New law grants credit for military training

By Rick Maze - Staff writer


Federal agencies must treat military training as sufficient to qualify troops for federal licenses or certification under a law enacted July 23

The Veteran Skills to Jobs Act, approved by Congress and signed by President Obama, gives federal agencies until Jan. 19 to draft regulations on exactly how they will credit military training for federally issued licenses, ranging from aircraft mechanics to radio operators.

Most occupational licenses are issued by states, but the federal government provides licenses in aerospace, communications and maritime sectors, according to a report on the bill by the House Veterans’ Affairs Committee.

“Aviation and maritime skills acquired through military training, for example, are readily translatable to many jobs for which employers may require or prefer holders of a federally issued license,” the report says.

The law was the brainchild of Rep. Jeff Denham, R-Calif., an Air Force veteran.

“Despite being trained to maintain some of the most complex aircraft in the world, when I left the military I was told I needed to go to school for three years ... to perform that same job in the private sector,” Denham said. “It is unacceptable that the federal government has still not reformed its licensing process, especially at a time when so many veterans are out of work.”
The aircraft mechanic certification sought by Denham is among those that should be covered by the new law. But while aviation mechanic work is a prime example of a skill that can translate to a civilian job, the Labor Department cautions that this is not a hot field and projects slower-than-average growth of just 9,100 aviation mechanic jobs over the next decade.

Meanwhile, a separate program is underway to provide civilian licenses and certificates to troops while they are still in uniform, as they complete military training. That program initially applies to welding, mechanical, engineering and manufacturing skills.

The services are working with industry and professional groups to revise training, if necessary, so graduates of some courses will automatically receive civilian credentials or be prepared to take any required tests.

Obama said Denham’s initiative could give a big boost to separating troops seeking jobs.

“If you are a young man in charge of a platoon or millions of dollars of equipment and are taking responsibility, or you’re a medic out in the field who is saving lives every single day, when you come home, you need to be credentialed and certified quickly so you can get on the job,” Obama said.

“People should understand how skilled you are. There shouldn’t be bureaucrats or runarounds.”