

THE STATE OF VETERANS EMPLOYMENT IN OHIO

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MONDAY, DECEMBER 12, 2011

United States Senate,
Committee on Veterans' Affairs,
Washington, D.C.

The Committee met, pursuant to notice, at 9:30 a.m., at the Center for Workforce Development, Columbus, Ohio, Hon. Sherrod Brown, Chairman of the Committee, presiding.

Present: Senator Brown.

OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR BROWN

Senator Brown. The Senate Committee on Veterans will come to order. This is an official Committee hearing.

I wanted to announce first one of the best resources available in assistance in employment is the AMVETS and their career center program. George Ondick of the AMVETS has set up a booth in the lobby and can answer any questions that you may have in addition to the people testifying here and from my staff.

George, do you want to tell everyone for a moment? If George wants to take--can you for just a moment give us a couple minutes about your services and what you are doing?

Mr. Ondick. [Off microphone.] Sure. Thank you very much, Senator.

The AMVETS, first, is a nonprofit 501(c)(3)

organization that provides current employment services to those who have [inaudible]. That includes veterans and service members and members of [inaudible].

On behalf of my over 60 career center [inaudible] in the State of Ohio are located in [inaudible] centers and one-stop employment centers and other locations [inaudible].

[Inaudible], related skills, job readiness training [inaudible], resume writing [inaudible] market themselves [inaudible].

[Inaudible] help veterans find jobs with vet-friendly employers and [inaudible] to the extent that we possibly can [inaudible].

We have been operating for 10 years with a track record [inaudible].

Senator Brown. Thank you. Thank you for your service, and others here from the AMVETS, thanks very much.

I want to thank Chairwoman Murray for her leadership of the Committee and for working with me on today's hearing.

Dolly Malendras and Alvin Valenzuela with Senator Murray's office and committee staff are here today. Welcome to Columbus. I hope you have time to enjoy this great city. Things are happening in this city. It is an incredible city, the largest city in Ohio now by far in population and growing and vibrant. So I hope you can spend some time here.

John McDonald has also joined us from Ranking Member Burr's office. We welcome him too.

And a special thanks again to Dr. Harrison for welcoming us.

I cannot think of a more appropriate place to hold a hearing on veterans employment than here at Columbus's State Center for Workforce Development.

I would first of all like for any veteran here to either stand or raise your hand so that we can recognize you, all veterans in the audience.

[Applause.]

Senator Brown. Thank you for your service to our country and continue your service to your community and your fellow veterans.

One person I would also like to mention in honor is a gentleman from Cleveland named Frank Anderson. Frank passed away at the age of, I believe, 60, a couple, or 3 or 4 days ago. Frank was paralyzed some 40 years ago when he was a soldier in the U.S. Army. Frank was actively lobbying and was a member of the Paralyzed Veterans of America. No one fought harder for his fellow veterans than I had ever seen in Frank Anderson, and I just wanted to honor his memory as someone who has made many people's lives better as a result of his sacrifice and his activism over the years.

As I said, this is an official field hearing of the

United States Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs.
Everything--it is everything here will be part of the public record, everything that the panelists say and statements and questions and answers.

Kathryn Craig on my staff is here today. Many of you may know her. She is a constituent liaison for my office.

Where is Kathryn?

Kathryn is in the back. And be in touch with her.

Doug Babcock is also on my staff and Doug handles veterans issues, played a central role in many of the veterans programs, from the new GI Bill to the work on hiring vets and all that the Senate Veterans' Committee has worked on. Doug went to high school in Columbus, grew up in Galion, went to high school in Columbus and does work for us and for the State in Washington.

The purpose of these hearings, obviously, is to hear from you, from veterans who are not able to attend hearings in Washington, D.C. They serve two important purposes. They help explain how policies affect people in Ohio, and they provide Ohioans with another forum through which they may influence the policies that affect their lives.

This hearing will be transcribed and shared with members of the Committee. Anyone wishing to get a transcript should be in touch with Kathryn or Doug or me.

In the last few months I spent, as I have really my

five years in the Senate, a lot of time talking to veterans in places around the State, especially veterans returning to school at Cleveland State, at Youngstown State and in Columbus.

I was recently at Youngstown State and spoke with a YSU senior and veteran, talking about the skills he and other veterans could bring to the labor market--skills that they developed, learned and honed, often in Iraq or Afghanistan or serving in the military stateside or somewhere else.

At Cleveland State, I spoke with staff from its SERV program which is a national model in helping service members and veterans transition to civilian life through education and workforce training--a unique program helping to bring veterans back into the classroom where a 25-year-old combat veteran sitting next to an 18-year-old just-out-of-high-school young man or young woman who does not really necessarily relate to the life experiences of the veteran. We have helped integrate those veterans in the classroom with some special programs at Cleveland State.

In Columbus, I went to a small business that wanted to install energy efficient technologies installed by returning veterans who had the specialized skills needed to get the job done. More later from then, on what happened there.

Service members who protect their nation and risk their lives should not have to return stateside, return to the

United States--as veterans, as former service members, as private citizens--should not have to return at the thought of not being able to find a job. Unfortunately, that happens far too often. Just as we invest in our service members in times of war, and members of Congress are always willing to vote lots of dollars for service members in times of war, we need to serve our service members returning home much better than we do.

Veterans between the ages of 20 and 24 face an unacceptably high unemployment rate. About one in five of these young veterans cannot find a job to support their family, to ease their transition with all their other challenges back into civilian life.

That is why enacting into law the VOW to Hire Heroes Act was so important and ensures a grateful nation will continue to invest in those who have served us.

It provides critical hiring incentives, transition assistance, mentorship programs to soldiers and to Marines and to sailors. It provides tax breaks for employers who hire veterans based in part--the size of the tax break, in part, is based on how long the veteran has been out of work. It provides job training for airmen and reservists to connect them and other veterans to jobs in high demand service sectors.

It provides 100,000 unemployed veterans of past eras

and wars with up to 1 year of additional Montgomery GI Bill benefits to qualify for jobs in high demand sectors such as IT. It also provides disabled veterans up to one year of additional vocational rehabilitation and employment benefits.

Veterans, young and old, have so much to contribute to our economy and our nation because of their work ethic, because of their service and because of the job skills that they have learned in the military.

Now that is why when so much of Congress has been divided with such uber-partisanship sometimes we were able to pass this bill and get it signed into law, but more needs to be done. We need to make sure that every veteran is aware of and is applying for the government programs they are entitled to.

Ben, in a moment, I assume, will share the story of how he found out about what Tipping Point is doing. And we have got to make it a more systematic way so that others can follow the same path Ben followed.

These are benefits that veterans have earned and they deserve. They are programs--these programs will improve their lives, their children's lives, the lives of others in our community, but they must know about the programs to utilize them.

We need to do a better job of educating employers on

the unique skills and talents of veterans and help them find these veterans in the labor force.

We need to coordinate the programs available for veterans from the Department of Labor to Ohio's extraordinary--in Washington--to Ohio's extraordinary system of county veterans service officers.

We need to do a better job of partnering with veterans service organizations. How can we better work with organizations like AMVETS and its career center programs?

We must work with veterans as they enter the private sector from small businesses to large companies.

And like a college career officer, we must maintain a lifelong relationship, not only offer services when a service member first leaves the military. We do not necessarily even do that part well, but it has got to be longer lasting than just that first hit, if you will, out of the military. They help to create and protect our economy and our nation. They deserve the full support of the Federal Government.

Whether it is a young tech sergeant from Wright Pat with specialized training or an older veteran who is looking to bring her wisdom and leadership to a second career, we know veterans bring unique skills and talents to our workforce. Helping a veteran find a job is the right thing to do morally and the smart thing to do for our economy.

Now I will introduce the panel. They will speak for five, six, seven minutes, whatever they have prepared. And then, after each of them speaks, I will begin the questions.

Our first witness is Kyle Burks. Kyle is originally from Fremont, Ohio.

Fremont Ross Little Giants--did you go to Fremont Ross?

Mr. Burks. Yes, sir.

Senator Brown. Okay. I want to first congratulate Kyle on graduating over the weekend, as President Harrison said.

Mr. Burks. Thank you.

Senator Brown. Kyle is a former Army combat engineer, a snapper. He is a combat veteran who served in Iraq. While deployed, he participated in over 100 firefights and found and dismantled over 250 roadside bombs. He is a recipient of the Purple Heart and the Valor Award.

Benjamin Noland is a Marine veteran originally from Kenton, Ohio, not far away, who was set to be stationed in Japan following boot camp and training. After 9/11, he was sent to desert training in Twentynine Palms, California, deployed to Iraq in late 2002. He was injured in the course of duty, returned to Iraq for another deployment later, his deployment later served in Afghanistan, returned to civilian life in 2007 on the eve of the economic downturn. While working to find employment and deal with all the strains in

the kind of service he experienced, all the kinds of service he can bring, this economy bottomed out. After struggling like so many, Benjamin now works for Tipping Point Renewable Energy.

