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The Labor Day holiday has evolved to represent the official end of summer. For some it means getting the kids ready to start school; for others, the the long-awaited start of football season. That said, the historical origins of the holiday are based on a celebration of the social and economic achievements of American workers and their contributions to the strength, prosperity and well-being of our country.

In a presidential election year, politicians from both sides of the aisle will undoubtedly attempt to leverage the Labor Day holiday — and the very real employment challenges facing many Americans — as a platform to advance partisan messages and agendas. It's also very likely that the labor situation facing America's post-9/11 military veterans, which for the better part of the past 24 months has compared unfavorably to non-veterans, will become a topic of political finger-pointing between the candidates for the nation's highest office, and for others vying for political advantage.

To be clear, the employment situation of America's veterans is a very real concern. Last year, veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan experienced unemployment at a rate of 12.1 percent. The unemployment rate for our youngest veterans and for female veterans was even higher. As we look forward to the planned end of war in Afghanistan in 2014 (and a subsequent drawdown in the size of the U.S. military over the next five years), conditions are ripe for the employment challenges facing those who served in uniform to endure.

It's my hope that on this Labor Day holiday and throughout the campaign season, politicians and pundits rise above the temptation to politicize the employment situation of the nation's veterans, because it inevitably devolves to the simple suggestion that somehow the nation's veterans are owed jobs as a consequence of their service in uniform. This is the wrong message and many veterans, in fact, would find that idea inherently insulting.

What we owe our veterans is timely access to the training, programs, benefits and services that keep them well and productive, so that they can put their often exceptional skills to use in jobs that both grow their futures and contribute meaningfully to our nation's economy.

What we owe our veterans are ways to transfer their certifications and licenses from military to civilian settings — which New York, I'm proud to say, has begun in some occupations.

To say that we owe veterans jobs is to suggest that they cannot succeed in the workplace without hand-holding. This approach frames veterans as victims, rather than acknowledging and embracing the skills and abilities they developed while in uniform, many of which are applicable, easily transferrable and often of great value to the American workplace.

Indeed, I've had the honor and privilege of watching veterans here in Central New York, when supported with training and education that complements their military experience, take steps toward positioning themselves as leaders in business and industry. Veterans like Tony Baird, who continues to grow and expand a successful electronic business in downtown Syracuse; Gerry Garritillo, who manages a flourishing insurance practice in Marcellus; Ken Tock, who is playing a pivotal role in designing next-generation manufacturing technology; and Christine Gentry, who is cultivating a successful home furnishings business, selling to customers all over the world from Liverpool.

Randy Wolken, president of the Manufacturers Association of Central New York, which serves over 330 companies with over 55,000 employees in the region, is a West Point alumnus and served at both Griffiss Air Force Base and Fort Drum earlier in his career. There are countless other successful veterans in Central New York. These men and women aren't victims, and we shouldn't be at all surprised by their successes.

Actionable and enduring solutions to the issue of veterans' unemployment will remain elusive until we move beyond platitudes and political rhetoric, and acknowledge and act on the underlying business case affecting the veterans' employment crisis. The fact is, the case for hiring veterans is real and compelling.

Veterans are comfortable in high-stress environments, entrepreneurial, exhibit high levels of organizational commitment. There are few civilian parallels to the crisis- and stress-management skills one develops while deployed to a combat environment. These individuals are creative, focused on the mission, can motivate the team, identify and solve problems, and deliver results that will contribute to the bottom line.

Hiring veterans should never be framed as an act of pity or charity, but instead a shrewd business decision aimed at creating a competitive advantage in the face of a dynamic and uncertain business environment.

Veterans here in Central New York have worked for the better part of the past decade building communities and strengthening economies in far-flung regions of the world; it is time we welcome them into our businesses so they can do the same at home — not as acts of charity, but instead because it's a smart business decision.

So as we celebrate the Labor Day holiday under the fog of a divisive and contentious political storm, it is my hope that — if only on this one issue — our elected officials and candidates for office voice a unified message on the subject of veterans employment, one that complements the Labor Day tradition; that is, highlighting how our nation's veterans represent a workforce well-positioned to contribute to the strength, prosperity and well-being of our country.

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