



From the office of Texas Workforce Commission

Chairman Tom Pauken

Opinion/Editorial

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Texas Veterans Leadership Program Helps Returning Soldiers Find Jobs in Texas **By Tom Pauken**

After 10 years as an Army infantryman, Sgt. Anthony Weir had a difficult time finding a good job as he transitioned from service in Iraq to civilian life.

Although he remained in the National Guard, Anthony worked as a jail guard, security guard, carpet cleaner, and most recently a pizza delivery driver to support his wife and four children.

As reported by the *Amarillo Globe-News*, Anthony's job as a pizza delivery driver landed him on the wrong side of a gun, when a teenage customer held a semiautomatic pistol to his stomach. Fortunately, the Army veteran of Iraq made his way out of that situation safely – but not without further discouragement regarding his civilian career prospects.

Little did he know at the time the *Amarillo Globe-News* article appeared that his luck was about to change.

Roger Williams, the recently retired Director of Amarillo Site Operations for Bell Helicopter (Bell), shared the article about the Army veteran's plight with Norm Bearden who heads up our Texas Veterans Leadership Program (TVLP) in Amarillo. The TVLP is run by returning veterans and is designed to help those who served in Iraq and/or Afghanistan make a successful transition to civilian life, with particular emphasis on getting good jobs upon their return home. Norm and Roger already had been working together as Bell had hired a number of returning veterans. To Roger's credit, he wanted to give Anthony an opportunity to come and work for Bell. Norm already had Anthony's information in the TVLP database, as he had been trying to help the soldier. It was an instant match.

Anthony is now working part-time for Bell and taking classes at Amarillo College to get the skills training that Bell requires.

"This couldn't have happened to a better guy," Norm said. "This is the kind of man that, you might think, would only be in here to see me. But he brought in other guys from his Guard unit to see how they also could be helped."

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TVLP was modeled after a similar program I started in my days with the Reagan Administration, called the Vietnam Veterans Leadership Program, which helped our returning veterans from Vietnam who were unemployed, underemployed, or had lingering problems associated with their Vietnam experience.

Through our TVLP leaders stationed at Texas Workforce Commission facilities across the state, we've helped about 8,000 returning veterans start careers and access educational and health benefits.

Like Sgt. Anthony Weir, these young men and women have answered our country's call under very difficult circumstances. They deserve our full support in making a successful transition to the civilian world. Let's put their experience to work in the state of Texas.

To find out more about the Texas Veterans Leadership Program, visit our website at vets.texasworkforce.org, or call our toll-free number at 888-VET-TEX1.

Tom Pauken is Chairman of the Texas Workforce Commission and author of Bringing America Home.

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The Texas Workforce Commission is a state agency dedicated to helping Texas employers, workers and communities prosper economically. For details on TWC and the programs it offers in coordination with its network of local workforce development boards, call (512) 463-8556 or visit www.texasworkforce.org.