



U.S. CHAMBER OF COMMERCE FOUNDATION

**Statement
of the
U.S. Chamber
of Commerce Foundation**

ON: Is Transition Assistance On Track?

TO: U.S. Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs

**BY: Eric Eversole, Hiring Our Heroes, U.S. Chamber of Commerce
Foundation**

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The Foundation's mission is to strengthen America's long-term competitiveness by addressing developments that affect our nation, our economy, and the global business environment. USCCF presents a broad range of programs that promote a greater understanding of economic and public affairs issues.

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation (USCCF) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit affiliate of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce dedicated to strengthening America's long-term competitiveness by addressing developments that affect our nation, our economy, and the global business environment. USCCF presents a broad range of programs that promote a greater understanding of economic and public affairs issues.

The Foundation conducts research and produces events on issues facing business now and in the future. Through its initiatives, the Foundation builds skills, drives innovation, and encourages growth.

**BEFORE THE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS OF THE
U.S. SENATE**

“IS TRANSITION ASSISTANCE ON TRACK?”

**Testimony of Eric Eversole
President, Hiring Our Heroes, U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation**

Good morning, Chairman Isakson, Ranking Member Blumenthal, and distinguished members of the Committee. My name is Eric Eversole and I am the president of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation's Hiring Our Heroes program.

Founded in 2011, Hiring Our Heroes is a nationwide initiative of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation which assists transitioning service members, military veterans, and military spouses in finding meaningful employment opportunities in a 21st century workforce. The program accomplishes this goal in a number of different ways, which include hiring fairs, multi-day on-base transition summits, campaigns in partnership with sponsor companies and nonprofit associations, and a robust suite of online digital resources.

We are proud to announce that, since our program's launch, we have held more than 950 hiring events in the United States and around the world, and from those hiring events alone, we've confirmed more than 28,000 military veteran and spouse hires in the civilian workforce. This does not include the hundreds of thousands of other meaningful connections that our program has made for job seekers through our various other resources, such as workshops, training programs, our online properties and more.

The past several years have been a time of tremendous growth in the military hiring community, as private sector companies have admirably stepped up their hiring efforts for veterans and military spouses. When Hiring Our Heroes was first started more than four years ago, the employment outlook for veterans and military families was challenging. However, with the business community meeting the challenge of finding jobs for this population, the unemployment rate for them has continued to drop precipitously.

This has resulted in what is currently the lowest unemployment rate yet for military veterans at approximately four percent. There are, however, military populations that continue to struggle. For example, post-9/11 veterans under the age of 35 face an unemployment rate that is higher than the national average. Military

spouses also face a high unemployment rate of approximately 25 percent. Couple that with the fact that more than one million service members are expected to transition off of active duty in the next five years, and we realize that there is still a great deal of work to be done moving forward.

We know that hiring veterans is not just the right thing to do for the country, but it makes good business sense. Veterans bring tremendous value in both the hard and soft skills to companies who hire them, from extensive training backgrounds in their military occupational specialties to the intangibles such as loyalty, discipline, and a work ethic that is not rivaled elsewhere in the economy.

We also recognize that this is not solely an economic issue for our country, but a national security concern. The military has long been a pathway to a better life for young Americans. If we cannot deliver that better life through better job opportunities, it will be much more difficult to recruit the next generation of the all-volunteer force.

Background on Hiring Our Heroes

When our program began, we had a very simple mission – host hiring fairs, and connect with local chambers to find opportunities for the military job seeker population. It was a straightforward way to address the challenging economic landscape for veterans and military spouses.

Although we know that some veterans and their families are still struggling, that landscape itself has changed, and we have had to adapt our operations in accordance with that change to continue our effectiveness in what we do. We've become more strategic in our approach and programs, and more focused on not only finding jobs for these individuals, but ensuring that they are finding the right jobs.

