

SUBJECT: Creating a program to financially assist veterans seeking energy jobs

COMMITTEE: Defense and Veterans' Affairs — committee substitute recommended

VOTE: 9 ayes — Raymond, Buckley, Biedermann, Cyrier, Gervin-Hawkins, Lambert, Lopez, Morales, Tinderholt
0 nays

WITNESSES: For — Steven Price, The Texas Democratic Veterans Caucus and The VOICES Foundation; (*Registered, but did not testify:* Daniel Collins, County of El Paso; Mitch Fuller, Texas Veterans of Foreign Wars; Daniel Womack, Dow Inc.; Mike Meroney, Texas Association of Manufacturers; Ryan Paylor, Texas Independent Producers and Royalty Owners Association; Thomas Parkinson)

Against — None

On — Shawn Deabay, Texas Veterans Commission; (*Registered, but did not testify:* Jim Brennan, Texas Coalition of Veterans Organizations)

DIGEST: CSHB 739 would require the Texas Veterans Commission to develop and administer a grant program to provide financial assistance to veterans seeking a certification or training for employment in the energy industry. The commission would be required to adopt rules to implement the program, including rules establishing criteria for eligibility and grant terms.

The bill also would require the commission, in coordination with the General Land Office and Veterans' Land Board, to conduct an outreach campaign to encourage veterans to participate in the program.

The bill would take effect September 1, 2021.

SUPPORTERS SAY: CSHB 739 would establish a program to provide financial assistance for veterans seeking training for energy industry employment, which would

support further job and training opportunities for veterans, improve their economic mobility, and provide skilled employees for the energy industry that is central to the state's economic prosperity.

Although military service frequently provides veterans with skills and training well suited to employment in the energy sector, veterans often face financial and logistical challenges to entering this critical and expanding field. A program specifically focused on bringing veterans into the energy industry would help combat these difficulties and support veterans seeking a meaningful career. The program created by the bill also could make Texas more attractive to veterans transitioning to civilian life by facilitating their access to the stable, high-paying jobs the energy sector can provide and would contribute to the broader effort to ease the burden of transition for veterans and their families.

In addition, the challenges posed by Winter Storm Uri have reinforced the how essential the energy industry, and skilled energy workers, are for Texas. CSHB 739 would help answer the need for energy workers by directing financial assistance to veterans seeking to become skilled employees in this industry.

While existing state and federal programs currently provide support for veterans' certification and employment training, the targeted program created by CSHB 739 would be appropriate because of the particular suitability and transferability of military skills to the energy sector, as well as the outstanding need for skilled workers in the industry. It is not anticipated that the bill would impose any additional costs to the state, and the program it would establish could pave the way for the use of federal funds to support these training initiatives.

CSHB 739 would not create a privileged status for veterans over other citizens but simply would create a targeted program within the special considerations already and deservedly given to veterans in light of their service.

CRITICS

CSHB 739 is unnecessary because the federal GI bill already covers

SAY: certifications and trainings for veteran employment. The bill also could cost the state additional money and establish a further privilege for veterans over the rest of the population.

NOTES: The author plans to offer a floor amendment to CSHB 739 that would establish a "program" rather than a "grant program." References to grants and related rule-making instructions would be deleted.