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Testimony by Kyle Burks before a field hearing of the
Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs
On the State of Veterans Employment in Ohio
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Opening

Senator Brown I thank you for this time to be able to share my experiences I have had working with the Veterans benefits and my time in the military.

A little about who I am.

I joined the army in March 2005 because I felt like I was at a dead end job and my grandpa passed away a couple yrs earlier and I wanted to have something in my life to be proud of. My Grandpa served in WWII breaking of Nazi concentration camps. I wanted to do something meaningful so I joined the ARMY. I signed up for 3 yrs and 16 weeks and that's all I wanted to do. I have been out of the military since July 2008. During my time in the United States army I was deployed to Iraq to perform route clearance missions. In my deployment I saw over 300 bombs go off and been in over 80 fire fights. I also had my best friend's truck get hit by a suicide car bomb. I made my sergeant in 2yrs and 8 months. I am very proud to have served for this country. I want to receive my Bachelor's degree from OSU. I plan on going and getting my masters someday so I can be a professor. I also want to open up my own dog day care type place. One of the doctors suggested I get a dog. She said it could possibly help with my PTSD and my dog is my best friend. I love being around animals. Getting out and what I didn't expect.

The briefing when leave the military is a joke. Its extremely boring and filled with power point slides. Really all you thinking about is where am I going to move to what will I do for work. Will I be able to function in a class setting? They do it as a catch all for everyone ETSing for the base. You really don't find out how your skills transfer over to the real world. I didn't feel like it applied to me as much because you don't really learn about the state you are going to.—My best idea about that is I would have an Ohio VA counsel worker do benefits session when you come to the state you plan on staying in. I believe there has to be a better way to get these young men and women ready.

Dealing with the VA hospital is something all in its self. I am really getting pretty good now but it only took me 3 yrs. It took me just under 2 yrs to get my acl surgery after I tore it out in Iraq. I did 3 MRI's and every time they would say you have no ACL but because of how back up the VA is with surgeries I was canceled 2 times and the final time I called and had to tell them I was going to go public to the new station about it. I was so fed up with me walking and my knee randomly slipping and giving out. Waiting that long made my knee way worse.

Still making an appointment can be a nightmare if you don't know the right person to call.

Trying to see one of the guys to help fill out disability paper work was a task in itself. I ended up calling the VA help line and doing everything on my own. I had friend that tried to go through there VA hospitals and they had the same things. I had to explain the process of doing it yourself. I am told by other Vets doing it yourself is the wrong way of going through it but to me it felt like the only option

I will be speaking on the few things I have come across when seeking employment.

Applying at Kroger and getting an interview. When asked about my military back ground I told them I have great attention to detail from when I looked for bombs. I don't remember the question but I was honest about now being considered partiality disabled. I suffer from some PTSD symptoms, MTBI, and a few other things. I can't say for sure if this had anything to do with me not getting a part time job there but I know it didn't help. What company really wants to hire someone who needs random days off to go to the doctor? What I mean by random is sometimes the VA hospital just gives you an appointment and tells you when it is. Sometimes rescheduling means you will not see a doctor for a couple more months.

I know very little about what job and services do for veterans. -Most the programs I find out about are through other veterans. The best source a veteran has is another vet who has broken through the red tape.

I know little about family jobs and services and from what I do know I would not want to step foot in there. Other Vets have told me stories of waiting a couple hours to be helped and then having to set an appointment to come back.

Voc Reb

I filled out all the paperwork and was accepted in 2009 and because I was advised to use the GI bill and not use the voc reb program. I have to refill out the paper work and it's been well over a month and yet no word from them. Yes I have called the Cleveland office 2 times and they keep telling me anytime now. I don't understand how 2 yrs ago I was fine to join and now I may not be. The only reason I knew about this program was from another vet.

I have heard of a book with all the programs in it for veterans but I have never seen one. My fellow vets and I joke around and say that is like a unicorn and is spoken of but never seen. If it really is out there than I think a benefits counselor should go over it with you when you get out.

Post 9/11 GI Bill

I have much more experience dealing with the GI BILL and disability benefits.—Dealing with the GI-Bill people is a complete joke and its takes so long to get the right info. I have waited on hold for 45 mins on many occasions if I am even lucky enough to get through. A perfect example is I know it will take forever to get everything switched over to OSU. So I call and talk to the VA rep there about getting changed over. Policy says I need to enroll in classes before I can meet and start to fill out the paper work transfer the benefits to OSU. I can't get enrolled in classes till Dec 13. She told me it will take about 30 days to get everything changed over. That puts me at Jan 13 for that. Well that means I will not receive my book money till at least mid Feb. from my past experience of starting at a school of after summer break. Last qt at csc I started Sept and didn't get my book money till Nov.-

I also understand the no break pay everyone is making cuts. But I don't understand what politicians want us to do. Ok for sake of a great sanrio, school ends dec 7 that was my finials day. I start work over break dec 8th if I have the time between writing paper and studying for finials to do interviews. I have to wait 2 weeks to get paid so we are on dec 26ish well if I do get 40 hours it will be about even. I work for about 2 more weeks and quit for school to start again. What incentive does and employers have to hire someone for a month? Most Vets have a family and can only work day shift hours anyways. Then you count in the holidays and really you're on payroll for less than a month. But a company still has to pay taxes on you.

I also wish there was some type of rule in the GI-Bill post 9/11 that would offer you a extra yr. I understand it is my own fault for changing my major. I am in a spot now that when I go to OSU only the rest of this yr will be covered. I first started out in nursing and found out with my disabilities it's really not for me. I can memorize things, I get to overwhelmed I need to step away from what I am doing; I would hate to be in the middle of saving someone's life and just shut down because I am too overwhelmed. Heck I left the mall last Saturday because there were too many people round me and I had a minor panic attack. I do understand I made the choice to change majors but I would also like to see an exception somewhere in there where if in good standing grades and can get that one extra yr of schooling.

Ending

I would like to say thank you Senator Brown for listening to me about the issues I faced and small ways I think you can fix them. I would also like to tell fellow veterans even though the VFW may seem like a place for old guy it's the best place to find out about the programs that are offered. I also know how hard it can be to ask for help and want to do it on your own, but don't be afraid to ask or speak out because otherwise the great people fighting to make our transition easier will never know what to fix.