We will then hear from Rebecca Lee who has served on roundtables with me before and has been an important advisor to our efforts. She is Executive Director of the county just south of here, the Pickaway County Veterans Service Commission. In addition to helping veterans through Pickaway County and around the State, Ms. Lee serves as the first female Commandant of Marine Corps League, Detachment 8310, Circleville. She served as Chair of the Governor's Women's Veteran Advisory Committee. She is a member of the Ohio Women's Hall of Fame. And one of her greatest points of pride is that four of her sons have chosen to follow in her footsteps and currently serve in the U.S. Military.

The last witness on the panel is Lisa Phelps, Vice President of Human Resources of the Chesapeake Energy Company. Lisa came to Chesapeake with more than 18 years of human resources experience, a B.A. in human resources from Golden Gate University in 1992, an M.B.A. from our Lady of the Lake University in 1998. She oversees Chesapeake Energy's veterans hiring initiatives.

Thank you for Columbus for this.

Kyle, begin, please.

STATEMENT OF KYLE BURKS, VETERAN

Mr. Burks. Yes, sir. Senator Brown, I would first like to thank you for this time to be able to share my experiences with the veterans benefits I have had and also my military experience.

I joined the Army in 2005 because I felt like I was at a dead-end job. My grandpa had just passed away, and he was in World War II and broke up concentration camps. So I felt like I wanted to do something meaningful.

I joined the active duty Army. I signed up for 3 years, 16 weeks, and that is what I did. I have been out of the military since 2008.

During that time in the military, I was deployed to Iraq, performing route clearance missions. I was there for 15 months. I saw everything from 250 bombs go off, 100 firefights, my best friend's truck getting hit by a suicide bomb. I made my sergeant in two years and eight months, which I am very proud of.

I want to receive my Bachelor's from Ohio State. I have just received my Associate's from Columbus State. I plan on one day going to get my Master's so I can be a professor. I also would like to open up a dog daycare center.

When I first got out of the military, the briefing was -I thought was very extremely boring. It is filled with a

lot of PowerPoint slides. When you ETS, they kind of do a catch-all. They bring everybody that is leaving the base at the same time and give you a huge briefing. So you really do not know what your job transforms into civilian life.

Looking for roadside bombs, there is really no job like that in the civilian life. So I really did not have a clue of what I would do next.

So I decided that I would go back to school.

I feel like that if--a better way to do that is if you would bring--when the veterans come back to Ohio, that they would meet with a benefits counselor here and describe all the things in Ohio that you can get because when I was there they kind of did a cover-all for the United States. So coming back to Ohio, I really had no clue what Ohio had to offer for veterans.

Dealing with the VA hospital is something totally in itself. I finally figured out how to do it after three years of going there. It took me a year and a half just to get an ACL reconstructive knee surgery.

When I had torn my ACL in Iraq, they asked me to stay there, so I did. And then I got back and I was ETSing in a few months, so they asked--they told me to wait until I got out of the military. So I did that, and it took me over a year and a half to get an ACL reconstruction. I was cancelled three times because the Dayton VA was too backed

up.

Now during this time, the third time, or the second time when I got cancelled, I got fed up with it and I had to call the bursar's office and tell them that I was going to go to a new station or do something like that. But what was odd was once I did that, within 24 hours, they told me I could pick any doctor in the Columbus area that I wanted. I do not understand why I could not do this before if it was cancelled so many times at the Dayton VA.

Making an appointment at the VA can be a nightmare. You have to call. You have to know the right person to call.

And then filling out the disability paperwork and meeting with somebody there was a complete nightmare too, and I got fed up with it and actually did it myself, which a lot of people do not suggest doing because it takes so much longer. I felt like it was a lot quicker. I got the--I got the same results. I have had other friends do the same thing in North Carolina, Illinois. People I have served with asked me how I did it because the VA was taking so long at their place.

I know very little about the veterans service--the jobs and services for veterans. The programs I have found out I found out through other vets. The best source is another vet now. It is a lot easier to figure out when somebody

else goes through it.

I applied at Kroger after getting out of the military for a part-time job. When I went there for the interview, they asked me about my military background. I told them I looked for roadside bombs.

They asked a few other questions, so I was honest and considerate and told them I was partially disabled. I suffer from PTSD, MTBI and a few other things. I cannot say for sure if this is why I did not get the part-time job, but I know it really could not help.

When you deal with the VA, when you are making an appointment at the hospital, they sometimes set your appointment without you knowing it and then give you like a week's notice that you have it, or two weeks' notice. So there is really nothing you can do about it. If you miss that appointment, you are waiting another two or three months to go back, especially when you deal with the surgeons, like the arthroscopic surgeons and everything.

So that is really a big pain, and I know that employers--it cannot be good for employers as a business person, having somebody tell you a week in advance that hey, I am going to be at the doctor's this day, and then the following week you have another appointment because they cannot seem to make the appointments on the same days.

Now I filled out voc rehab paperwork too. I did this

in 2009. One of my friends told me about the voc rehab program. It sounded wonderful. I did it.

And then, when I met with the person, they said that post-9/11 GI Bill was way better than the voc rehab program at that time. So I decided to go with the post-9/11 GI Bill.

I was accepted into voc rehab in 2009, and then I realized that I changed my major at Columbus State, so I only have one year left on my GI Bill.

So I went back to voc rehab and asked them how I could finish out my degree at Ohio State. They told me that I had to go back and fill out all the paperwork again. I did this in November. I still have not heard back from them about if I was accepted into the program or not.

I have called twice, and both times they keep on telling me any time now you will find out. I have called-- the Cleveland Office is who I have called.

I have heard a book on the programs for veterans, but I have never really seen one. Some of the vets and like my friends in the military who I was with, we kind of think it is like a unicorn. It is a myth. You really do not know where it is or where it has been or if you can ever find it.

I have had much more experiences dealing with the GI Bill than I have with the employment issues. The GI Bill has been actually a wonderful program--the post-9/11 GI

Bill. It is amazing if you get the chance to use it, which I have.

A couple issues I have with it are that the book, when you receive your book money, it can take another three or four months afterwards to receive it. For instance, I was in Columbus State in September. I did not receive my book money until mid-November to early December. So I paid for the books up front and did not receive that money until later on.

It is not really that big of a deal, but it can be for other veterans if they did not budget their money, if they have kids, children or anything else. One of my friends in Colorado has four children. So taking that money up front and not getting it for a while really hurts him, and he really gets frustrated with that point. He has actually found a program that was disabled vets on the internet or something, where they actually fronted him the money to buy the books and then he paid them back because it took so long with the post-9/11 GI Bill.

I also understand that everyone has to make budget cuts now, and I understand that even the veterans do, but the break pay and the post-9/11 GI Bill is a big issue right now with other vets, as myself.

What the break pay is, is that when you--for instance, if I would go to Columbus State again, since I ended on

December 10th, they take that. They take the days, and then they subtract the money and they pro-rate it. So I would not get paid again until January, so I miss 24 days of pay, which I can understand everybody has to make cuts.

But the issue is that, for instance, my friend who has four children has to miss that. Let's say he does go pick up a job. Well, he is not going to get paid for two weeks anyway. If he works 40 hours, then he does make up the money. Well, then in two more weeks he probably is going to quit because he has to go back to school full-time. With four children, going to school full-time, working full-time is just not something he could do at this moment, especially with the things that have happened to him.

So I do understand that we have to make cuts, budget cuts, with that, but I would really like to see that changed to how it used to be before where you did get paid for that; you did get paid for the break pay.

Also, the rule of the GI Bill, I did not know this, that you guys actually added another year to it if you needed to. I called the GI Bill about three weeks ago and asked them about that since I was going to OSU to finish out my degree, and she told me that I could not do that, that it was not possible to take another year on the GI Bill, which I understand.

I picked the wrong major to begin with. It was

something that I did. It was my fault. I changed my major and really liked what I changed to. So I would like to continue that, but because the way the GI Bill is structured you only get four years. So that fifth year, either it comes out of pocket or I hope that the voc rehab program comes through.

I would like to say thank you, Senator Brown, for listening to me about my issues I faced, and the audience. I would also like to tell fellow veterans even though the VFW may seem like a place for old people it is really a place for young people too. I have learned more about the experiences I have had, with them, finding out programs and everything else through other vets that have done things.

I also find it hard to ask for help and want to do it on my own. Do not be afraid to speak out because otherwise great people fighting for our transitions do not know what they need to fix.

