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WRITTEN TESTIMONY OF
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TO THE
SENATE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS
Hearing on: Easing the Burdens through Employment
NOVEMBER 18, 2009

Chairman Akaka, Ranking Member Burr, and distinguished Members of the Veterans Affairs Committee. I sincerely appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss matters related to the employment and training issues and barriers facing our returning veteran service members. My testimony today will address, from an industry perspective, the challenges faced, current actions, and opportunities for collaboration. Additionally, I will highlight the importance of a tripartite approach involving government, education, and industry to help ensure that our veterans and their families receive access to the training and education resources they need to transition smoothly and successfully into sustainable, family wage civilian work.

Current Challenges
In the 21st century, occupations and employment are evolving faster than ever before, largely driven by the rapid pace of technology innovation and change. Information technology has become so pervasive in the working world that almost every job requires some level of IT understanding and skills. This occupation revolution affects non-IT related jobs, like manufacturing, construction, or even nursing, and gives birth to new job categories, such as Cyber Forensic Specialist or Enterprise Network Architect.
How we prepare citizens for jobs is quickly evolving as well. Learning itself has changed and veterans will have to learn to study and prepare efficiently in the 21st century. The new world of learning mirrors the new world of working that EVERY veteran returning to civilian employment will encounter, whether they find their way into IT jobs or not! They will be expected to communicate via email and instant messaging, participate in virtual meetings, find and evaluate data online, present their analysis on knowledge-sharing portals, collaborate on projects with team members that rarely meet face-to-face. And hiring managers today are recruiting employees who have project management skills, demonstrate agility, and have an aptitude for adapting to new circumstances and challenges. In the new "flat world', we are constantly developing new skills, using them, and refining them repeatedly. Veterans transitioning into civilian and government jobs face employment challenges that require skills and experience in modern information technology. IT has consequently been added as the 4th knowledge pillar side-by-side to the traditional 3 R's of basic education.

Leveraging the Skills Link between Defense, Education and Industry
Industry and defense enjoy a long standing history of sharing talent. Investments in training and education have created some bridges for soldiers to move successfully from civilian to armed services responsibilities and vice versa. However, evolving job requirements and changing hiring

expectations, now make a more formalized approach to creating these bridges necessary. We require a bridge building approach that adopts accountability and measurement as primary tenets in addition to establishing standards of excellence in training and development. Among U.S. businesses, the most widely accepted proof for demonstrating the quality of employees' technology skills are industry certifications, especially for job candidates without relevant working experience. Military organizations also have learned to recognize the value of certifications for their workforce needs. The U.S. Department of Defense provides funding for certain job roles in (DoD) Directive 8570 for industry credentials which meet the quality standards of the ANSI 17024 accreditation. We are witnessing a growing trend by DoD and other government agencies to accept industry credentials for validating professional skills and capabilities in addition to formal degree, and proven work experience.

Veterans' Families

Another important consideration for current and returning veterans is the economic stability of their families. Service-disabled veterans face the challenge of coping with their injuries in addition to the challenges of changing employment. The recent reports of veterans' families receiving food stamps while they are on deployment starkly illustrate the economic challenges of spousal unemployment. We must provide immediate career retraining assistance to injured veterans early and as part of their convalescence. Rather than waiting months for extended veterans' benefits, retraining benefits should be accessible to service members before their exit from military hospital facilities. We must also extend these career training benefits to spouses of military veterans in order to maximize their chances for employment in family wage jobs while their veteran spouse adjusts to re-entering the workforce.

Coaching, Community and Internships

Members of the armed forces are taught early in their training to rely on the experience and mentorship of their cohorts to achieve professional excellence. Microsoft's experience working with veterans at Walter Reed Army Medical Center, allowed us to witness firsthand the powerful impact of mentoring veterans. Working with soldiers on Medical Hold recovering from a variety of injuries, volunteers from the Microsoft Certified Trainer community mentored soldiers as they studied for their Microsoft Certification examinations. Soldiers were matched with a trainers whose areas of expertise matched the veteran's areas of interest, thus helping the learning soldier to more deeply connect with the mentor while benefitting from the mentors' real-world experience and professional capabilities. Motivated by this community support, the majority of the veterans went on to take their first exam successfully in December 2008.

Mentoring and coaching are effective forms of professional citizenship and a proven way for established IT workers to give back to their local and Services' communities. Support for programs that encourage coaching and foster community support for veterans should be supported by government initiatives and contributions. A system for the creation of mentoring relationships and internships to develop hands-on experience is critically important especially for younger veterans. As evidence from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics shows, inexperienced veterans in the age range of 18-24 years are particularly vulnerable to long term unemployment.

