

EASING THE BURDENS THROUGH EMPLOYMENT

HEARING

BEFORE THE

COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS UNITED STATES SENATE

ONE HUNDRED ELEVENTH CONGRESS

FIRST SESSION

NOVEMBER 18, 2009

Printed for the use of the Committee on Veterans' Affairs



Available via the World Wide Web: <http://www.access.gpo.gov/congress/senate>

U.S. GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE

54-281 PDF

WASHINGTON : 2010

For sale by the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office
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EASING THE BURDENS THROUGH EMPLOYMENT

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 18, 2009

U.S. SENATE,
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS,
Washington, DC.

The Committee met, pursuant to notice, at 9:36 a.m., in room SR-418, Russell Senate Office Building, Hon. Daniel K. Akaka, Chairman of the Committee, presiding.

Present: Senators Akaka, Murray, Brown, Tester and Begich.

OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. DANIEL K. AKAKA, CHAIRMAN, U.S. SENATOR FROM HAWAII

Chairman AKAKA. The hearing of this U.S. Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs will come to order. Aloha, good morning, and welcome to this hearing on veterans' employment.

These are difficult times for many Americans with an unemployment rate higher than it has been in more than 20 years. When the number of those who have given up looking for work because they believe none is available, and it is combined with those who are only able to find part-time employment, the extent of our challenge is staggering.

For our Nation's veterans, especially for those who have recently separated from active duty, the search for a job can be particularly difficult. Skills honed on the battlefield are not easily translated to a resume for the civilian job market. Add to that the need for a period of readjustment to civilian life, and the problem is compounded.

Veterans who have been injured while on active duty, and especially those who are suffering the invisible wounds of war, face an even more daunting task when seeking to find a career. For those thousands of veterans who are homeless, who may be bearing the burdens of drug or alcohol abuse or struggling with mental issues, finding work seems impossible. Older veterans and those from other conflicts may lack the skills necessary to compete in an increasingly high-tech type of job market. Jobs that once were plentiful may simply no longer exist.

Today we will be focusing on the employment needs of veterans, especially those who have recently separated from active duty and those who face substantial or unique obstacles in the civilian workforce. The goal this morning is to gain input in ways to improve current programs. We also need ideas for new initiatives for transitional programs that emphasize easing burdens through employment and reducing homelessness among other things.

Veterans make good employees. They have learned discipline, commitment, and the value of hard work. Many employers are eager to hire these brave men and women. The challenge is matching the right former servicemember with the right career and addressing any obstacles that may stand in the way of successful employment.

On November 5th, I was privileged to attend the Department of Labor's annual Salute to Veterans. It was an impressive event led by our lead witness today, the Honorable Ray Jefferson, Assistant Secretary of Labor for Veterans' Employment and Training.

I was especially moved by the remarks made by two young veterans, Ms. Dawn Halfaker and Command Sergeant Major Michele Jones. These remarkable individuals spoke from their hearts about what it means to be a veteran and the challenges that they face. They touched many hearts with their words that day, and we have reason to be proud of them and the hundreds of thousands of others who have honorably served our country in time of need.

Our agenda is an ambitious one this morning, and I know that there is much ground to cover. I look forward to the testimony and working with all Committee Members and advocates to find ways to address the employment needs of veterans.

Now I would like to call on Senator Murray from the State of Washington for her opening statement.

**STATEMENT OF HON. PATTY MURRAY,
U.S. SENATOR FROM WASHINGTON**

Senator MURRAY. Mr. Chairman, thank you very much for holding this really important hearing on some of the burdens that our veterans are seeing as they try to come home and get civilian employment. I want to thank all of the witnesses who are going to be appearing before us. I look forward to your comments today.

But before I begin, I do want to welcome one of our witnesses today. He is a Washingtonian and a Microsoft employee, Lutz Ziob. He is in the audience here today. He is going to be testifying. He is here, Mr. Chairman, to talk about the barriers and opportunities for veterans in the information technology realm. I know that in today's high-tech military, we need to be working to find ways to translate our servicemembers' technology skills into the civilian world. So, I am really looking forward to his thoughts today.

Mr. Chairman, our Nation's veterans have all the character and skills they need to succeed in the working world. They are disciplined team players who have proven that they can perform under pressure. Now we have got to make sure that the VA and the Department of Defense and the Department of Labor are given the tools they need to give those soldiers the support they need.

In the coming months, I had planned to introduce a veterans' employment assistance bill that I hope will add to the toolbox. It is a bill that is designed to expand employment and training and placement service for our veterans. It will help our veterans who are looking to create small businesses by establishing a veterans' business center program. It will help unemployed veterans get the job training they need. We are going to set up a demonstration program to examine how transitioning servicemembers can build on their military IT skills to enter the civilian IT workforce.