Thank you for your time.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Burks follows:]

DRAFT

Senator Brown. Thank you, Mr. Burks.
Mr. Noland, your comments. Thank you very much.

DRAFT

STATEMENT OF BENJAMIN NOLAND, VETERAN

Mr. Noland. Thank you, Senator, for this time.

Fellow veterans and veterans up here with me, it is a great honor to sit here today with you--all of us who have stood on that wall, defending freedom.

A little bit about myself, I come from a family who is very patriotic, who has represented the United States Military in every conflict between now and the War of 1812. So I took great pleasure in joining the Marine Corps in 2001.

My immediate family is made up of my daughter, Alexis, my two sons, Kolton who is 11 and Kaleb who is 10. My wife and I have been together for over four years now.

Growing up in Central Ohio was a great honor. Ohio is a very patriotic State. I was not set for the Marine Corps right away after high school. I attended an electrical apprenticeship program in Florida for two years. I came back to Columbus, was actually walking through the new Easton Mall and found a Marine Corps recruiter--I will never forget his name, Staff Sergeant McGrady and told him I am his next recruit. He was a little shocked, so was my mother.

So--and that was July of 2001. Little did anybody know what was going to tragically happen on 9/11, and that was just about a week before I was to graduate boot camp.

I quickly went through MCT training and was then rushed to CAX training in Twentynine Palms and Yuma, Arizona. My first duty station was supposed to be Okinawa, Japan. It ended up being Kuwait.

Needless to say, my butt was puckered. That is about as best as I could put it.

Did I think I was going to be in combat? No.

Was I ready for it? Yes. Being at the age of 25, I was quite a bit older than the average 18-year-old Marine.

As a supply logistics guy, I knew my job was very heavily needed and depended upon by the ground forces that were to soon make their march from Kuwait to Baghdad. When the invasion happened, I took part of several supply convoys to and from Doha, Kuwait, Baghdad, Fallujah and supplying the front lines and the troops with their supplies that they needed.

On the 5th of June in 2003, my convoy was attacked maliciously by a couple of cowards with an IED. Two individuals, including my A driver, lost their lives. A very close friend of mine, actually he is from here in Central Ohio. He is from Worthington.

I was knocked unconscious. Do not remember the event. Was life-flighted to Ramstein, Germany, where I had eye surgery done to the left side of my eye. I had some burns on the left side of my face. And from what I understand, I

had a traumatic concussion, which to this day I have severe headaches which I have come to live with.

I guess the underlying medical issue was the emotional side effect that I buried inside of me. At a sense, I was ashamed for quite a long time that I did not die, that I felt that there was an emotional disconnect there with me and the rest of society.

I came back to Camp Lejeune, was put on limited duty. The Marine Corps tried to separate me for the medical conditions I was going through. I fought that. I won. I went back to Iraq again in 2005, searching for those 2, the 3, whoever put that IED there even though I had no name or no face, but that is my driving force.

I continued. I reenlisted for an additional 2 years, went back to Afghanistan in 2006 and 2007. It was not until that time I realized that my family meant more to me than the service to my country. My daughter, who is 12, and my stepsons were growing up before my eyes, and I did not know who they were.

So I got off active duty in late 2007, moved back to Ohio. I had found a management job with a chemical company in Kenton, a great \$18 an hour job. I thought wow, life is great.

Six months later, the economy crashes. Three hundred people lose their job. We had just bought a house. I have

to thank my wife every day for, one, supporting our family, for, two, putting up with me.

I went out after losing my job in July of 2008 and searched. I drove through 6 States, applied to 311, 312 jobs. Nobody--nobody would hire me.

And I could not believe that. I had a great resume. You know, I have never quit a job before. You know, I had an honorable discharge from the Marine Corps. I had served my country.

And all I could do is look at my family and wonder how they were suffering. My wife was in the middle of finishing her degree, so she was only doing a part-time job.

Just to go from walking off active duty to thinking you found the greatest job, you would buy a house, you would get a new car and you would think things are on the up and up, and the rug gets pulled out from underneath you. It is very difficult.

I figured the six years in supply and logistics--I tried for supply and logistics jobs. I tried for McDonald's, Walmart. You, know nothing. I did not belittle myself. There was nothing there, absolutely nothing.

I will not mention the retailer's name. I will tell you it is from the State up north, but they are here in Columbus. I went in through an interview with them, and the individual had the tenacity to downplay the fact that we are

in Iraq and that I did not stand up to our commander-in-chief and disrespect the law of order. I have never again shopped in that store, I will tell you that much. And that was in 2010.

In November of 2010, my wife had finally told me she had been documenting for the last 4 years, 3 years, my actions, and that she thought I had severe PTSD. No one knew of the incident in Iraq except for those who were there. I kept that from my family. I kept that from my wife. She called the Columbus VA and got me in, and I am currently seeing a psychiatrist for PTSD and my traumatic brain injury.

And I can sympathize with Kyle in a sense of many of the VA struggles that yeah, they are quick to label you and quick to medicate you, which I am on five different medications right now, one of which Ohio State University says that they have not handed out to somebody in 25 years.

It is tough, but when dealing with a traumatic brain injury, the short-term memory loss, those things you do not see until the loved ones you have hurt over and over. The VA does not recognize that.

I have got these bumps appearing all over me. I have got a cyst on my heart that the VA only told me about because I passed out a month ago while I was at a PTSD meeting, took me to urgent care and said, oh, by the way, do

you know you have a cyst on your heart? And I said, is that why I have had this chest pain?

My wife had enough. She is now employed at the Hardin County Sheriff's Office in Kenton, and we used her insurance, and I have been seeing cardiologists and neurologists at Ohio State University. It took them 10 days--10 days--to tell me what I have.

And I have been seeing the VA for over a year, and the VA, all they could do is schedule appointments. The soonest they could schedule a cardiology appointment was February 20th of 2012. Matter of fact, this afternoon, I have my fourth cardiology appointment at OSU. So needless to say, I have pretty much given up on the VA.

During those two years that I was unemployed, I tried the Montgomery GI Bill because I thought--which was in large part due to the Senator having it redeveloped for the new 9/11 veterans--it was a great fit. But it is not a great fit for families because as what you heard Kyle saying is true. They pay for your tuition, but your books and other things, you have to pay for it out of pocket because it takes them so long to pay you back.

That organization that he is speaking of is called Books for Vets, and they will pay for your books up front but only at a cost of 20 percent interest on the loan that they give you. I currently owe over \$2,000 to that company

because I committed to two years at OSU-Lima, but I backed out after the financial burden that I saw on my family.

We fast-forward to August of this year, sitting in another VA appointment waiting room, I watch the channel 10 afternoon news and I see Senator Brown with my current boss, Eric Zimmerman, who is sitting among us at the Flannagan's Bar and Grill on Dublin Road in Dublin, and this great project called Solar by Soldiers.

I took a pen and wrote the name down, wrote the Senator's name down and Eric's name down. I called them. I emailed my resume to Darin Hadinger, another a co-owner of the company. He called me back at 10:00 that night and had me come on the job site the next day. I came with my tools and my boots in hand, and I actually started working that afternoon and I have worked every day since then.

I have never been a part of any type of renewable energy program, and needless to say, it is a change. It is something that this country needs. We need it. We need a change. There needs to be a change. There are veterans that are going to come home from beyond me that need this, that need jobs like this.

And renewable energy is sustainable. I mean I have seen three projects that I have taken part of that have offset the energy reliability on foreign oil and natural resources. These employers and customers that are buying

this, they are seeing the great results, and it is amazing.

And they are only utilizing these grants, the 1603 Federal grant, State grants and other great amenities out there that are slowly going away, and we need to reuse those and have Congress pass new laws.

There has got to be some type of veteran benefit for these companies to say, hey, you know what; if you do renewable energy, we will give you a 5 percent tax break, or 15 percent, something. Something has got to be done about that.

You know what? I have taken care of myself. I am on the righteous path. It took a long time, but I am here.

But I am more worried about the people that are coming home now. That is my main focus, and that is what I want to put all my energy on. I have taken care of my family.

Thank you, Senator.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Noland follows:]

DRAFT

Senator Brown. Thank you. Thanks for your service and
thank you for sharing your story.
Ms. Lee.

DRAFT

STATEMENT OF REBECCA LEE, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
PICKAWAY COUNTY VETERAN SERVICE COMMISSION

Ms. Lee. Good morning, Senator Brown. I want to thank you and the members of the other Senators' staff as well as your own staff. It is truly an honor for me to be at this hearing.

You are about to muzzle a Marine, another Marine, but I do not know how I can follow these two. What I do as a county veterans service officer is because of these two and because of my four boys that are currently serving. I want them to come home to better benefits than I came home to, that these gentlemen have come home to. I want them to come home with a better understanding of what is available to them.