Expanding Capacity

Recent economic events have further strained the capacity of career education programs at community and technical colleges and universities at a time when student demand is rising

across the country. Meanwhile, unused teaching capacity exists among high-quality private education providers faced with reduced demand from their existing commercial customer base. Leading technology companies, including Microsoft and its network of thousands of partners in the U.S., rely on the established network of over 350 private education providers to train and certify 150,000 to 200,000 technology professionals in the U.S. annually. These training institutions have fully qualified, certified trainers, well-furnished and equipped classrooms and access to state-of-the art information technology products. Providing veterans training and certification benefits through these private training organizations, in partnership with other workforce stakeholders, is worthy of serious consideration by policy makers. The expanded tuition benefits included in the New GI Bill are a big step in the right direction of providing access to more training options for returning service members. I applaud the pioneering work of the Members of this Committee in creating these new opportunities.

Access to Technology

Access to state-of-the art information technology for teaching and learning purposes is of utmost importance, but it needs to be provided in an easily accessible, cost efficient way. Programs like Microsoft IT Academy and Cisco Networking Academy Program ensure that community colleges, technical colleges and other schools have access to the latest technology, software, curriculum and industry certification exams.

We can expand our capacity for teaching and learning by tapping into the rich system of online learning courses, virtual classrooms and online hands-on-labs. Technology learning and workforce development training are already provided as offerings "in the cloud" – or in plain English: students and teachers can access curriculum, data storage, hardware and software as a hosted service online.

We know from our experience that veterans are also interested in setting up their own businesses. As new entrepreneurs, they need help and support. In addition to understanding how to use information technology effectively, they also need convenient, affordable access to the latest technologies that will help them to start their own business and keep it growing. Understanding the needs of new entrepreneurs, Microsoft has launched BizSpark, a program that provides full access to the latest Microsoft technology for startups free of charge while they are striving to reach profitability. BizSpark eliminates the need for cash investments in information systems early in the startup phase of their business, allowing funds from programs such as Small Business Administration to be used for other critical business related investments.

Continuing the Momentum

Moving forward, Microsoft endorses the recommendations made earlier by the National Center for Women & Information Technology, and offers additional ideas for intervention. In their "Elements of a Military Pathways Program" proposal, NCWIT makes recommendations for an education program that employs the skills of returning members of the military who have already received non-traditional IT education as a part of military service:
• The requirement that each member of the military have his/her Lifetime Education Plan to better provide them with the required education to assist transition into the civilian population.
• The requirement that all advisors at National Veterans Training Institutes be certified in providing information on higher education in IT.
• Remote learning opportunities for active duty members of the military in which credit earned could be applied to the completion of a four year or higher education degree in IT.

• The substitution of on-the-job training for the coursework requirement in preparation for IT licensing exams.
• Financial incentives for colleges, universities, and authorized organizations to institute this program and provide on-campus IT-tailored mentoring.
While we have made some progress in these areas since this proposal was first presented, more can be done to address the immediate needs of veterans, including:
• Promoting learning plans that link military occupation specialties for job roles to civilian job roles.
• Awareness campaigns for military personnel and employers around the skills bridges being built between military and civilian jobs.
• Early access to separation training benefits to reduce the number of veterans dependent on Unemployment Compensation for Ex-service members (UCX)
• Assuring access to industry certification programs will not only secure the prompt restoration to duty following uniformed service as required by the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act, but will also keep those who serve at the top of their careers after prolonged deployments.

Microsoft Engagements for Workforce Development
Microsoft invests in skills programs for workforce development in three primary areas: programs for underserved communities, programs among and for educational institutions and programs for jobs creation through entrepreneurship.
Programs for Underserved Communities
Microsoft Unlimited Potential
By working with partners to create relevant training opportunities and innovative tools for people who are underserved by technology, we believe we can help foster social and economic opportunities that change people's lives and transform communities. As part of the Microsoft Unlimited Potential commitment, our employability and workforce development programs support organizations that work to ensure that individuals have the IT skills they need to succeed in the 21st–century workplace.
For nearly a decade, Microsoft has been working with nonprofit organizations around the world to support technology skills training programs in local communities. Our corporate donations of cash, software and free training curriculum have helped ensure that millions of individuals have access to the training and education resources they need to begin developing the technology skills that employers seek in our 21st century workplace.
Examples include:
Workforce Development Council of Seattle-King County; Seattle, WA: The Workforce Development Council (WDC) projects connect businesses and job seekers by providing the necessary resources and tools for successful employment, lifelong learning, and business development. Microsoft Unlimited Potential funding supports WDC technology implementation and training efforts across the state to ensure a strong and vital economy.
Iredell Statesville Community Enrichment Corporation; Statesville, NC: A Microsoft Unlimited Potential grant enabled the Iredell Community Technology Institute's CTLC to open lab number 4, run in partnership with the Boys & Girls Club of Piedmont. Low-income and underserved communities are benefitting from the training designed to prepare students to meet future the job market demands with a special emphasis on Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math, coupled by robust tools that include the Unlimited Potential curriculum and basic computer

skills.