In addition to that bill, last week Senators Klobuchar, Johanns and I introduced the Post-9/11 Veterans' Job Training Act. Our bill takes a very critical step forward for veterans by expanding benefits available under the Post-9/11 GI Bill to include job training and apprenticeships because in these tough economic times, we have got to expand the opportunities opened under the Post-9/11 GI Bill to include workforce training. So, I hope my colleagues take a look at this legislation to help our veterans obtain access to employment through better training.

Mr. Chairman, our men and women who are fighting overseas face incredibly dangerous and stressful situations on the battlefield, so it is critical that we not add to that stress by burdening them with worries about keeping or finding jobs for themselves and their families.

In my home State, the citizen soldiers of the 81st Brigade Combat Team of the Washington Army National Guard just returned this summer after serving their country honorably in Iraq. We had about 2,300 members of that brigade return. About half of them tried to get direct job placement or job training, and of those were trying to get job placement, only 20 percent have been able to get a job so far.

So, we know that these men and women are struggling when they come home. In Washington we also have thousands of soldiers from Fort Lewis who have returned from Iraq and Afghanistan who are seeking employment resources.

I do want to say I am very really encouraged by some of the grassroots efforts that are occurring in my State. I want to actually take this opportunity to acknowledge the important work that is being done by Hire America's Heroes. That is a Washington state-based organization that focuses on improving access to corporate jobs for transitioning military servicemembers, veterans, and their family members. By bringing together major employers in my State—Comcast, Boeing, Weyerhaeuser, Starbucks—with our area veterans, Hire America's Heroes has been able to sidestep many of the barriers that often prevent veterans from having their unique skill sets recognized.

I especially want to mention, Mr. Chairman, the great work being done by Marjorie James, the president of Hire America's Heroes, and General James Collins. He will be in the audience here shortly. General Collins is actually a two-star general. He has been one of the main forces behind Hire America's Heroes. He has served our Nation honorably both in and out of uniform, and as a retired officer and a former Weyerhaeuser employee, General Collins brings a very valuable perspective on veterans' employment issues to the table. And I really want to take this opportunity to publicly thank him for his work.

So, as I have said many, many times here and around the country, I believe how we treat our veterans when they come home is an indication of the character of this Nation, and we have to do all we can to transition them from servicemember to citizen, and making sure they have the skills and the jobs when they come home is a critical part of that. So, this hearing is extremely important, and I want to thank you, Mr. Chairman, for holding it.

Chairman AKAKA. Thank you very much, Senator Murray.

Now I will ask Senator Brown for his opening statement.

**STATEMENT OF HON. SHERROD BROWN,
U.S. SENATOR FROM OHIO**

Senator BROWN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for holding this important hearing and aloha.

Chairman AKAKA. Aloha.

Senator BROWN. Aloha, Secretary Jefferson. Thank you for joining us on Hawaii Day here, I guess. Thank you very much for being part of this.

I can only stay a few minutes because I have a HELP markup at 10, but I look forward to learning from Assistant Secretary Jefferson about the Veterans Employment Council.

As I travel my State—and I have had numerous roundtables with veterans and with health care workers and educators and families of servicemembers where I hear over and over about the health and education needs of servicemembers. This hearing could not have come at a more important time as our country works to recover from last year's economic meltdown.

My State does not have the highest employment rate. It is one of the highest, over 10 percent, as much of the country is afflicted with, but it also has been in recession longer than almost any other State, I believe, with the exception of Michigan.

We know from the U.S. Department of Labor that returning vets are more likely to be unemployed than their civilian counterparts. There are structural reasons for this that are pretty obvious. Vets have been away from the workforce serving our Nation. Oftentimes, they are beginning a second career after retirement. There are economic reasons for job disparity as well since many companies are not hiring obviously during this downturn. As the economy begins to recover, many people are not likely at least soon to change jobs. But that does not make it acceptable. What it does, however, is tells us where we must provide assistance and where we can seize opportunities to expand employment opportunities for our veterans.

Late last month, I went to Youngstown State University in northeast Ohio for the naming of Air Force Boulevard on its campus. YSU has been a leader in reaching out to veterans and military students because, as Senator Murray pointed out, it knows the values of a military career. From the newly-created office of Veterans Affairs to being designated as a military-friendly campus by GI Jobs magazine, YSU is demonstrating its commitment to a cause greater than itself.

The city of Youngstown has been hit especially hard by economic times, but that is changing, too, in large part because YSU is playing a key role in bringing talented men and women from our military with their skills, their talents, their experiences, and their life experiences, especially, to the city of Youngstown to be part of the rebirth in Mahoning Valley.

Employing veterans and tapping their skills are an important part of the city's business model for revival. It is not just happening in Youngstown. There are active programs at Cuyahoga Community College, Cleveland State University, and other colleges

around Ohio are contemplating establishing their own similar programs.

Helping vets get into the civilian workforce or moving up the company ladder is not only about rewarding them for service to our Nation, but because veterans have skills and experiences and expertise that are so needed in the private sector and in government.