I was President of the National Association of County Veterans Service Officers. So it really gave me a very good perspective nationally, but I also work as the Pickaway County Veterans Service Officer and the Executive Director there. And I am here today to talk to you about veterans employment issues and recommendations on where we as a nation can better assist our returning heroes.

There is currently 23 million honorably discharged veterans of the Armed Forces of the United States, and a large number of those veterans, as you just heard, are having difficulties returning to civilian life. In this day

and age of our great nation, it is unthinkable that young men like this, and women, that enter into the military service, serve honorably and upon discharge are finding difficulty obtaining a sustaining employment.

And I feel it is our responsibility as people of the United States to fulfill the debt that we owe our service members and our veterans of assuring them better and brighter futures as our thanks for their service in our defense. That promise includes a myriad of veterans benefits should the service member become injured, as these two gentlemen did, in defense of our freedom but also an underlying promise that says if you serve your country with honor your country will be there to serve you.

And it is not a handout. It is a hand up. Together, we must develop mechanisms for solutions so that the veterans are able to return to civilian life and find their part of the American dream.

The National Association of County Veterans Service Officers works hard to train and equip service officers throughout the nation in providing benefits to veterans.

In Ohio, we are very fortunate. We have a county veterans service office in all 88 counties. Not all States are set up similar to us.

The National Association of County Veterans Service Officers, as well as the Ohio State Association of County

Veterans Service Officers works in conjunction with the VA, and we are equipping these service officers to explain things like education benefits, to explain their State and local benefits, to help them with their medical benefits. But we are embedded in the local communities. We know the resources that are available within our own rural communities to help these veterans. And one of the more important tasks, and the reason I am here today, is to assist veterans in obtaining gainful employment once they come back.

The National Association of County Veterans Service Officers has been in existence since 1990, and as I stated, we provide all the way from basic to advanced training. I am one of the certified veterans advocates, one of six in the nation.

But we have observed an alarming trend of unemployment with our veterans coming home, and the current state of the economy is horrible, and it is affecting our nation's veterans even more than their civilian counterparts.

And this is a November 2011 statistic, but unemployment rates are hovering at nearly 9 percent for the nation as a whole. This even alarmed me when I read it--returning young veterans have a rate of 30.4 percent, and young African-American veterans returning from the service have an unemployment rate of 48 percent. Nonveterans of the same

age group have an unemployment rate of 15.3 percent.

You can look at statistics from the State of Ohio. You can see it fluctuating anywhere from 15 to 22 percent for male veterans coming back. That is unacceptable.

And why does the average veteran coming out of the service have a more difficult time locating a job? Well, you heard a lot of it right here with these two gentlemen testifying. The fact that most veterans are men has an effect because unemployment is worse for men, by a full percentage point. Men are unemployed at 9.5 percent while women at 8.5 percent. And you also have a smaller percentage of women serving than you do men.

Many returning veterans, particularly the younger veterans, lack competitive education levels. They are leaving straight out of high school and going straight into the military. Their counterparts are going on to college. This is putting them behind the hamster wheel.

Their counterparts are graduating as my--my son is a reservist in the Marine Corps. He has been to war twice. He is coming back in April. He will finish his college degree.

But he said, mom, I am not going back to the main branch. Why should I?

He said, everyone that I was there with has already graduated.

He said, I have been to war. I do not care about walking across that stage and getting a degree. I just care about holding it in my hand, that diploma.

As soon as he gets his diploma, he is headed right back to Afghanistan.

So these young men and women, after repeated deployments, are coming home to an unstable economy. Where once we were the Land of Opportunity, we have now deteriorated to a Land of Survival.

Unfortunately, the job market seems to punish those with less education, and quite frankly, not enough employers place importance on your military service. You heard the young man down there speaking of sweeping for IEDs. Who is going to hire you to sweep for IEDs?

Due to this, recently discharged veterans are resorting to their education benefits. They are trying to obtain degrees, but they are years older than their classmates.

And as this gentleman referred to, it was an awkward situation for him to go into a campus experience where he is much older, he has a family, as compared to an 18, 19-year-old, and it is very frustrating to deal with the issues that he is dealing with and to try to fit into a college campus with much, much younger individuals. So it is difficult for him to relate to those other students because he has different experiences in life.

As with most veterans from past wars, the current veterans return to their homes, and for the most part they are from the rural South or from former manufacturing areas of our country where unemployment rates are staggeringly high. Because it is difficult for employers to understand the value of military experience and for new veterans to translate the skills they have learned into the civilian market, it is difficult for them to compete for more scarce jobs, even at McDonald's. You can go to work for the State and fight with a Master's degree to get into the mailroom.

Because of this, four years in the military can be viewed by some employers as four years without needed skills and experience for employment in their business. In the blue collar sector, returning veterans often lack the proper licenses or certifications. For example, a mechanic with eight years in the military might be highly skilled in his craft and he may be more qualified to enter the workforce and perform at a high level, but he lacks the certifications of his civilian counterparts. In most cases, the civilian would be hired over the veteran because the veteran lacks the certifications even though he possesses the skill and work ethic needed for the job.

A truck driver may have several years experience driving a truck in some of the most difficult driving conditions, including combat. But when he applies for a

truck driving job, he lacks the licenses required by the State. He is not eligible to drive for the company unless he attends school or goes through extensive testing to obtain a license, with no guarantee of a job, despite the fact that he already possesses many of the needed skills.

The government hires more veterans than any other employer. Unfortunately, with the way the economy is going and the political climate, as you mentioned, sir, many jobs have been eliminated or the entities have been placing hiring freezes. Just over the past few months, 57,000 government jobs at all levels--Federal, State and local--have been eliminated.

Two industries still hire veterans at a higher rate, and that is your police and your fire. And the reason they hire veterans at such a high level is because of the discipline and the understanding of the rank structure that is critical to those demanding jobs. But again, with the economy being so poor, even those jobs are drying up.

There is a time in this country--there was a time in this country when military service was viewed as something special and a unique qualification for employment. That does not appear to be the case anymore. More than 90 percent of all American citizens are not veterans of military service. They do not understand it, so they place very little value on it, as these gentlemen referred to. It

has become what other people do, not what is expected and as an obligation of citizenship.

Then you throw in the other factors such as PTSD, traumatic brain injury, and PTSD has become a substantial issue among returning veterans and a major challenge to their ability to obtain employment. Ten thousand combat veterans per month have sought out treatment at VA facilities over the past year. This brings the number to more than 200,000 young veterans in the VA system just from the 2 most recent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. This is approximately 16 percent of the troops who fought in these wars.

But keep in mind only half--it is estimated that only half--of the veterans that are affected by PTSD actually seek treatment because of the stigma that surrounds mental health issues. This gentleman here went for four years until his wife actually pointed out to him that he had an issue. He did not realize he had an issue.

A lot of these young men, my son included, he is a military police officer. He does not want to come back and apply to a police department and tell them that he has post-traumatic stress disorder. He may not want to tell them that he served in Afghanistan on three tours because there will be a perception that there is something wrong with him, that he is defective. Civilians who do not have that combat

exposure have a tendency to believe that these people are broken, that they are coming with baggage, and that makes them nervous to hire a veteran.

County veteran service officers and all veteran advocates know that this is not really the case. Many returning service members do not suffer from these invisible wounds, and those that do can still be valuable employees and, most importantly, can heal and overcome those wounds. We all need to spend as much time and effort explaining that and publically praising veterans' skills and abilities as we spend encouraging veterans to seek care and benefits.

You have heard personally that I have four boys serving in the Armed Forces--on in the United State Marine Corps, one in the Army, two in the Air Force. Between my four boys, they have served nine combat tours.

My son in the Marine Corps is a reservist on his second combat deployment and will be coming back in the spring, finish his last semester of college and then reactivate to return to Afghanistan. There is nothing here for him. He gets such a bonus to go back; it will pay off his student loans. This is his unit's 10th deployment since combat operations began because of his MOS, and this is a reservist.

These men and women are a prime example of the demand we are placing on our reserve and National Guard elements.

These individuals are students. They are parents. They are someone's employee. Every time they deploy at the need of the nation, they leave behind their jobs, which the employer by law must hold for them until they return home and are released from active duty.

As you can imagine, these employers are losing a great deal of productivity during these deployments and can start becoming wary of employing our citizen warriors. To combat the bitterness of losing a great employee, Congress should consider implementing incentives for employers who do save the jobs of deployed service members.

The National Association of County Veterans Service Officers and the County Service Veterans Service Officers from the State of Ohio were grateful for this opportunity to testify to the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs. If we work together, I believe that we can reverse the growing trend of veteran unemployment and get our heroes into stable careers.

