
Governor Bolling, Senator Warner, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen: good afternoon.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today about what Virginia's Community Colleges are doing to serve military-related students - and to talk about how our work could be enhanced moving forward through strategic partnerships and resources.

Virginia's Community Colleges were created 46 years ago to address the commonwealth's unmet needs in higher education and workforce training. We were founded, in essence, to do what no other higher education provider was willing or able to do.

Time and again, we have seen the flexibility and responsiveness of that mission serve the commonwealth well - bringing the opportunities of higher education to people who were separated from it by reasons of geography, of finances, of culture and other circumstances.

It's easy to bask in the altruistic notions of our mission. But the truth is that our mission is increasingly selfish - selfish on behalf of the commonwealth's benefit.

Competing for and securing opportunity in the 21st century is harder than it has ever been before. Virginia doesn't have the luxury of wasting the talents and contributions of any single person.

That's especially true when it comes to the men and women who are willing to wear our nation's uniform.

REBUILDING COMMUNITY, COMMONWEALTH AND COUNTRY

It has been said that America is the land of the free because it is the home of the brave.

Since the year 2000, Virginians serving in every branch of our nation's armed forces have been called to duty in no fewer than a dozen foreign countries including Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, East Timor, Haiti, Somalia and Yemen.

We have asked these men and women in many cases to go to places they've never before been, to help people they've never before met with challenges they've never before faced.

It's time, I believe, to take that experience, that courage, and that passion and translate it into opportunity - opportunity that will not only benefit these young people and their families but also our country, our commonwealth and our communities.

Just as we cannot expect members of our military to carry out their mission without resources and training, we cannot expect them to meet their potential at home without resources and training.

That's where their community colleges step in.

I would like to spend the next few minutes talking to you about who these people are - these military-related students and veterans - and what we do to serve them today.

And I will wrap-up, with help from my team, talking about what more we could do to be serving these students moving forward.

WHO ARE THEY?

Virginia's Community Colleges, today, serve more than 31-thousand military-related students. That number includes active military and reserve members; spouses and dependents; and veterans.

We believe that number may be even higher because that is a self-reported statistic, from students enrolled only in our academic credit programs.

Let me give you a better sense of what that number means: if all of those people were to appear in one place, you would have a student body about the size of Virginia Commonwealth University.

I would invite you to read just a few of their stories. We brought with us today copies of the most recent V-C-C-S annual report that includes some student profiles in a special veteran's section. You can't help but be impressed, if not amazed, if you read a few of those stories.

There are some subtle, yet significant, differences between these military-related students and their classmates:

- Our veterans are more likely to be men. Seven out of ten veterans that we serve are men. That is nearly the opposite of our non-veteran student enrollment, where six out of ten students are women.

- Our veterans are more likely to be older students. Most of our veteran students are 25 or older. Fewer than 8 percent are younger than that. Meanwhile, six out of ten students in our non-veteran enrollment are under the age of 25.
- Our students who were veterans are more likely to be minority students generally and more likely to be African-American than the rest of student population.
- Veteran students at Virginia's Community Colleges come to us with lower average incomes and earn slightly higher average financial aid packages.
- Two out of ten students who were veterans are also the first in their family to attend college. That compares to three out of ten for our non-veteran students.
- Veterans are nearly twice as likely as their counterparts to pursue degrees in science, technology, engineering, mathematics and healthcare – or what's often called STEM fields.

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- And it's about even money between veteran and non-veteran students when it comes to examining who are pursuing transfer degrees.

There are some promising signs when you look at those statistics. That's especially true with the significant percentage of male veterans who are enrolling - bucking the gender trends being seen across the nation.

That's also true with the higher percentage of veteran students who are pursuing STEM degrees.

Just as there is near-universal agreement on the need for more college graduates across our commonwealth and country, there is similar agreement on the need for more science, technology, engineering, and mathematics - and healthcare - majors.

SERVING OUR VETERANS

So, what are Virginia's Community Colleges doing to serve active duty members of the military and reserves, veterans and their families?

The answer is that the focus, personnel and resources that our individual 23 community colleges offer to these students are calibrated to match the demand in their college service region.

