

THE PRESIDENT'S EXPORT COUNCIL
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20230

September 16, 2010

President of the United States of America
The White House
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

As members of the President's Export Council, we applaud and strongly support your National Export Initiative (NEI) as an essential component of U.S. foreign policy for international trade. Successful implementation of the National Export Initiative will require a work force that is trained and educated to meet the economic challenges that lie before us as a Nation. We believe promoting more effective training programs and a focused effort on increasing the number of Americans high-demand job areas focused in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) is essential and will in turn boost productivity. A particular segment of the workforce, returning soldiers from overseas operations, deserves your special attention and consideration. With the unemployment rate of veterans ages 22 to 24 reaching as high as three times that of non-veterans in the same age group, we believe the Administration should put additional emphasis on training initiatives to transition returning veterans back into the civilian workforce. By equipping veterans with highly-marketable skills, the U.S. can take a practical approach to addressing both the problem of high veteran unemployment and the challenge of industry skill shortages in key occupations.

Model programs that could serve as templates are the "Helmets to Hardhats" (H2H) Program of the National Building Trades Unions and the "Veterans in Piping" (VIP) programs of the United Association of Plumbers and Pipefitters (UA), both which have established track records of helping returning veterans make successful transitions from the military to high-skill careers in the private sector. Founded in 2003, H2H has placed tens of thousands of veterans into some of the most successful apprenticeship training programs in the country where they receive skills training offered simultaneously with immediate employment opportunities. The VIP program, launched in 2008, is an intensive eighteen week program offered directly on military bases that has provided training to numerous veterans in high skill jobs that are in strong demand in various U.S. industries. The program will soon be expanded to include new training aimed at jobs in the green technology sector.

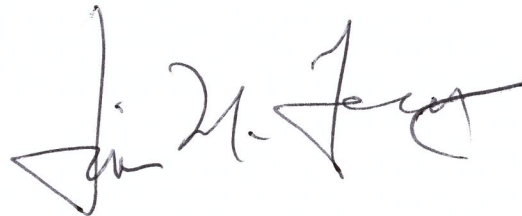
Expanding the H2H and VIP programs, and developing similar programs based on these models, is one way to address critical workforce shortages in a constructive manner. Allowing a preference in federal contracting solicitations for companies that participate in H2H, VIP, or similar programs could further expand the success of these initiatives and help provide a model for additional training programs in the future.

Working with the Departments of Veterans Affairs, Education, Labor and Agriculture, we believe there are additional opportunities to encourage veterans to enroll in the STEM disciplines. These agencies should take the lead in forging partnerships between the local colleges and businesses to create venues where returning soldiers can match their backgrounds to these high demand fields of study. Encouraging veterans to choose STEM disciplines could be accomplished through preferred job placement with participating industry partners. Tailoring programs at the local level would ensure industry is engaged with veterans before and throughout their time in the classroom. By utilizing tuition assistance programs already available to qualifying veterans, shortages in fields critical to supporting export potential could be filled at minimal additional cost.

Experience has shown the lessons of leadership, discipline, and teamwork instilled in our soldiers translates well to workplace. By training our veterans in high demand fields that will support the Administration's goal of doubling exports in five years, these men and woman will continue to ensure the security of America's future in their new civilian lives.

We stand ready to work with you to ensure that our veterans' exceptional talents are leveraged in support of our nation's economic competitiveness.¹

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jim M. Ferguson". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial "J" and a long horizontal stroke at the end.

¹ Please note that this letter has been prepared by the private-sector appointed members of the PEC.