When FDR signed into law the original GI Bill six and one-half decades ago, he not only provided servicemembers with an education that strengthened our Nation, colleges and universities were created to serve the growing student population. Businesses expanded with a highly-educated workforce. Middle-class communities thrive with renewed economic prosperity in large part because of these highly-skilled, increasingly highly-skilled returning vets.

We must encourage and promote the value of hiring vets within the private sector and by the government. This hearing, Mr. Chairman, is an important step in doing that. Thank you.

Chairman AKAKA. Thank you very much, Senator Brown.

Now I will call on Senator Tester for his opening statement.

**STATEMENT OF HON. JON TESTER,
U.S. SENATOR FROM MONTANA**

Senator TESTER. I, too, want to thank you, Chairman Akaka, for holding this hearing, and I want to welcome the witnesses on both panels. A special welcome to Secretary Jefferson. It is good to see you again, and I look forward to your testimony and your energy, as always.

Like the rest of the country, Montana continues to get through a significant economic downturn. Unemployment rates in some parts of our State are over 11 percent, and most of those counties are very, very rural.

A tough economy, coupled with physical disability, a mental condition, or routine job loss, can leave a veteran particularly vulnerable. I look forward to hearing today about how the Department of Labor's programs are working, particularly in rural and frontier areas where it is often harder to find work.

In addition, I am deeply concerned about the Guard and Reserve members returning from Iraq and Afghanistan who are transitioning back to civilian life and civilian jobs. Last week, I had a chance to sit down with Montana's Adjutant General. He has over 1,200 Guardsmen that are scheduled to deploy next year. That is nearly one-third of the Montana Guard. Those folks will have all the employment needs when they come home, but sometimes the job they left no longer exists. And in other cases, their military skill set does not translate into the civilian job market, thus increasing the difficulty of finding a job or employment opportunity in their hometown.

With all of these challenges and changes, I think we have to critically review the focus and value of these programs. We have to ensure their efficiency, applicability and responsiveness. The relationship between the Veterans Administration and the Department of Labor is absolutely critical. We need extra attention on veterans in rural and frontier areas and on Indian country. At the

end of the day, we have to make sure we have done everything possible to help our veterans find jobs.

So, Mr. Jefferson, I know you have got a lot of ideas and absolutely a lot of energy, and I want to make sure that you are getting the support that you need from Secretary Solis and Secretary Shinseki. We are here to support you and ensure that you have the resources necessary to advance these very important programs.

In closing, I just want to ask that if we have a veteran in a situation where they are deployed, they come back, they are returning to a frontier area of the State where there are less than 350 veterans, and they have got some issues in a job loss area, how do your programs apply to those folks?

I know you cannot be everything to everybody, but we certainly can try to be everything to everybody. So, that is really my concern as I go around the State of Montana every weekend into areas where there are big land masses but few people. And a lot of veterans, a lot of people in those areas, serve in our military because they feel a calling to service. Those folks return to those communities and they need support, and we need to make sure that support is there.

Again, I want to thank everybody in both panels for participating, and I want to once again thank the Chairman for calling this hearing. Thank you.

Chairman AKAKA. Thank you very much, Senator Tester.

I want to welcome our first panel this morning. Our first witness is the Honorable Raymond Jefferson, Assistant Secretary of Labor for Veterans' Employment and Training. This is Secretary Jefferson's first appearance before this Committee since his confirmation in June, and I want to extend a very warm aloha to him this morning, and especially to note that this is the anniversary of his hundredth day on the job. I wish you well.

Secretary JEFFERSON. Thank you, sir.

Chairman AKAKA. I know that his enthusiasm and energy and commitment is contagious and that he is determined to get the job done. I thank you for being here this morning, Mr. Secretary. Your full testimony will, of course, be printed in the record. Thank you very much, Secretary. Please begin with your statement.

STATEMENT OF HON. RAYMOND JEFFERSON, ASSISTANT SECRETARY FOR VETERANS' EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR

Secretary JEFFERSON. Right. Well, Chairman Akaka, aloha. Senator Murray, Senator Brown, Senator Tester, thank you for your service to our Nation, to the veterans' community, and for the opportunity to be here before you today. It is my hundredth day. I remain thrilled and honored to have this opportunity to serve our Nation's veterans.

We are working diligently every day. Secretary Solis had made vets and veterans one of her top priorities. We are working very hard to achieve her vision of good jobs for everyone. I want to acknowledge that we have unprecedented support and relationship at VA with Secretary Shinseki and Deputy Secretary Gould.

Since being confirmed, I have been meeting with stakeholders to get their feedback on the issues, challenges, and opportunities fac-

ing our Nation's veterans and transitioning servicemembers. From that and my observations, I have formed five aspirations that we are committed to achieve as outcome goals.