Knowing that part of this strategic approach encompasses a broad-based effort to engage the private sector, in 2012, together with Capital One, we launched the "Hiring 500,000 Heroes" campaign to secure half a million commitments by various employers to hire veterans and military spouses. Once businesses who joined this program committed, we worked with them to translate those commitments into hires. We're proud to say that in June of 2015, we surpassed the 500,000-hire mark for veterans and military spouses who were hired as a result of this initiative.

Hiring Our Heroes also developed and continued to improve our robust array of digital tools and online resources for both job seekers and employers. With support from our generous sponsors, including Toyota and USAA, we provide tools such as the Personal Branding Resume Engine, My Career Spark for military spouses,

the Employer Roadmap, Fast Track, and others free of charge for all users, whether job seeker or employer. All of these online tools are designed to ensure that our target audiences have easy access to the most up-to-date information and best practices when they enter into this unique and often challenging environment.

Lastly, we know that the military spouse population faces its own unique set of challenges when searching for employment. While a service member will typically only transition off of active once in his or her career, military spouses make multiple transitions while serving alongside their service member, making it all the more challenging to find stable and meaningful employment. Our Military Spouse Program, which has been in place since 2012, is incredibly active in the spouse community, engaging spouse-specific hiring fairs, networking receptions, roundtable discussions, workshops, and more. All of this is made possible by the generous donations of the companies on our Military Spouse Employment Advisory Council, to complement its counterpart, the Veteran Employment Advisory Council.

Partnerships

Creating and maintaining valuable partnerships for our program has been crucial to our success. Hiring Our Heroes is in a unique position in the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation to have influential connections to thousands of state and local chambers, which provides us with tremendously effective grassroots teams across the country to engage with military job seekers in their communities. The enormous impact that we have seen at every level has been extremely beneficial to our mission.

Our program has also been able to develop key partnerships with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, the U.S. Department of Labor, the U.S. Department of Defense and many of its services, as well as the Small Business Administration, in order to expand our messaging base and reach the service member and military spouse population, connecting employers to them wherever they are in the world.

The relationships that we maintain with other nonprofit organizations within this military hiring community have been integral to our success as well. Our work with groups such as the Institute of Veterans and Military Families, Student Veterans of America, Blue Star Families, Got Your 6, and many others has furthered our reach and strengthened our ability to provide networking and training opportunities for job seekers, and make valuable connections for them with employers who are hiring.

Of significant note, earlier this year, we partnered with the George W. Bush Institute's Military Service Initiative as well as a broad array of public, private, and nonprofit partners to create the Veteran Employment Transition Roadmap, a

comprehensive guide for transitioning service members and military veterans to help them become better equipped to navigate the complex landscape that they will encounter when leaving the military to pursue meaningful work. This document, which is available in hard-copy as well as digitally online, is unique in that there is nothing else like it that exists in this military employment space, and outlines best practices and checklists for job seekers to consider, as well as an overall list of resources that are available to them from across the public, private, and nonprofit sectors that are available to them when making this transition.

Moving “Left of Transition”

One of the key lessons we have learned over the last four years is that many of the challenges that military veterans face when transitioning off active duty is primarily due to a lack of preparation. Far too many service members have traditionally viewed transition not as a continuing process but as a single point in time when they simply pick up their DD-214 papers and leave the military. Not surprisingly, in recent years, more than 50 percent of service members were unemployed within 15 months of leaving the military, with no clear pathway to economic success.

In 2014, a key effort of Hiring Our Heroes was our aggressive work to address this problem, by helping service members focus on moving left of transition, and starting the job search process earlier. When interfacing with service members, we compare this process to any evolution that they would encounter in the military. It is a process that requires a clearly-defined mission, preparation, execution, and ability to adapt and overcome as circumstances evolve.

Working with our public, private, and nonprofit partners, we launched a series of multi-day, on-base transition summits aimed at reaching and empowering service members long before their last day on active duty. These summits are essentially one-stop-shops for service members as they learn what economic opportunity looks like for them in today’s workforce, with panel discussions from industry leaders, breakout workshop classes, networking receptions, and ultimately a hiring fair to conclude the event.

