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Sen. Barrett remarks at Bedford Veterans Day  
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We worry about our young veterans, especially those who have served in Iraq and Afghanistan since 9/11. There is reason to worry:

In a recent survey, 44% of post-9/11 veterans said they had difficulty readjusting to civilian life, compared with 25% of pre-9/11 veterans.

This may be due in part to the fact that post-9/11 veterans are much more likely than those who served before them to have seen combat.

Given the concern we hear regarding the challenges facing ex-military it was a distinctly pleasant shock to read a report issued last week by the U.S. Dept. of Labor, on employment for last month, October 2015.

While the unemployment rate for the entire American workforce was a not-too-shabby 5.0%, the unemployment rate for American veterans was even better -- much better, actually -- 3.9%.

This is a change from the situation that existed two years ago. In October 2013, the unemployment rate among veterans was 10% versus 7% for the entire workforce. Think about that. 10% unemployment two years ago. 3.9% today.

Other measures reinforce this surprisingly positive picture. It turns out the self-sufficiency and survival skills of our ex-military -- and, we would like to think, the support system the country provides for them -- is keeping them out of poverty. Compared to the poverty rate for Americans who haven't served -- a truly troubling 14.4% -- the poverty rate for vets is a still-upsetting but much more modest 6.9%.

What is going on?

Well, despite the well-documented failures of care at certain VA hospitals outside New England, the fact remains that post-9/11 veterans have better rates of public and private health insurance coverage compared to non-veterans.

It also seems the military may be doing a better job of giving recruits training and life lessons that are of use later on. According to a 2013 study by the Pew Research Center, 61% of post-9/11 veterans say their military experience has been relevant to the civilian jobs they've taken afterwards. This compares to 41.1% of all veterans.

Along the same lines, employed post-9/11 veterans report being more likely to be in management and professional occupations -- which pay better, for the most part -- compared to employed non-veterans.

Certain military values may carry over well into civilian employment. There's the job training, of course. But there are also core values ... like punctuality. A strong work ethic. Crucial understanding of the value of teams. And -- some would call it respect for the chain of command -- an understanding of how to function within large organizations.

Whatever the reason, post-9/11 veterans have, on average, higher personal incomes than non-veterans.

Bottom line: Despite the very real reports we receive of psychological trauma, addiction and even homelessness confronting some of our ex-military, the majority of American veterans are not on the ropes and down in the dumps. They are not losers in life; they are winners.

This point takes on even more significance when we note a trend that seems unbelievable, given the stress that young people have experienced recently in the job market, but is true nevertheless -- we are about to enter a period in which there will be too few American workers for the available jobs.

A story in Monday's Boston Globe is representative of what the future holds:

Turns out the state faces severe labor shortages ... we're looking at some 1.2 million job openings by the year 2022.

In the next seven years, Massachusetts employers will need about 40,000 more equipment techs, nursing assistants and other workers in health care; 150,000 more food services employees; 34,000 more building and maintenance positions -- and the list goes on.

And get this: Many of the openings will require vocational training, post-secondary school certificates or associate degrees, but three out of five -- 60% of them -- will not require a four-year bachelor's degree.

Predictions of labor shortages -- and there are many of them -- turns on a phenomenon we see all around us, within our families and among our friends -- baby boomers, the biggest group of employees this country has ever had, are hanging it up, calling it a day -- retiring.

Young people will take their place -- and young veterans, for all the reasons I've cited earlier -- are very well positioned to compete.

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