Let me share these with you. First, to serve as a national focal point for veterans' training and employment, and this will involve several actions. Second, increasing our engagement and outreach to employers, particularly the private sector. Third, providing seamless transition for transitioning servicemembers with a particular emphasis on emerging industries and green jobs. Fourth is boosting the impact of USERRA by increasing awareness of it and also commitment to it. And finally, developing our team members' potential so they have meaningful careers and provide the best possible service and programs.

Let me first talk about improvements in current programs. During the confirmation hearing with regards to TAP, I promised to do an external review of the TAP employment workshop. Thus far, we are presently reviewing TAP's performance and impact. We are also working to modernize the workshop to increase its effectiveness and improve the participants' employment outcomes. A key component of that is going to be bringing new content into the workshop, content that is more economically relevant, immediately useful and also engaging for the participants. We are working closely with DOD, VA and DHS as we accomplish this.

USERRA. During the hearing I promised to do an external review of the USERRA program and determine ways to improve it. We have recently completed a Lean-Six-Sigma quality enhancement and process efficiency assessment. What will be the impact of this? It is going to help us to streamline the process, to provide consistent high-quality investigations, to increase our responsiveness to our veterans, our clients and, also, it will help us determine other ways that we can improve the program and its outcomes.

We are also identifying an electronic case management system to remove and address the paper-centric component of the USERRA process as it presently stands today.

With regards to veterans' homelessness, we are fully committed to the shared vision between Labor, VA, HUD and other stakeholders of ending veterans' homelessness in 5 years. We have 131,000 veterans at least on any given day who are homeless. What will be the Department of Labor's contribution to this? We have requested a 34 percent increase in our budget, \$9 million. Of that, \$4 million will go toward funding the Incarcerated Veterans' Transition Program, which should help approximately 1,500 veterans through 12 sites.

We also plan to take up to \$5 million of that and to do focused work to better serve homeless women veterans and veterans with families. We want to identify the best practices for serving this population and to disseminate that more broadly to service providers.

With regards to the Jobs for Veterans State Grants, two things I would like to emphasize. One, increased employer outreach, and I will talk more about that later. But we are developing a new model to more effectively engage with employers in the private sector to increase veterans' hiring.

We have also partnered with ETA to ensure priority of service at all ETA one-stops in Department of Labor training and employment programs. And for the first time, Assistant Secretary Jane Oates and I—Jane Oates of ETA—we have issued joint guidance for how this would be implemented. And during my time in the field, I am ensuring that this is cascading down.

We also have new initiatives. One which I am very excited about and spoke about during the hearing is increased engagement with employers in the public and private sectors. In the public sector, President Obama recently signed the new veterans' hiring initiative for the Federal Government. This will mobilize the entire Federal Government to do more recruiting and training of veterans to ensure that those veterans who are recently hired successfully make the transition to a new work environment. There will be hiring managers in all the large departments. This is a huge step to bring the veterans who are transitioning and veterans who are unemployed into the Federal Government.

We are also developing relationships with the private sector. We recently took a major first step and gave an address at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce's Business Steps Up: Hiring Our Heroes last week. We will be having a follow-on meeting with employers that the Chamber has graciously agreed to bring together to look at how do we develop hiring partnerships and hiring relationships, which will be very effective to get more veterans into these private sector jobs.

Additionally, we are developing relationships with thought-leading business associations. We will be reaching out to business executives in national security. We have had some initial relationships there—Young Presidents Organization and World Presidents Organization. In my travels, I am bringing a new model together to connect us with economic development boards, high-tech associations, et cetera.

In terms of pilot programs, we are also doing accelerated hiring initiatives, one with Job Corps and one with OFCCP right now, the Office of Federal Contract and Compliance Programs. I would like to use these as a model to validate the proof of concept that we can then bring to hiring partnerships with larger companies.

Targeted populations. There are several populations which are underserved. I spoke about this during the confirmation hearing. Native American veterans, many, Senator Tester, who are in rural areas, just completed participating in a summit led by Secretary Solis with Native American tribal leaders to identify some of their issues and the ways that we can better serve them.

Two, we have a study going, which I have requested to go further to become deeper and more comprehensive, that will help us identify the recommended best practices and solutions for better serving Native American veterans, especially those on tribal lands. Also, in 2010, we will be engaging and participating in the major Native American conferences and summits to make the tribal leaders aware of the programs and resources available to them. And I am mobilizing my regional administrators to support this outreach effort.

Veterans who have been wounded or injured. We have the REALlifelines program that provides one-on-one life planning and

seamless transition to veterans who have been wounded or injured. We are very excited about that, and we have also formed liaisons at the Department of the Army and Department of the Navy this year.

Furthermore, we have the America's Heroes at Work program, which is an education program for transitioning servicemembers with PTSD, that teaches employers the accommodations which are required to provide these wounded warriors with meaningful roles.

Finally, the Veterans Green Jobs initiative. We have awarded 17 grants totaling \$7.5 million to provide training in occupations relating to emerging industries and green jobs.