We continued this innovative effort throughout 2015, hosting 20 summits in the United States and internationally, providing job seekers with best-in-class resources for their transition process, and connecting them with employers (sometimes numbering in the hundreds) at each event that are searching for top military talent.

Over course of the last two years, in 2014 and 2015, we have seen tremendous success resulting from these summits. In the span of those two years, more than 20,000 service member, veteran, and military spouse job seekers attended these summits, connecting with well over 2,000 employers who were present as well.

As we close out 2015 and move into the New Year, a newer emphasis will be placed on a particular type of event which complements our transition summits: professional sporting event expos. This series of events was launched in 2014 in conjunction with major professional sporting events, such as NBA basketball or Major League Baseball games. All military job seekers receive free admission to the hiring events and tickets to attend the game and/or special event. We have seen great success with these as a means to attract attention to our program, capitalizing on the high-profile nature of the athletic teams or host organization to further our messaging reach with job seekers and employers.

Lastly, we have critically important training programs which truly set us apart in this hiring community. Our Corporate Fellowship Program is a 12-week evolution that prepares service members for separation from the military through corporate education, extensive on-the-job training, and networking opportunities. At the completion of the program, service members have increased their marketability tremendously, giving them an added edge in an increasingly competitive job market.

In our Higher Veterans initiative, student veterans who are within two years of graduation from school are able to participate in the program and obtain part-time employment with a company, and complete a four-month curriculum to prepare them to enter into the business community. This program has been made possible through key partnerships with Starbucks and the Pat Tillman Veterans Center at Arizona State University.

Most importantly, it is incumbent upon job seekers to own their transition. There is a sea of goodwill that exists for transitioning service members and military spouses, but ultimately, it is their responsibility to start far enough in advance and dedicate the time and effort necessary to have a successful transition.

What Employers Can Do

As mentioned previously, the current unemployment rate for veterans is far and away better than it has been in the past when the country was in the midst of a deep recession. This may lead some companies and employers to assume the problem has been solved and ask: "What else is there for us to do?" Conversely, Hiring Our Heroes is also approached constantly by employers who are interested in hiring veterans and military spouses, but they may not know exactly where to start.

In addressing the first question, it is worth revisiting that while great strides have been made in this area over the last several years, the struggle remains for key segments of the veteran population. For companies who have been engaged in this effort recently, considerations should be made to start veteran and military spouse hiring programs and affinity groups within their organizations. What we have seen is that mentors, resource groups, and military relationships within companies are key to breaking down barriers to success and instrumental in retaining veterans long-term. Some companies are new to this, while others, like Coca-Cola, have veteran affinity groups and hiring programs which date back decades.

For employers who themselves may have trouble navigating the vast landscape of the military hiring community, we have a number of different resources they can utilize. Our online tool Employer Roadmap is a wide-ranging resource which gives companies a customized experience based on their experience level to help them learn best practices and programs for recruiting, hiring, and retaining veterans and military spouses. Information on how to develop military hiring strategies, military-friendly job descriptions, and understanding what the veteran and military spouse bring to companies in the way of experience is readily available through this multi-faceted web site.

Our combined effort to focus on both the job seeker education as well as the employer side will continue as our program evolves in the months and years ahead. And we will continue to position ourselves as leaders in this community to the further benefit of all of our target audiences.

Conclusion

Looking ahead to 2016, our program continues to grow in ways that we did not think would be possible when starting this endeavor in 2011, and we are continuing to adapt to the evolving landscape that is the 21st century economy.

Building upon our successes and constantly making important improvements to our program, Hiring Our Heroes, working with our strategic partners, will continue to bring our resources and tools directly to where transitioning service members and military spouses are when they need them the most. We are proud to serve our military community and of the work that we have done over the past several years, and we know that not losing sight of our mission and goals will become all the more important in the years to come, as we will serve as a key catalyst in bringing the right people together.

Chairman Isakson, Ranking Member Blumenthal, and members of the

Committee, I thank you again for the opportunity to testify and look forward to answering your questions.