In closing, the National Association of County Veterans Service Officers welcomes and is very enthusiastic for the aggressive implementation of VOW to Hire Heroes Act of 2011, and we thank you, Senator Brown, for supporting that legislation.

We also recommend that the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee author legislation that will allow additional tax

savings for employers who are hiring deployed reserve and National Guard members.

We furthermore suggest that the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee require that County Veterans Service Officers be included in the TAP courses offered to transitioning service members. These two gentlemen were out on their own. We are there in the beginning just now.

Look how long we are into these wars. Just now, we are being invited to Yellow Ribbons. That is when they are ready to deploy.

After they have been in war, they do not even remember what they were told before they left. When they come back, they need our services more than ever, and we are not invited to the TAP to be a part of that for the most part. It is crucial that we be there.

We are part of their community. They are coming home to us. We know what is available within our communities. We know how to help this gentleman get his education, how to get his benefits. We know how to help this gentleman with the jobs that are available within our community. And we can help them transition. We are the one-stop shop to get them the benefits they need in every area.

County Veterans Service Officers are crucial but often overlook, and we provide important information on local job opportunities, services, vital points of contact so the

veterans know to whom they should turn to for their communities for assistance--assistance to this gentleman, losing his home. We have financial assistance in our offices. We have transportation. We have claims. We help them with claims.

This is all free of charge to these veterans. If they do not know about us, they cannot come and see us. I did not know when I came out that there was anything available.

Finally, we suggest that the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee direct the Department of Veterans Affairs to produce and distribute mass media campaigns which outline benefits of hiring veterans, and doing so on a national scale. I think we concentrate a lot on where to go to get your medical, where to go to get your benefits, but I think the Federal Government really needs to promote and put up on a pedestal these veterans because the experience, the discipline, the integrity, the courage that they are coming back with is invaluable as an employer.

And I thank you very much for the opportunity to speak.
[The prepared statement of Ms. Lee follows:]

DRAFT

Senator Brown. Thank you for your service--

Ms. Lee. Thank you.

Senator Brown. --and your family's service in the military and your services of VSO.

Ms. Phelps, your comments, please. Thank you.

DRAFT

STATEMENT OF LISA PHELPS, VICE PRESIDENT, HUMAN
RESOURCES, CHESAPEAKE ENERGY CORPORATION

Ms. Phelps. Thank you, Senator Brown, for the opportunity today to discuss employment needs and opportunities for our nation's veterans. As a member of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee, we appreciate your efforts and leadership on this issue in Congress.

I am Lisa Phelps, Vice President of Human Resources for Chesapeake Energy Corporation. Chesapeake is the nation's second largest producer of natural gas and a top 15 producer of oil and natural gas liquids. Our company is also a very proud top employer of veterans.

Chesapeake employs more than 12,400 employees across the country. We have operations in approximately 17 different States, including Ohio, with a new oil and natural gas play called the Utica Shale. We are excited about the potential of this play, both for domestic energy production as well as the stimulation it will provide for the Ohio economy and jobs.

Unlike many industries, the oil and natural gas industry has experienced growth during this recessionary period, and the outlook for jobs only looks brighter in the future. In fact, Chesapeake has experienced a significant hiring boom to keep up with the industry's demands, increasing headcount by nearly 30 percent since this time

last year.

I am here to speak with you today because Chesapeake is proud to be a top employer of U.S. Military veterans, and our veterans recruitment and hiring program continues to grow since its inception in 2008. In fact, Chesapeake was honored by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce just last month as one of the top 25 American companies to hire veterans. We also serve on the U.S. Chamber's new Veteran Employment Advisory Council, and we were a finalist for the Post-9/11 Veteran Employment and Internship Award. G.I. JOBS magazine designated Chesapeake as a 2011 Top 100 Military-Friendly Employer and CivilianJobs.com named Chesapeake a 2011 Most Valuable Employer for the Military.

Our efforts to recruit military service men and service women began in 2008. Veteran recruiting originally started as a small component of our recruiting efforts and was originally intended to show our appreciation for the veterans who served our country. Instead, we quickly discovered that Chesapeake reaped the benefits of these highly trained individuals who joined our workforce, sharing their skills and showing us what a great fit their experiences are for the oil and natural gas industry.

In the past three years, our targeted recruiting outreach has resulted in the employment of more than 420 former military personnel in positions ranging from rig

hands to engineers. Moreover, approximately 7 percent, more than 800 employees, have self-identified as veterans. The average annual salary for these veterans at Chesapeake is \$68,000.

Initially, our company recruited only junior military officers--JMOs lieutenants and captains leaving service for specialized positions within our company. But in the past two years, Chesapeake has expanded our efforts to include hiring former enlisted personnel to work in the field. As part of this, we attend military recruiting job fairs and partner with several recruiting firms.

It is worth sharing more details of each of our targeted efforts. As I said, the company began by recruiting JMOs with strong engineering backgrounds such as mechanical, electrical and systems engineering. These individuals have proven to make excellent field production operations employees. They have adapted well to the industry and make great leaders.

Chesapeake's second recruiting focus is aimed at hiring entry-level drilling services employees. Until now, we have partnered with an organization called Troops Transition to help with this effort. Through Troops Transition, we have hired former military candidates and placed them on our drilling rigs. It is hard work, but we have found that military recruits make rig hands as they are used to working

outdoors and in safety-sensitive environments.

Chesapeake's partnership with Troops Transition has proven to be an invaluable resource for obtaining a steady influx of high quality drilling service employees. Unfortunately, we learned just last week that Troops Transition's Federal funding has been eliminated and the program will no longer continue. We are now considering how to deal with this new development and address the loss of Troops Transition as we go forward.

Finally though, a recent addition to our recruiting resources is a company called Air Streams. This organization identifies and trains personnel during a two-week course to work in the oil and natural gas industry. While Troops Transition focused on personnel still in the military, Air Streams has a branch that focuses on those who have been in the workforce for a period of time. Often, these are veterans who have a mechanical background but are looking for a great company that values their past service. Chesapeake actively recruits from this program to primarily assist with our well stimulation company, Performance Technologies, which has a goal of staffing 50 percent of its workforce from various disciplines in the military.

The result of the continued success of our program is that today we plan to add military veterans in locations across the country--including Ohio, Oklahoma, Texas,

Pennsylvania and Louisiana--in positions like field engineers, environmental health and safety representatives, pumpers, equipment operators, business analysts, rig hands and many more.

In your State, we currently have about 100 open positions ready to fill with military candidates and hiring rates are projected to significantly increase in 2012 as we ramp up drilling activity in the Utica Shale. As one example of our Ohio efforts, we participated in a Hire-A-Vet Career Fair on November 9th in North Canton.

All in all, our veterans recruitment and hiring program has turned out to be a win-win for Chesapeake, and the reasons that veterans make great employees for our industry are worth noting.

First, experienced military professionals excel in our field operations and drilling services because their military experience has accustomed them to working in similar conditions.

The military has taught the individuals to be team-oriented, detail-oriented, disciplined, dedicated and creative problem solvers, all characteristics that we seek in employees.

Furthermore, veterans have an unmatched work ethic. While any industry wants hardworking employees, ours demands it.

Additionally, military men and women learn leadership skills that enable them to make team-oriented decisions in stressful situations. Teamwork is key in the military, and often the team's safety depends on everyone working together. The same can be said for our industry, particularly for our team members working on drilling rigs.

The military also prepares them with technical training which allows many veterans to advance more quickly in our industry.

Finally, veterans understand our country's needs for energy independence. In particular, those who served overseas saw firsthand the danger of our country's dependence on foreign oil. Many of our veterans remarked that after service they wanted a civilian job that made a difference. By working to produce domestic energy resources and reduce OPEC oil imports, they are extending their mission to protect national security while growing their careers.

I am proud to see the oil and natural gas industry growing and creating so many needed jobs for our country. Early reports suggest an estimated 30,000 military personnel will return from service in the next 18 months. Not only will these men and women face the often difficult transition to civilian life, but most will experience higher unemployment rates than nonveterans. As such, we believe

our veterans hiring program has positioned us not only to help provide a solution for these service men and women, but while we thought our company could and should help these brave men and women, we have proven to be the real beneficiary of these hardworking employees.

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to be here with you today. Again, we appreciate your efforts and leadership as a member of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee, and I look forward to answering any questions you may have.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Phelps follows:]

DRAFT

Senator Brown. Thank you, Ms. Phelps.

One question, and I will direct it, and we are running a little bit late, so I just will ask the two of you, Mr. Burks and Mr. Noland. What advice would you give to a Marine about to leave the service?

Mr. Noland. Go ahead. You go first.

Mr. Burks. Can you repeat your question, please?

Senator Brown. What advice would you give to a Marine or a soldier or an airman about to leave the service?