In conclusion, Chairman Akaka and Distinguished Members of the Committee, I really appreciate and the team really appreciates the unwavering support and commitment that we have received from this Committee. We are excited. We are working tirelessly and innovatively to make sure our veterans and transitioning servicemembers create meaningful lives, develop rewarding careers, and become productive citizens and leaders in their communities. There is further detail in my written testimony.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I stand ready to answer your questions.

[The prepared statement of Secretary Jefferson follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF HON. RAYMOND JEFFERSON, ASSISTANT SECRETARY,
VETERANS' EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR

Chairman Akaka, Ranking Member Burr, and Distinguished Members of the Committee on Veterans Affairs: Thank you for your service to the Nation, for your service to the Veterans community, and for the opportunity to testify before you today about the actions we're taking at the Department of Labor's Veterans' Employment and Training Service (VETS) to meet our Veterans' and transitioning Service Members' employment needs.

Today marks my 100th day of serving as your Assistant Secretary of Labor for Veterans' Employment and Training. The past few months have been busy ones spent learning about the agency, determining how to improve our current programs, creating necessary new initiatives and developing partnerships with our stakeholders.

I remain deeply humbled, honored and energized by having the privilege to serve our Nation as President Obama's appointee for this role. Secretary Solis has been an incredible source of guidance, wisdom and support, and has made Veterans and VETS one of her top priorities.

During the past 100 days, you and your professional staff have been a tremendous source of ideas, wisdom and insights. Thank you.

As we're all aware, since the onset of military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, over 1 million members of the active duty military have served in these two theaters. Additionally, since September 11, 2001, the Department of Defense (DOD) reports that over 700,000 National Guard and Reserve mobilizations have occurred—the largest deployment of the National Guard in the past half century.

Every day, we are reminded of the tremendous sacrifices made by our servicemen and women, and by their families. Our Veterans should be remembered, honored and appreciated not just on Veterans' Day, but every day. One way that we do that is by providing them with the best possible services and programs our Nation has to offer. Accomplishing this will require seamless collaboration, enhanced communication, and sustained, purposeful action. It's going to take all of us working together, sharing best-practices and developing innovative solutions to challenging problems while constrained by limited resources.

I am honored to be here today to provide an update on improvements to current programs and new initiatives, and to answer your questions.

BACKGROUND ON VETS

The mission of VETS is to provide Veterans and transitioning Service Members with the resources and services to succeed in the workforce by maximizing their em-

ployment opportunities, protecting their employment rights, and meeting labor market demands with qualified Veterans.

We accomplish our mission through three distinct functions: (1) conducting employment and training programs; (2) enforcing relevant Federal laws and regulations; and (3) providing transition assistance services.

VETS administers two employment and training programs through formula grants to States that directly meet the goals of its mission: (1) the Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program (DVOP) and (2) the Local Veterans' Employment Representatives (LVER) program. DVOP specialists provide outreach services and intensive employment assistance to meet the employment needs of eligible Veterans. LVER staff conduct outreach to employers and engage in advocacy efforts with hiring executives to increase employment opportunities for Veterans, encourage the hiring of disabled Veterans, and generally assist Veterans to gain and retain employment.

VETS also administers two competitive grant programs. To meet the needs of homeless Veterans and help reintegrate them into the workforce, VETS administers the Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Program (HVRP). Veterans with significant barriers to employment or service-connected disabilities are also served through the Veterans Workforce Investment Program (VWIP), which offers innovative training and placement services. The program was recently refocused to emphasize training and placement in green industries.

Our enforcement programs investigate complaints filed by Veterans and other protected individuals under the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act (USERRA), assess complaints alleging violation of statutes requiring Veterans' Preference in Federal hiring, and implement and collect information regarding Veteran employment by Federal contractors.

VETS' transition assistance services are offered through the Transition Assistance Program (TAP), which provides employment workshops and direct services for separating Service Members, including those who are seriously wounded and injured.

ASPIRATIONS

Since being confirmed, I have met with Service Members and Veterans, leaders in the Federal and private sector, Veterans' Service Organizations and providers of employment and training services to solicit their views on the issues and challenges regarding Veterans' employment. I have incorporated the combination of feedback and observations from these discussions into five aspirations that VETS will pursue during my tenure as Assistant Secretary in order to achieve our desired outcomes:

1. Providing Veterans and transitioning Service Members a voice in the workplace through serving as the National focal point for Veterans' employment and training. This will involve the following actions:

- a. Increasing awareness, access and participation in VETS programs, and employment outcomes for those participants.
- b. Communicating, convening and collaborating with partners and stakeholders.
- c. Ensuring we effectively serve populations with unique needs, especially Veterans and transitioning Service Members who are women, homeless, live in rural areas, or are wounded, ill or injured.

2. Creating a path to good jobs for Veterans through increased engagement with employers, with a particular emphasis on the private sector.

3. Helping Service Members transition seamlessly into meaningful employment and careers while emphasizing success in emerging industries such as green jobs.