Accordingly, the parts of Virginia that military-related students and their families most often like to call home – Northern Virginia and Hampton Roads, for example – are where you will find our most significant offerings for those students.

An example of that is the Tidewater Community College Center for Military and Veterans Education, which was established just this year at the college's Virginia Beach Campus.

That center, in many ways, represents a blue print for what community colleges can be to military members, veterans and their families.

According to the Virginia National Guard the T-C-C Center is the only public college or university in the Virginia actively supporting their “Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program” working with their soldiers and families before and after over-seas deployments.

The T-C-C center is also working with the Department of Defense, the Veterans Administration, the Department of Labor, the Office of Personnel Management and others to develop the E-2-I wounded warriors Education Employment Initiative. This work is aimed at working with wounded warriors early in their recovery to identify the skills and knowledge they have and need to earn the postsecondary credentials that

will position them to secure high-wage, high-demand jobs to get them back into the workforce.

The T-C-C center is working on a similar project with the Navy's Center for Personal and Professional Development to design and pilot the Navy's Disability Transition Assistance Program.

Through the center, T-C-C is a candidate for a Military Spouses Community Blueprint Network Grant to ensure that military spouses have the skills and credentials they need to secure good jobs in the private sector.

The T-C-C center, like Northern Virginia and many of our other community colleges, also acts like a bridge connecting military-related students with employers who are in need of skilled-up workers. That work can take many forms.

For example, they are partnering with Dominion Virginia Power and the Troops to Energy Jobs program to help veterans make a smooth transition from their military careers into skilled utility and engineering position within the energy sector.

Along with the Virginia Employment Commission and Easter Seals, the T-C-C center is promoting the Veterans Employment Program Green Jobs Initiative. A customize certification program, created along with the

Virginia Center for Weatherization is showing promising results. Every single veteran who took part in initial pipeline course this year got a job. You can't ask for much more than that.

As I earlier mentioned, efforts like this, in various shapes and sizes can be found across our 23 community colleges.

Virginia Western Community College, in Roanoke, is the first higher education institution in Virginia to officially start a chapter of SALUTE, the nation honor society for veterans.

Patrick Henry Community College, in Martinsville, has a Veteran Coordinator who boasts an impressive track record of connecting veterans with employers who are seeking them.

Eastern Shore Community College is working with their local Virginia Employment Commission to offer monthly workshops for veterans focused on jobs and career services.

A number of our institutions are connected to Veteran's Upward Bound Programs and others are working with local chapters of the Wounded Warrior Program to bring their services to recovering veterans.

Our statewide foundation, the Virginia Foundation for Community College Education, has adopted support for military-related student resources as one of its key priorities.

And, of course, military-related veterans have access to resources like non-credit workforce training programs; academic, financial aid and career coaching; and resume-building networking-assistance at every Virginia Community College, just like their classmates.

MOVING FORWARD

This is simply a small taste of what Virginia's Community Colleges are offering veterans and military-related students.

If for no other reason, I kept it brief to respect everyone's time at this important meeting.

I spoke earlier about some of the differences between military-related students and our entire student population.

There is something significant that all of those students share, however. They all are being served by a community college system that has grown by more than 50,000 students over the last five years while losing nearly \$100 million in General Fund support from the state.

There are ways that we can and should be serving our military-related students. And we are actively seeking the partnerships and the resources to turn some very good ideas into reality.

One of those very good ideas will be demonstrated for you by a member of my team.

You will hear about how the Virginia Education Wizard could be expanded to help veterans find their way from their time in the service to the right postsecondary program and into a good-paying job in a high-demand field.

Just as we find with practically all students, it's the act of transitioning - the act of understanding your experience, making the most of it, and using it to maximize your future - that is where a lot of people get stuck.

We think the Wizard can be a game-changer for these veterans in figuring that out.

More than a million people have used the Wizard. It's helping individuals create college and career plans as early as middle school now.

With the right development, we could extend that type of transformative planning power to our veterans as well.

So with that, I would like to introduce Dr. Craig Herndon.

Craig, who was the original project director of our Wizard project, is now serving as the interim VCCS Vice Chancellor for Workforce Development Services.

Craig...