

RON PIERRE 8/2/12

KINS COMMUNITY COMMENT (442-5744)

This is Ron Pierre for Community Comment.

Since my retirement from the Air Force, I have worked as a volunteer with veterans. As a jobs counselor assisting in job placement or as benefits advocate my military background and experience has provided a foundation to assist former military members. Over the years, one fact resonates loudly. The fact that bothers me most is that a majority of the government-based bureaucracies working veteran's issues are failing badly. From the Veteran's Administration and VA Medical facilities to the state and local offices set up years ago, there is a services vacuum that exists in government sponsored programs tasked to help military veterans, particularly those service members who are members of reserve component forces. As the California Ombudsman Director for Employer Support for the Guard and Reserve, I work nearly every day as a volunteer to mediate workplace problems between service members and employers. The ombudsman program works, but the long-established processes don't! For example, it is not unusual for a disability claim to take over 200 days to be evaluated under the VA.

This vet services vacuum is filled by a number of not for profit organizations that have stepped up to meet the needs. Most prominent are organizations like "Wounded Warrior Project," "Fisher House," and the Gary Sinese Foundation to name just a few. Some large DOD sponsored volunteer groups like the "Employer Support for the Guard and Reserve (ESGR) are meeting the day-to-day needs of service members outside of the in-place service delivery model that was created at the end of World War II and is at best "out-dated."

I mention the Employer Support for the Guard and Reserve volunteers, because this volunteer contingent works directly with reserve component military forces. In years gone by, this was not a major emphasis area for consideration because these military service force elements were not a major part of the American military. Now they are!

The combined manpower of the U.S. military is about 2.25 million people. That number is made up of all military branches including the Coast Guard. Our population is 312,780,968 and less than 5 percent of

that population has either served or had a military member in their family. That was not always the case. In 1865 20% of American population was under arms and over 80% of all families had close relatives who had served in the military. In 1946, our population was 132,481,000. Over 16 million people were wearing the military uniform of the U.S., and nearly over 50% of American families had family members under arms.

The "All-Volunteer Force" changed all of that in 1973. When the draft ended, the American military began to shrink. More significantly, the active military force decreased significantly. Today's military is 40% reserve component forces. These reserve and National Guard forces have shouldered the brunt of multiple deployments and war since the 1990s and Desert Storm.

This background reinforces the need to change the process for American veteran in 2012. ~~It seems to be easier and easier to forget that our American military is that single national element that provides for the National defense.~~ The military funding just can't be a pig bank to be tapped by every bloated social welfare program

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