4. Facilitating a return to work for Veterans and protecting vulnerable populations through boosting USERRA's impact by increasing awareness of and commitment to it.

5. Investing in VETS' team members and emphasizing continuous improvement to further develop their potential and better serve our clients.

IMPROVEMENTS IN CURRENT PROGRAMS

TAP

During the confirmation hearing, I promised to do an external review of the Transition Assistance Program (TAP) employment workshop and determine ways to improve it. In addition to presently reviewing TAP's performance and impact, we are also working to identify and incorporate world class content to modernize the workshop, increase its effectiveness and improve participants' employment outcomes. Specifically, we want the content to be more economically relevant, immediately applicable, and engaging for participants. Thus far, we've solicited input from external, world-class content experts and service providers to help us determine what would

be a best-practice employment transition program. We are working in close cooperation with our partners at DOD, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) in this endeavor.

Earlier this month, our three agencies engaged in a weeklong working group to develop a joint, multi-year, strategic plan for TAP. We're all committed to ensuring the plan is action-oriented and will have a direct, positive impact on our transitioning Service Members. The plan will involve an increased emphasis on the employment needs of the Reserve components and Service Members who have been wounded, ill or injured.

USERRA

VETS recently completed a Lean-Six-Sigma quality enhancement and process efficiency assessment of USERRA, with a view toward streamlining, quality improvement and increasing responsiveness to our Veteran clients. The goals of the assessment were to 1) identify ways of ensuring a consistent, high standard of investigations; and 2) determine other steps to improve the program and its outcomes. We have begun work on identifying an electronic case management system to eliminate the paper-centric aspect of investigations and improve efficiency. Access to this system will be shared with our Federal enforcement partners.

We are also working closely with the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) to ensure that the Federal Government serves as a role model for honoring USERRA.

The Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Program and Veterans' Homelessness

Secretaries Solis, Shinseki and Donovan share the vision of eliminating homelessness among Veterans within five years. We have strengthened our interagency collaboration at all levels to mobilize for this important and necessary goal. VETS' contribution to this effort will include the following:

- Continue reaching out to homeless Veterans and assisting them in becoming re-integrated into the workforce through the Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Program (HVRP). VETS requested a total of \$35,330,000 for the HVRP for FY 2010, an increase of \$9,000,000 (34%) above the FY 2009 funding level. VETS expects to serve 21,000 participants in FY 2010.
- Through the Incarcerated Veterans Transition Program (IVTP), VETS will continue its efforts to help incarcerated veterans and will coordinate these efforts with the Department of Veterans Affairs. Of the \$35 million requested for HVRP in FY 2010, VETS plans to use \$4 million for IVTP, which will serve approximately 1,500 Veterans through 12 grants.
- Of the \$9 million increase requested for the HVRP in FY 2010, we would use up to \$5 million for a major new undertaking—to provide customized employment services for homeless women Veterans and homeless Veterans with families.
- VETS is collaborating with DOL's Women's Bureau, which has already conducted over 60 listening sessions nationwide with homeless women Veterans to identify the causes and the solutions for homelessness among women Veterans. Their findings will be made available before the end of this year.
- We recently conducted a national listening session with service providers, VA, the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), and other government agencies to begin identifying the best practices for serving homeless women Veterans and homeless Veterans with families. We will continue to identify the best practices for serving this population, and disseminate them to service providers throughout the Nation.

Jobs for Veterans State Grants

The FY 2010 request for State Grants is \$172,394,000. This level of funding is expected to support 2,036 DVOP and LVER positions. We anticipate that this program will serve nearly 653,000 participants. We are also partnering with DOL's Employment and Training Administration to ensure Priority of Service for Veterans in all DOL-funded employment and training programs. Furthermore, VETS is collaborating with VA's Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (VR&E) service to provide enhanced services to VR&E participants by out-stationing DVOPs at all 57 VR&E Regional Offices.

NEW INITIATIVES

Increased Engagement with Employers in the Public and Private Sector.

There is tremendous potential and opportunity for increasing engagement with employers to increase the hiring of Veterans and Transitioning Service Members. This will involve communicating the value proposition for hiring Veterans more effectively; making the hiring process more convenient and efficient; and developing hiring partnerships.

Tremendous strides have been made in the Federal sector. For example:

1. The Executive Order (EO) titled Employment of Veterans in the Federal Government was issued by President Barack Obama on November 9. It established the Veterans Employment Initiative for the executive branch to emphasize the importance of recruiting and training Veterans, increasing the employment of Veterans within the executive branch, and helping recently hired Veterans adjust to service in a civilian capacity. The EO also established the Veterans' Employment Council, which is chaired by Secretaries Solis and Shinseki, and Vice-Chaired by OPM Director Berry.

