful veteran employment programs.

Assistant Secretary Raymond Jefferson is here to speak about these and other Department of Labor programs for veterans. I look forward to hearing about his plans to improve the services that VETS provides to our nation's veterans.

The Federal government is not alone in working toward the goal of increasing a veteran presence in the workforce. Today, we will be hearing some very inspiring stories of veterans and

corporations who are taking part in groundbreaking programs to assist our nation's heroes find meaningful work.

One such veteran is Helen Tymes, who is working as a Career Specialist on a pilot program between Army Wounded Warriors and the National Organization on Disability at Fort Bragg, where she is providing face-to-face career development services to severely wounded Army soldiers and veterans. Helen, thank you so much for traveling up from Fayetteville to tell us about your important work.

Thank you to all of our witnesses today, and everyone who is working to assist our American heroes find employment. We owe our freedom to those who have heard the call and wore the uniform, and I believe the least we can do is work together to serve those who have served us.