Mr. Burks. I would definitely tell them to look, go to the VA as soon as possible and ask about all programs they possibly can. I know that the VA here in Columbus just put a program together where you have a benefits counselor that calls me regularly now for OIF and OEF veterans, and that has actually helped a lot.

Mr. Noland. That is true. I would do the same. They do have an OIF/OEF program that has kind of helped.

Also, I would make copies of your medical record before you leave. That is in all seriousness. Oftentimes, what Cleveland claims is not in your medical record.

Case in point real quick, when I got life-flighted to Ramstein, Germany, none of that was in my medical record. I had to personally call the Landstuhl Hospital myself and have them faxed here to Ohio. I have the copies of them and had to give them to the VA. So that would be one of my

requests is to--I know right now it is protocol that you are not allowed to copy your medical record before you leave service.

Senator Brown. Why do you think that is?

Mr. Noland. I am not sure. I am not quite sure why that would be. I am not sure if the VA or the Department of Defense is trying to cover something. I am not quite sure.

Senator Brown. It would give them to you when you ask, but only if you asked?

Mr. Noland. Oh, no, they would not give it.

Senator Brown. They would not give it to you?

Mr. Noland. You are not allowed to have a copy of it. That is--go ahead.

Mr. Burks. I did ask for my medical records, and they would not give me the copy. But they would let me take it with me, and I took it to FedEx and had them create two copies of my own. So I do have all my medical records.

Mr. Noland. Smart man.

Senator Brown. Outsmarted DOD.

Mr. Burks. Kind of, sir.

Senator Brown. Thanks to all four of you.

And Benjamin, I am glad things are working out for you. Congratulations again on your graduation.

Mr. Noland. Thank you, sir.

Senator Brown. And to both of you, thanks for your

service to veterans and to our communities. Thanks.

We will call the second panel up, and first, the second panel is Joyce Cange, Sherre Collier and John Savage, if they would come forward.

Thanks to the four of you. You certainly stick around if you would like.

Mr. Noland. Thank you.

Senator Brown. I look forward to seeing you build more solar panels.

Mr. Noland. Definitely.

Senator Brown. All of that.

And Will Davis, the State Commander of DAV is here, if he would raise his hand in the back. Thank you for your service and thanks for being here and sitting here for this.

Commander Graham is here too, State Commander of AMVETS, if he would raise his hand.

Commander, how are you? Thank you for being here. Thank you for joining us.

Thanks folks. How are you?

I would like to begin the second panel. Our first witness is Sherre Isaac Collier, Services Division Chief, Manpower, Personnel and Services Directorate, Headquarters Air Force Materiel Command. In her role, she oversees the Transition Assistance Program that offers separating and retiring personnel an individual transition plan to ease

reentry into civilian life.

Thank you for joining us, Ms. Collier.

Also, we are joined by Joyce Cange, the Director of the Cleveland Regional Office of the Veterans Benefits Administration. Joyce joined me some time ago, a year plus ago, in Cambridge at one of our field hearings. She was there in a supportive role for a different VBA witness.

I am glad you are here today to talk to us.

Bill Hartnett, at that hearing, the former head of the State of Ohio's Veterans Office, testified you were his all-time hero for your work on behalf of Ohio veterans.

Ms. Cange. Yes, he did.

Senator Brown. Congratulations. I have known Bill for 20 years, 30 years almost. Congratulations.

And also, we are joined by John Savage who works for the Veterans' Employment and Training Service in the Department of Labor.

Mr. Savage, nice to see you.

Mr. Savage. Thank you, sir.

Senator Brown. Why don't you begin--we will just go left to right--Mr. Savage, with your testimony? Try to keep it about five minutes

Mr. Savage. Five minutes.

Senator Brown. And then we will do questions. Thanks.

Mr. Savage. Yes, sir.

STATEMENT OF JOHN SAVAGE, STATE DIRECTOR,
VETERANS' EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING SERVICE, U.S.
DEPARTMENT OF LABOR

Mr. Savage. Senator Brown, thank you for the opportunity to testify before the Committee about the state of veterans' employment in Ohio and the important work we are doing at the Department of Labor to decrease the unemployment rate for veterans, National Guard members and reservists.

With nearly 900,000 veterans living in the State, it is critical that we provide those who need assistance with the services and support they need to find and obtain good jobs. My name is John Savage and as a director for the Department of Labor Veterans' Employment and Training Service, I am dedicated to helping our veterans and returning service members achieve that goal.

VETS does this in three ways. We prepare, provide and protect.

We prepare transitioning service members to reenter the civilian workforce through the Department of Labor workshop, employment workshop, as part of the Transition Assistance Program, or TAP. Ohio currently has one TAP site located at Wright Patterson Air Force Base in Dayton. In fiscal 2011, 638 transitioning service members and their spouses attended 1 of 28 TAP workshops held at Wright Pat.

We provide employment services through a \$6.75 million grant to fund local veterans' employment representatives and disabled veterans outreach program specialists. LVRs primarily provide employer outreach while DVOP specialists provide individualized, intensive employment services. There are 92 LVRs and DVOPs housed at 90 1-stop centers throughout the State, including over 15 serving veterans in the Appalachian areas of Eastern and Southern Ohio. I know you are concerned about that, sir.

We also provide intensive services to homeless veterans through \$1.2 million in grants in Columbus, Cleveland, Dayton and Cincinnati.

Finally, we protect service members' employment and reemployment rights by educating service members about--and employers about--the Uniform Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act, USERRA. VETS work closely with the employer support of the Guard and Reserve to ensure that service members are informed of the USERRA rights both before and after they are mobilized. If informal efforts fail to resolve a situation, VETS will investigate. Ohio typically investigates between 50 and 70 complaints per year.

President Obama is committed to ensuring that America fulfills its obligations to our returning service members and their families. As a result, the Administration has

launched a series of initiatives to lower veterans' unemployment and provide a seamless transition from active duty to civilian life.

A recent VETS initiative is called the Gold Card Initiative which offers a set of intensive services to post-9/11 veterans through Department of Labor's nationwide network of 1-stop career centers. The goal of this initiative is to jumpstart the job search process for post-9/11 veterans through enhanced in-person services that help reconnect to the civilian workforce.

Also, a new veterans' job bank has been established. It is an easy-to-use tool to help veterans find job postings from companies looking to hire veterans. In a few easy steps, companies can make sure that job postings on their web sites are part of this veterans' job bank.

Finally, the Department of Labor launched My Next Move for Veterans, a new online resource that allows veterans to enter their military occupational code and discover civilian occupations for which they are well qualified. This site includes information about salaries, apprenticeships, education and training programs, and links to related job openings in their selected region.

Regarding employer partnerships, VETS has been taking a new approach to employer outreach that involves programs and partnerships with the private sector, including the U.S.

Chamber of Commerce and the Society for Human Resource Management. These partnerships are giving us a much broader access to employers which allows VETS to communicate the value of hiring a veteran and educate employers about the unique skills veterans bring with them based on their military experience.

The Chamber is working to hold 100 hiring fairs exclusively for veterans, transitioning service members and their spouses. On September 22nd, 2011, 500 veterans and their military spouses met face to face with 60 employers looking to hire veterans at Cincinnati's Paul Brown Stadium.

In calendar year 2010, the rate of unemployment for veterans was 11 percent while the general rate for nonveterans was 9.6. In order to ensure that deploying service members are aware of the employment services available to them and to address the higher veteran unemployment rate, LVR and DVOP staff participate in all pre-mobilization briefings and 30 and 60-day post-deployment briefings. VETS participates in 90-day post-deployment briefings to provide USERRA information.

Thank you again, Senator Brown, for allowing me to testify today and for your tireless support and commitment to our nation's veterans. DOL and VETS look forward to continuing to work with you and your staff on veteran employment initiatives.

I would be happy to answer any questions you may have regarding my testimony or VETS's support on behalf of our veterans and transitioning service members. Thank you, sir.
[The prepared statement of Mr. Savage follows:]

DRAFT

STATEMENT OF SHERRE ISAAC COLLIER, SERVICES
DIVISION CHIEF, MANPOWER, PERSONNEL AND SERVICES
DIRECTORATE, HEADQUARTERS AIR FORCE MATERIEL
COMMAND

Ms. Collier. Good morning, Senator Brown, and thank you for this opportunity. My name is Sherre Collier, and I am the Technical Director of our Services Director at Headquarters Air Force Materiel Command which is located at Wright Patterson Air Force Base near Dayton, Ohio.

As we all know, Wright Patterson is the largest single employer in the State of Ohio, and as a component of the Department of Defense, we are uniquely positioned to provide assistance and resources to members of all military components who call Ohio home or who wish to transition to Ohio.