2. VETS is also convening a roundtable with senior representatives from the Departments of Commerce, Veterans Affairs, Small Business Administration and the Minority Business Development Agency to streamline agency services; improve communications between the agencies on key Veteran hiring issues; better promote the hiring of Veterans, and overall get aligned on the issue of Veterans' employment and determine how we can work together more synergistically and strategically.

VETS is also developing new relationships with major private sector organizations to enlist their advice and support to increase Veterans hiring.

1. On November 12, Secretary Solis and VETS participated in a major outreach initiative to promote Veterans hiring sponsored by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation. In addition to serving as a keynote with Secretary Shinseki, this event was a major first step in developing a partnership with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce in this important area of shared interest.

2. VETS is also in the process of developing relationships with other important business associations, such as the Executive Leadership Council, Young Presidents' Organization-World Presidents' Organization, Business Executives for National Security (BENS), business roundtables, economic development boards and high-tech associations.

Pilot Programs

Within the Department of Labor, we are identifying opportunities to collaborate with other DOL agencies to pilot new approaches to accelerate transitioning Service Members into employment and training. For example, we're developing accelerated hiring initiatives with two of our sister agencies—the Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs and Job Corps—to meet their human talent needs with transitioning Service Members and Veterans. Such pilot programs will allow us to refine and validate an operational model and identify best practices that can then be applied more broadly to other Veteran hiring initiatives.

Targeted Populations

There are several populations of Veterans who have been under-served and require special outreach and services.

1. Native American Veterans, especially those on tribal lands, are one such population. Secretary Solis hosted a Summit of Tribal Leaders at the Department of Labor earlier this month that VETS participated in. We discussed the challenges facing Native American Veterans and potential solutions. This event began the process of better serving this community. VETS will also be participating in a number of major Native American outreach events in 2010. Furthermore, we are conducting a study on the employment needs of Native American Veterans living on tribal lands to identify best practices for serving this population.

2. Veterans who have been wounded, ill or injured are another one of our targeted populations. In response to the employment needs of these brave heroes, VETS has two special initiatives.

- a. Recovery and Employment Assistance Lifelines (REALifelines) provides one-on-one services to our wounded warriors to ease their transition into civilian employment. We have special REALifelines coordinators stationed at seven military treatment facilities on a full-time basis who provide employment services on those bases and at other nearby facilities. We also have a VETS liaison working full-time at Marine Headquarters in Quantico. This year, we established a liaison at both the Department of the Army's and the Department of the Navy's wounded warrior headquarters. These liaisons will enable seamless transition and serve as a gateway to all DOL employment and training services available to these wounded warriors.

- b. America's Heroes at Work (AHAW) is a joint initiative with DOL's Office of Disability Employment Policy. AHAW is an outreach and anti-stigma campaign that educates America's employers about the simple on-the-job accommodations and steps they can take to help Veterans with post-traumatic stress and/or Traumatic Brain Injury to excel in their careers. This program is a

strong collaboration with DOD, VA and other Federal agencies and stakeholders. AHAW has developed a series of timely educational materials to help dispel the myths associated with these conditions and highlight the value these wounded warriors still bring to civilian workplaces. The program receives outstanding feedback from both employers and participants.

Veterans' Green Energy Jobs Initiative

In July 2009, VETS awarded 17 competitive grants totaling \$7.5 million to provide training and employment services in green energy occupations to approximately 3,000 Veterans. These grants awards were made under the recently refocused VWIP program, with the goal of providing Veterans with training and other services that lead to green energy jobs. Fields of employment include energy efficiency, renewable energy, modern electric-power development and clean vehicles. This program will help Veterans overcome employment barriers and ease their transition into this growing industry.

CONCLUSION

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Burr, and Distinguished Members of the Committee on Veterans Affairs, I reaffirm my commitment to work closely with you, the outstanding team at VETS, and our partners and stakeholders to provide Veterans and transitioning Service Members the best possible services and programs. Our success will be measured by the impact our programs have on helping our Veterans find and keep good jobs in today's modern economy.

We will continue to work tirelessly and innovatively to help our Veterans and transitioning Service Members create meaningful lives, develop rewarding careers and become productive citizens and leaders in their communities.

Thank you again for your unwavering commitment to Veterans and for the support that you've been providing to us.

I appreciate the opportunity to testify before you today and look forward to answering your questions.

RESPONSE TO POST-HEARING QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY HON. DANIEL K. AKAKA TO
RAYMOND JEFFERSON, ASSISTANT SECRETARY, VETERANS' EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING
SERVICE, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR

Question 1. Do you believe the availability of 26 weeks of unemployment compensation for separating members of the military contributes to a high rate of unemployment for those who have recently separated from active duty?

Response. In today's economy, unemployment compensation is serving a particularly important role in providing a safety net for individuals who are having difficulty finding employment.

One of the reasons that Unemployment Compensation for Ex-Service Members (UCX) is available to individuals who voluntarily leave military service is because there is often very little time or opportunity to find a civilian job while performing military service. In addition, UCX provides some protection against underemployment by alleviating some of the time pressure related to obtaining employment. This helps prevent talented individuals who have been serving their country from having to take the first job they can find and instead have time to search for a truly meaningful career.

