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"The basis of our governments being the opinion of the people, the very first object should be to keep that right; and were it left to me to decide whether we should have a government without newspapers or newspapers without government, I should not hesitate a moment to prefer the latter."

- Thomas Jefferson

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OPINION & COMMENT

First Amendment: Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances.

Veterans initiative gives back to those who have given

Guest Commentary

By Jerry Sanders and Phil Blair

get veterans and their families better integrated into their communities.

The VA is calling this campaign the Veterans Economic Communities Initiative and its goal is to bring people and organizations together to create more education and job opportunities for veterans and their families.

We can't think of any better way to give back to those who have given so much on our behalf. These men and women took on some of the hardest jobs in the world and when they come home from service they return with incredible skills that our companies, organizations and government desperately need.

As president and CEO of the San Diego Regional Chamber of Commerce and president and CEO of Manpower San Diego, we hear from business leaders regularly about the contribution their veteran employees make.

Helping veterans reintegrate, re-engage and find opportunities to develop their careers isn't just beneficial for our veterans, it's good for our schools, businesses, service organizations and community at large.

That's why we're so proud that San Diego was chosen as one of the first 25 communities to partner with VA this summer. The Chamber is honored to work closely with Manpower, 2-1-1 San Diego and other members of the defense, veterans and military affairs committee to launch the initiative in our community and ensure its success.

As one of the largest military communities in the country, San Diego is a proud veteran-focused city, and although the city and region have done tremendous work to support veterans, there is always room for improvement.

Through VECI, we can build on the great local initiatives already in operation, such as zero8undred, which has quickly been established as a national model for transitioning members of the military, or the United Veterans Council, which represents hundreds of veteran organizations in the region and is a leader in advocating for veterans and their

The Department of Veterans Affairs has announced it will partner with 50 communities across the country, beginning with 25 this summer, to help

families.

VECI presents a powerful new opportunity that harnesses the progress we've already made and the dedication of these organizations to ensure we are reaching more veterans and doing so more efficiently.

Our local VECI economic liaison — who is VA's ambassador in the San Diego community — has initiated partnerships with employers, elected officials, nonprofit organizations and educational institutions to develop new opportunities for veterans and their families in this area.

As a community, we can make a difference. Here are just a few of the activities we're going to be working on locally through the VECI:

- Fostering employer networking and encouraging hiring commitments on the Veterans Employment Center (www.ebenefits.va.gov/jobs).
- Supporting career fairs, job and employment summits, and roundtables to boost economic competitiveness for veterans.
- Sharing best practices to train and support employers who are considering hiring veterans.
- Facilitating the development of learning and resource hubs to connect veterans with entrepreneurship, credentialing and skills building.

The Chamber and Manpower San Diego look forward to working with the VA and VECI. We are honored to help our veterans achieve the American dream they so honorably defended.

If, like our organizations, you are committed to hiring and supporting local veterans, we encourage you to learn more about the VECI initiative and thank you for your commitment to the men and women who have served so selflessly.

We all have a part to play in this mission and we are confident that we can continue to work together to make a difference for our veteran community.

The local VECI Economic Liaison for San Diego is Sarah Kirkpatrick, who can be reached at s.kirkpatrick.CTR@calibresys.com.

Sanders is president and CEO of the San Diego Regional Chamber of Commerce. Blair is president and CEO of Manpower San Diego.

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