Mission West Virginia; Hurricane, WV: The Build It, Keep It, Share It Program (BIKISI) received a multi-year Microsoft Unlimited Potential grant to support education in underserved and unemployed local communities. Without Microsoft support, Mission West Virginia would not be able to fund training in Digital Literacy. With more than 1,500 people having received their Digital Literacy certificates in the last year alone, this program provides a beneficial training opportunity for local residents.

Microsoft Elevate America

As a continuation of our commitment to helping individuals develop the skills they need for success in the workplace, we launched Microsoft Elevate America in February 2009. Elevate America is an initiative designed to provide one million Microsoft E-Learning courses and select Microsoft Certification exams at no cost to recipients. Microsoft works with a designated agency in each state to implement Elevate America and ensure that the training benefits are delivered effectively and efficiently. Elevate America will be implemented in cooperation with states across the country as part of our overall effort to help train 2 million people over the next three years.

Through Elevate America, individuals receive "vouchers" that are redeemable, at no cost, for Microsoft online learning courses and industry recognized certification exams. The learning offered through Elevate America is available at beginning, intermediate and advanced levels so individuals can select the trainings most appropriate for their needs. Microsoft certification exams are offered in Microsoft Windows and Office, the programs that are in most demand from employers across industries and across sectors.

Completing these training programs and achieving a Microsoft certification, together with other training and support helps make an individual more employable and more prepared to meet the demands and needs of the 21st century workplace.

To date, Elevate America has been implemented in: Washington, Virginia, Illinois, Iowa, Maryland, Mississippi and Missouri. We are in discussions with a number of states and expect additional launches in the coming months.

Programs Among and for Educational Institutions

Microsoft partners with education communities around the world to deliver a relevant and effective scalable set of technologies, services and programs that focus on building digital literacy for all individuals. Microsoft's Community Technology Skills Program has reached over 160 million people around the world since 2003, while the Partners in Learning effort has reached 135 million people in the same time period. Together, these two programs alone have reached more than a quarter of a billion people in less than a decade.

In addition to the reach and scale that these numbers imply, when people are trained on internationally recognized standards and certifications, cross-country skills matches are possible, a critical component of economies wishing to develop knowledge workers who will be competitive in the global marketplace.

Along with Microsoft training and certification, the consistency of the platform and its resources give policy makers, learners and educators peace of mind that their investments in training and education are secure and will keep pace with technology as it develops.

Microsoft is passionate about facilitating the success of each educator and learner and expanding the power of education for all through personalized learning. The following programs are

excellent starting points for discussions on how partnering with Microsoft can drive universal digital enablement in cost-effective ways in the 21st century.

Microsoft Partnerships for Technology Access (PTA)

Microsoft Partnerships for Technology Access (PTA) helps governments achieve policy objectives through public-private partnerships (PPPs) that deliver technology solutions to underserved communities and students. PTA's guiding principle is that technology can be a powerful enabler of development goals when driven by country stakeholders, embedded in public services and delivered through a network that leverages the strengths of the public and private sectors. In education, Microsoft PTA programs look to provide educators and learners with access to training and technologies to facilitate learning, increase digital teaching skills, and prepare for the future.

The mission of Microsoft PTA is to make PCs relevant and affordable to citizens everywhere through public-private partnerships (PPPs).

Microsoft Community Technology Skills Program

The Microsoft Community Technology Skills Program works with partners to create training opportunities for people underserved by technology:

• Cash grants, software and specialized curricula for non-profit community technology centers.

• A framework for institutions to deliver IT skills to communities that previously would not have had access to these skills.

• Students in these communities the opportunities to gain essential computer skills that will equip them to compete more effectively in the job market.

• Support for stronger community based organizations providing IT skills for lifelong learning.

Microsoft Digital Literacy Curriculum

Microsoft has two key initiatives which address lifelong learning and skills development: Partners in Learning (PiL), and Unlimited Potential (UP). These are complemented by the Microsoft Digital Literacy curriculum, which builds on the existing two initiatives.

Microsoft Digital Literacy focuses on teaching and assessing basic computer concepts and skills so that people can use computer technology in everyday life to develop new social and economic opportunities for themselves, their families, and their communities. The program offers:

• A curriculum of 5 e-learning courses, 5 online assessments and a certificate test, totaling 30 hours of learning to equip students, faculty and staff across all disciplines with a standard, internationally recognized level of computer skills.