Today, I will share with you our experiences at Wright Patterson and the activities we provide in our Transition Assistance Programs, or TAP, the Wounded Warrior Program, and I will conclude with the status of current hiring efforts that also include prior military members.

Our TAP program is a one-stop shopping service operation. Our customers include members of the Air Force, Army, Navy and the Marine Corps. Annually, we provide services to over 800 members from the 5-State region, so our TAP office services 5 States.

Our TAP program includes 27 4-day transition seminars each year, and with the new VOW Act we anticipate that we will have to increase that by about 10 additional sessions. Customers tell us that these sessions on resume writing and mock interviews, specifically, make a difference as they apply for and interview for jobs.

The TAP office also hosts periodic job fairs on base and invites employers to come and join us as we make that available to our military members and transitioning members. Our programs and events are supported by other State and Federal organizations, and we have upwards of about 13 partners who work with us through our transition programs.

The Air Force Wounded Warrior Program is designed to assist members with a 30 percent or higher combat-related disability who are seeking Air Force Federal civil service employment. The program is centrally managed through the Air Force Personnel Center at Randolph Air Force Base in San Antonio.

Air Force central funding is available for salaries for up to 18 months for organizations who would hire wounded warriors--Air Force organizations. At the end of that period, the goal is for the base to find a locally funded permanent position--again, an Air Force position--for the wounded warrior. Wounded warriors are also--who are also separating also receive the full range of transition

assistance.

At Wright Patterson today, there are approximately 88 Air Force members enrolled in the Wounded Warrior Program, and they are referred by our personnel center. Again, the members come from across the 5-State region. The office also provides services to members of other components--the Army, the Navy, the Marine Corps--who walk in for assistance as they have learned about the services provided at Wright Patterson.

Since the program was established at Wright Patterson, 10 employees have been employed in Federal positions through the Wounded Warrior Program, and to date, 7 wounded warriors have been hired at Wright Patterson through this specific program. And we will talk about some other hiring efforts and numbers in which we also employ veterans, including those with 30 percent disability.

The goal of TAP and Wounded Warriors programs is to assist clients in finding following-on jobs or careers after military service. Because of our size at Wright Patterson, many seek employment there at our base. Wright Patterson currently employs approximately 12,500 appropriated, funded, civil service employees. Fifty-two percent of our occupations are in the science and engineering, acquisition and contracting, and finance career fields and generally require college degrees.

Since 2007, a total of 7,600 positions have been filled at Wright Patterson. Of that number, 70 percent of the new hires have prior military service, and of those who have prior military service 6 percent, or 318, of the veterans hired have 30 percent or more disability. And as mentioned earlier, 7 veterans were placed specifically through our Wounded Warrior Program.

Most Air Force organizations at Wright Patterson are currently under a hiring freeze. The hiring freeze, of course, will limit the number of new hires for this fiscal year, and our TAP office continues to grow its network of support to include public sector organizations that may provide employment opportunities in Ohio.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my statement. And on behalf of the men and women of our military who call Ohio home, I thank you and the members of the Committee for your continued support and welcome any questions that you may have.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Collier follows:]

Senator Brown. Thank you, Ms. Collier.
Ms. Cange, welcome again.

DRAFT

STATEMENT OF JOYCE CANGE, DIRECTOR, CLEVELAND
REGIONAL OFFICE, VETERANS BENEFITS ADMINISTRATION,
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

Ms. Cange. Senator Brown, thank you for inviting me today to discuss the Department of Veterans Affairs' efforts to assist veterans in obtaining gainful employment, suitable careers, through the Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Program.

Also, Senator, I want to thank you for your efforts with regard to the VOW Hire Heroes Act. I appreciate your efforts there as well.

Today, I will provide an overview of national programs and highlight services provided to Ohio veterans by the Cleveland VA Regional Office. My statement summarizes my formal written testimony prepared for the record.

I want to begin by emphasizing the post-9/11 GI contribution to providing education and training to our newest generation of veterans, which will lead them into career paths of their choosing.

Through the end of November 2011, VA has issued nearly \$15 billion in post-9/11 bill benefits, GI Bill benefit payments, to approximately 650,000 individuals and educational institutions. Of the 594,000 students who received the Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits nationwide for 2011, 12,700 students were from Ohio.

And VA continues to be a leading agency in hiring of veterans. VA for Vets, VA's new recruitment, retention and reintegration program was created to increase veteran hiring throughout the VA and help veterans achieve success in their VA careers. Veterans understand the mission of VA, and we look to tap their experiences and knowledge, and use them as front-line resources--veterans helping veterans. We are pleased to announce that 30.5 percent of VA employees are veterans.

While many veterans are able to successfully find employment after military service, many also require assistance in preparing for careers. Possible barriers to that employment include lack of suitable education and transferrable work skills, limited networks in the career field of interest or unresolved financial issues. Some face injuries and disabilities and illnesses that prevent successful reintegration into the civilian workforce.

The VR&E program is fully committed to such veterans by providing comprehensive services that reduce or eliminate employment barriers to the maximum extent possible. VR&E counselors engage veterans in ongoing vocational exploration, developing individual rehabilitation plans and assisting the job placement services, all aimed at reintegrating veterans into successful civilian careers.

VA also offers many opportunities to veterans,

including the nonpaid work experience which provides eligible veterans with practical job experiences and government facilities. Our on-the-job training program allows any employer to hire a qualified veteran at a trainee wage while offering private sector employee tax incentives.

Furthermore, VA's Special Employer Incentive Program provides assistance to employers hiring veterans at the apprentice level, including reimbursement of part of veterans' salaries.

Also, the VR&E encourages Federal employers to use what we call the Schedule A hiring authority to appoint qualified people with disabilities noncompetitively.

Veterans can also pursue a self-employment track with VR&E assistance for some startup business costs for veterans with the most serious disabilities.

During fiscal year 2011, VR&E received 65,111 applications and currently has about 107,900 participants in all facets of the program. Nearly 58,400 are engaged in rehabilitation plans leading toward gainful outcome--career outcomes.

Even in spite of our nation's current economic challenges, VR&E services helped approximately 10,000 veterans in fiscal year 2011 reach their employment and independent living goals.

To promote hiring, VR&E's VetSuccess.gov web site

targets veterans in need of employment. With over 7,500 registered employers and 90,000 registered veterans, it is an excellent employment resource. That is VR&E's VetSuccess.gov.

And the VR&E's Vet Success on Campus Program, currently at eight locations including Cleveland State University, is designed to ease the transition from service member to veteran by coordinating veterans benefits smoothly and seamlessly. Each of the eight campuses has a full-time vocational rehabilitation counselor to provide motivational and outreach activities to veterans.

Within Ohio, the Cleveland VA Regional Office's VR&E Division also provides the full range of employment-related assistance with out-based benefits offices in Columbus and Cincinnati. We partner with the State and Federal agencies and local academic institutions to promote veterans' employment. And in August 2011, we signed a memorandum of agreement with the Department of Labor and the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services, ODJFS, is jointly--to jointly reaffirm interagency cooperation in helping disabled veterans obtain suitable, gainful and satisfying employment, complete with an ODJFS Disabled Veteran Outreach Program coordinator co-located in our Cleveland VR&E office.

As I mentioned before, we are most proud of the Vet Success on Campus Program at Cleveland State University in

providing immediate services on campus to veteran students transitioning into an academic environment. Obviously, coming back from the battlefield and going back into a classroom is different than leaving high school and going into college academia, and we are there to provide that assistance.

In Columbus area, a separate employment coordinator provides job placement and employment services. The individual also networks the local employers, establishing veteran apprenticeships and on-the-job training programs.

Assigned to the RO's Columbus out-based benefits office is a vocational rehabilitation counselor whose outreach efforts include attending job fairs, sharing information to out-processing National Guard units and other information dissemination functions.

Furthermore, ODJFS and DVOP are assigned to Columbus's out-based benefits office to support VA's hiring initiatives, veterans' employment opportunities and coordination of seamless benefits delivery between the two agencies.

There are--the vocational rehabilitation counselors in Columbus's out-based benefits office are veterans themselves, further demonstrating VA's commitment to have veterans serving veterans.

The Cleveland Regional Office management team is making

efforts to hire and promote veterans. In fiscal year 2009 alone, nearly 60 percent of all of our new hires, including those hired under the funding from the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act, were veterans. This hiring program and subsequent hiring opportunities resulted in veterans comprising 36 percent of our current Cleveland Regional Office staff. Nearly 16 percent of those office staff are also disabled veterans.

Senator, I want you to know that through local and national partnerships we are implementing the President's hiring initiatives for veterans and preparing to implement services consistent with the VOW to Hire Veterans Act of 2011. The law will assist VA and the Department of Labor in providing training opportunities for our nation's unemployed veterans. The VR&E services provided by our Cleveland Regional Office employees and VA employees across the nation are pivotal to the success of these initiatives and the implementation of the new law.

