Legion wants feds to leave veterans preference alone

*Suggestions that the policy is unfair to non-veterans in the federal work force are unjustified*

WASHINGTON (Oct. 9, 2014) -- The federal government’s veterans preference policy has been criticized in a report released last August by the Merit Systems Protection Board (MSPB), which suggested that such preference causes resentment among civilian federal workers, and decreases the number of women being hired into the federal work force.

The Washington Post and Government Executive have reported on MSPB’s findings without challenging the conclusions.

“We’ve seen the report and its claim that veterans preference for federal jobs is creating resentment among federal workers who are civilians,” said Michael D. Helm, national commander of The American Legion, “and the claim that it interferes with the hiring of women.

“To any civilian workers who have problems with veterans preference, The American Legion’s message is simple: Become a veteran. Those who have served in uniform have earned such preference.”

Helm also took issue with MSPB’s finding that veterans preference had a negative impact on the hiring of women. “The federal government has been hiring fewer people in general since fiscal 2011 – that includes women. But the good news is that more women veterans, and more veterans in general are being hired.”

Noting that the percentage of women employees in the federal work force has dropped only one percent since 2000, Helm said veterans preference needed to remain in place to help veterans compete with civilians in the job market. “We understand that some individuals abuse the policy, and that needs to be corrected. But helping those who have served in uniform get jobs, especially those who are disabled, is a policy that must remain in place.”

Mark Reinhold, associate director for the Office of Personnel Management, wrote in a letter that “OPM does not concur in your somewhat negative assessment,” and that MSPB “seems really to be taking aim at the entire civil service system in its current form.”

Helm said The American Legion will closely monitor any suggested changes to veterans preference policy. “We urge the Office of Personnel Management – and Congress -- to continue supporting our veterans in the federal job market with its hiring policies.”

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