• Accessible, easy to use, self paced introduction to the basics of computing.

• Learners develop the essential skills needed to use computers with confidence whether at work or for personal use.

Microsoft IT Academy

The Microsoft IT Academy program enables academic learning institutions to connect the world of education to the world of work by enabling faculty and students to acquire new technology skills in an academic setting. Microsoft IT Academies benefit from world-class Microsoft curriculum and cutting-edge software tools to experience real-world challenges in the classroom environment. Microsoft IT Academy can help to create a future-ready, IT literate workforce to meet the demands of a job market that is now global and more competitive than ever. The

program offers:
- Access to Microsoft software and resources with academic pricing for Microsoft certification exams.
- Online curricula for academic institutions to provide work related IT skills.
- Students the opportunity to develop the relevant IT skills to progress and develop in the work place.
- Internationally recognized qualifications.
- A platform for future personal development.

Microsoft Students to Business
The Students to Business (S2B) program is a Microsoft Community Initiative designed to connect Microsoft partners and customers with qualified students for entry-level and internship positions.
The objective of the S2B program is to inspire local businesses to communicate the competency requirements for new talent, to evaluate the skills of students ready for an entry-level job or internship and collaborate with Microsoft and local education institutions to provide the curriculum and training needed to ensure students are prepared to meet the innovation needs of company's around the globe.
Students engaged in S2B benefit from unique mentoring, training and certification opportunities. Various offerings are available to students at each stage of S2B – when profiling, in application and after their job connection.

Programs for Entrepreneurs
BizSpark
BizSpark is an innovative global program designed to unite startups and resources to support them into a single community. BizSpark is uniquely designed to help startups engaged in software development, by offering Software, Support and Visibility:
- Software: BizSpark provides fast and easy access to Microsoft tools and technologies, for their immediate use in design, development, testing, demonstration, and hosted application production and deployment;
- Support: Professional Technical Support from Microsoft, including, for entrepreneurs working with early adopter technologies: access to unlimited email support, online training and invitations to local technical events. Examples of early adopter technologies: Windows® 7, Microsoft® Silverlight, Windows® Azure and Microsoft® SQL Server 2008 as well as a connection to Network Partners, organizations that provide programs, mentoring and other resources to Startups;
- Visibility: The opportunity for global visibility on the MicrosoftStartupZone Website via the BizSparkDB, an online Startup directory, hosted on http://www.microsoftstartupzone.com \bizspark.

Conclusion
There is clear evidence that all jobs that veterans are likely to return in the U.S. labor market will increasingly be technology rich. Whether these new jobs are in clean or green industries, health care, hospitality or financial services, they will all require a certain level of information technology and productivity skills if workers are to compete successfully for these family wage jobs. Making broader use of portable, industry-led certifications and credentials is critically

important to ensuring up-to-date skills, business relevance and employability.

Given the fast pace of technology innovation and the ever changing requirements of our modern workplace, we have to make better use of modern technology to scale workforce readiness and instruction to a larger group of veteran job seekers. Much of this learning and instruction will be facilitated by information technology, with online and distance learning offerings likely to become the prevalent form of skills acquisition.

To be successful, especially in times of economic crisis, we need a truly cooperative, tripartite approach where the public and private sectors work hand-in-hand with all branches of our Armed Services to provide the kind of efficient, real-world training and credential solutions that will lead to attractive, well-paying careers.

For the new skills and workforce readiness paradigm to be successful, veterans need better access to the most current technology instruction, combined with hands-on experience of the technology, plus real-world advice, for example in form of mentoring, internship and career guidance provided by private teaching organizations.

We applaud the new GI Bill as a huge step in the right direction. It provides funding for private training providers and recognizes their role in expanding the availability of up-to-date, industry supported skills instruction and certifications. The nimbleness of their course offerings, their qualified trainer availability, and their existing classroom and assessment capacity, enhance workforce readiness provisions across the country while at the same time maximizing scarce public resources.

At Microsoft, we believe that building effective bridges for our returning service members into civilian employment is morally the right thing to do for our veterans – but it also is a vital business imperative and in fact, increasingly a matter of national security for our country.

We look forward to working with this Committee, other Members of Congress, veteran's services organizations, and key federal government departments to rethink how, why and where we provide for the re-skilling of our returning service members to better enable them to secure family wage jobs of the future. I know all of us in this room are committed to working in partnership to realize this laudable and critically important goal.

This concludes my statement. I would be pleased to answer any questions the Members of the Committee may have.