We are working to seamlessly transition our service members and increase their successful employment. We are developing strong partnerships with businesses in all sectors to seek employment opportunities and are seeking to match for VETS program to hire and train veterans to become successfully employed in high demand jobs in VA such as nurses and counselors. Our proud staff members work

diligently toward the mission of helping veterans achieve the full employment--their full employment potential.

Senator Brown, this concludes my statement today. I would welcome any questions that you may have.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Cange follows:]

DRAFT

Senator Brown. Thanks, Ms. Cange. Appreciate your service and your testimony.

Mr. Savage

Mr. Savage. Sir.

Senator Brown. --Benjamin testified in his written testimony, and then we were talking earlier before the hearing started. He said, so my 6 years as a supply guy and having 24 Marines work for me and balancing a supply warehouse budget of \$130 million a year does not count.

You know the issue with States, of certifications, that there are private sector jobs not too different from military jobs. Should we be looking to help DOD to teach to the certification or finding a way to connect, understanding that certification to drive a truck or EMT or other kinds of certification differ from State to State? Those are typically State licenses, State certifications.

How do we do that? How do we assist DOD so that when Benjamin comes home or when Kyle comes home that the things they have learned in the military can translate into employment much more quickly and lucratively for them?

Mr. Savage. Thank you for your question, sir. I appreciate it.

I believe the services already have some apprenticeship programs. The Navy has an electrician program. The Army has aircraft maintenance, airframe and power plant

apprenticeship programs. So they can come out of the service already with documented hours.

It turns more into a State issue, as you noted. Each State has different regulations and different requirements for these programs. So it is--I think part of the VOW legislation addresses apprenticeship programs. However, I think we need to work it more from the bottom-up in getting the States to agree to a standard.

Senator Brown. Are there DOL or DOD efforts to work with the States then from the bottom-up to encourage them to do this and sort of clear the path for them to do it?

Mr. Savage. There has been for many years. It has not made a lot of headway, sir, but--

Senator Brown. Why is that?

Mr. Savage. I think it is just a matter of trying to get that many moving pieces moving in the same direction.

Senator Brown. Well, how do we do it?

Mr. Savage. It is a great question, sir. I believe we just keep trying to--

Senator Brown. Is there somebody at DOL or DOD whose specific responsibility is this, to get the States to work with DOD, with any of the military service branches, to do this right?

Mr. Savage. I believe there is an apprenticeship person within VETS that is responsible to try and coordinate

these programs.

Senator Brown. Within DOL?

Mr. Savage. Yes, sir.

Senator Brown. Okay. What is the person's name?

Mr. Savage. I will have to get that for you, sir.

Senator Brown. Okay. Thank you.

Ms. Collier, what do we do?

You were sitting here during the last testimony, I assume. You heard Kyle's and Benjamin's stories. How do we make sure that does not happen again?

Ms. Collier. One of the things we talked about when we were studying and preparing for this is the marketing effort, and I think that came across clearly that people are not getting information up front. And we talked about at Wright Patterson where we do service all components, and most of them find out about it by word of mouth, and they just happen to walk in. So we need to do more pulling of people to these resources and pushing information out to them, and I think that would help a lot.

We have been talking particularly on the Wounded Warrior side with representatives from Army and Navy, how to better jointly utilize that program or make that program more effective. And a lot of it is marketing, particularly for folks who are coming back to Ohio who may not necessarily have previously had access to Wright Patterson

and to understand that that is a resource that is there for them as well.

Senator Brown. Ms. Cange, Kyle said that this book I am holding up is a unicorn, that nobody seems to be able to see it really exists. But it does exist, obviously.

Why is that? Why do so many--why did he and so many of his friends not know about this book?

Ms. Cange. You know, I am not sure.

Senator Brown. This is a Federal Benefits for Veterans Handbook--

Ms. Cange. Yes.

Senator Brown. --Dependents and Survivors, 2011 Edition from the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Ms. Cange. It does exist. We have copies that we disseminate at every outreach opportunity that we have. That book is also available online. So it is available to everyone.

Senator Brown. But why would--I mean he is a smart guy that testified, and he is very aware, and he is articulate, and he is thinking about this stuff. Why did he and so many of his friends not know of its existence?

Ms. Cange. I cannot answer that question. I know it is available, but what I will do is make sure that we have a good supply out there and when we go on outreach we will continue to do that. And wherever Kyle is, I will make sure

he gets one.

So we will, Kyle.

Senator Brown. What would you add in this book that is not in here? Or, anybody else on the panel that knows much about the book, what would you add that is not in here? And I have some suggestions after you answer.

Ms. Cange. Well, for me, what is not in there is getting the word out more widespread. What are the benefits that every veteran needs to know about?

You know, it is in the book, but we need--just reading a book sometimes is not enough. It is hearing it at the appropriate time to know what benefits are available to those veterans because when they initially get out and we give the briefings, their mind is not thinking about what their entitled to. They are thinking about I need to get back to my family. And so, doing it maybe multiple times, giving briefings later on multiple times, to get that benefit information out to them.

Senator Brown. I know from Ms. Lee's testimony, not today but other times that I have been in roundtables with her and with other veterans service officers, that they do not know of the existence of a soldier returning from Iraq, or someone returning from Europe or someone, a Marine, returning from Afghanistan has moved back to their community. They often do not know she is there or he is

there.

So there is obviously a terrible disconnect between DOD and the VA that General Shinseki has talked repeatedly to Secretary Gates and now to Secretary Panetta about addressing. There are improvements I have seen in the last three or four years but not there yet.

And just the whole idea of medical records that both Kyle and Ben talked about is that the VA should have DOD medical records so when these men and women return, even on leave, let alone when they are no longer connected to the service.

What about in this book nonveterans services? It seems we have been working, talking to the VA for some time about including things like the earned income tax credit, which large numbers of military, of soldiers and Marines and airmen and women returning home will end up in jobs where they are eligible for the earned income tax credit because they are not making a ton of money when they are coming home if they are employed. But they do not know anything about the earned income tax credit likely.

Or, how about LIHEAP, a program for the low energy, the low income heating assistance program where a large number--again, a significant number--of veterans would be eligible, but they are not veterans benefits per se? Why would that not be included in this book? As I have said, we have asked

the VA to move on that. They have not still.

Any thoughts on that, any of the three of you?

Ms. Collier. Sir, I have not read the book.

Senator Brown. Okay, okay.

Ms. Collier. But I know that in a lot of the TAP classes--and hopefully, I am saying this correctly--we do include a lot of private sector resources, particularly in the areas of planning for financial management, those kinds of things, reestablishing households on the market which they have not done before, so including those kinds of resources in the TAP training as well.

Senator Brown. Are LIHEAP and EITC included?

Ms. Collier. I do not--are those two--

Senator Brown. Even food stamp eligibility, if they are?

Mr. Savage. If I may, sir, our goal at Labor is to try to get these veterans into the one-stop system. Once they are into the one-stop system, they are provided not only employment services but the Veterans staff also partner with all of the other Human Services staff that are co-located there. So if we can just get them into the one-stops, which that is what we teach at TAP and other programs, we can make them available to all those other services that are offered there.

Senator Brown. Let me ask one question in conclusion

that all three of you can take a shot at if you would. What do we do to--one of the things that Kyle mentioned was he wants to do a--I took particular interest in this because my wife and I just got a rescue puppy, but that he wants to do puppy daycare. Is that what you said?

He wants to set up a business like that.

What do you do to help somebody that has never set up a business, that does not really--he has got an idea. He is a smart guy. He has maybe thought it through. I assume he has. I will bet you that he could use some more help than that.

What do you do to help a veteran set up a business that wants to?

Mr. Savage. To be perfectly honest, we-- entrepreneurship is one of the five tracks at the VA VR&E, Veterans Rehabilitation and Employment Program. So as employment counselors, we would probably point them towards the VA.

Ms. Collier. And we include the same in our TAP programs. They do have the opportunity to take workshops and consult with business people in building their business plans and strategies if they are interested. So that is part of our resources as well at Wright Patterson.

Ms. Cange. And yes, for VA VR&E, we offer lots of career opportunity for self-employment, and we can provide

them guidance and definitely give you more information, Kyle.

Senator Brown. All right. Thank you, all three of you.

Thanks to the first panel again, those that stayed.

Thank you in the audience for being here, a special thanks to all of you who have served our country so well.

And especially to the staff, thanks for coming out here, and to Doug and Ben and Kathryn from my staff.

The Committee on Veterans' Affairs is adjourned.

Thank you all.

[Whereupon, at approximately 11:08 a.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

DRAFT