Question 2. The Transition Assistance Program, referred to as TAP, was established to meet the needs of separating servicemembers during their transition into civilian life by offering job-search assistance and related services.

Secretary Jefferson, how effective do you believe TAP is in preparing servicemembers for careers in their civilian lives and in what ways, if any, do you intend to improve this program to meet its intent?

Response. Anecdotally, we receive much positive feedback from TAP participants. However, there is room for improvement. For example, there is no baseline for TAP's effectiveness. Establishing such a baseline is a priority. We are encouraging spouses of separating Service Members to attend TAP employment workshops. Additionally, we will be transforming the content and service delivery, to ensure that the program is immediately useful, economically relevant, and engaging to participants. We will also assess whether we should increase the timeframe during which Service Members and Veterans can access the TAP employment workshop. Also, as stated in my testimony, we are working in close cooperation with our partners at the Departments of Defense (DOD), Veterans Affairs (VA), and Homeland Security (DHS) (for the U.S. Coast Guard) in improving TAP. Earlier this month, our three agencies engaged in a weeklong working group to develop a joint, multi-year, strategic plan

for TAP. We're all committed to ensuring the plan is action-oriented and will have a direct, positive impact on our transitioning Service Members. The plan will involve an increased emphasis on the employment needs of the Reserve components and Service Members who have been wounded, ill, or injured.

Question 3. Secretary Jefferson, one of our witnesses suggested that TAP workshops could be improved by focusing much more attention on the development of resumes that better reflect accomplishments and the skills learned while on active duty. Since a good resume is the first step in the job search process, what do you believe could be done to improve this aspect of the workshops?

Response. Resume writing is an important part of the job search process, and needs to be complemented by increasing skills in interviewing and network development. We will incorporate into TAP the best models for resume writing in the private and public sectors and provide participants with preparation so participants can develop concise, compelling resumes that make a positive first impression and lead to interviews.

Question 4. Secretary Jefferson, in your testimony you discuss DOL's efforts to engage employers and promote the value of hiring Veterans. Does DOL have or plan to have any efforts to coordinate with non-government agencies that provide employment services such as some of the groups on our second panel?

Response. Absolutely. One of our ongoing activities is to engage with and learn from public, private and non-profit organizations to identify best practices related to transition and Veterans' employment. One manner in which we will achieve this objective is by developing a new and effective model for engaging with employers, especially in the private sector. This model will involve reinvigorating the roles and responsibilities of our Local Veterans' Employment Representatives (LVERs), and providing them with a new outreach approach. For example, we are creating a paradigm for engaging the private sector through interaction with organizations such as local Chambers of Commerce, economic development boards, business roundtables and high-tech associations.

Question 5. It seems to me that we need to be focusing on helping Veterans find meaningful and productive careers. What will you do to prioritize this need?

Response. The need for helping Veterans find meaningful and productive careers is one that we keep foremost in our minds on a daily basis. As noted above, one manner in which we will achieve this objective is by a new and more effective model for engaging with employers, especially the private sector. This model will involve reinvigorating the roles and responsibilities of our LVERs, and providing them with a new outreach approach. For example, we are creating a paradigm for engaging the private sector through regular interaction through organizations such as the local Chambers of Commerce, economic development boards, business roundtables and high-tech associations. DOL also partners with VA's Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment service and Education service, both of which are established to equip Veterans with the education and training necessary to match their skills with careers in the private economy. DOL has refocused the Veterans' Workforce Investment Program into a Green Vets program that emphasizes preparing for and placement into Green Energy Jobs. Additionally, we will continually review our programs to determine how they can be enhanced and work to develop more innovative and effective approaches.

Question 6. Secretary Jefferson, it has been said that some of our Nation's Veterans lack adequate training or education to compete effectively in today's high tech marketplace. Are you exploring ways Veterans can upgrade their skills such as increased training and education?

Response. Ensuring that Veterans can upgrade their skills through increased training and education is of high importance to DOL and VETS. Eligible Veterans are entitled to priority service in all DOL funded employment and training programs offered through the DOL/State partnership. Another way that we can facilitate this is by raising awareness of the new GI Bill and the benefits that it offers. Other resources include Vocational Rehabilitation & Employment (VR&E) services that may be provided by VA to disabled Veterans needing training and/or assistive technology to compete in the marketplace. Additionally, we will be working to determine the best way to achieve and highlight accelerated credentialing and certification for Veterans. High-tech skills are particularly important and are often an integral part of green economy jobs. Therefore, we have refocused our \$7.5 million Veterans Workforce Investment Program, via 17 grants, to train and certify Veterans for green energy sector jobs.

Question 7. Secretary Jefferson, can you elaborate on how DOL works with service providers to ensure that homeless Veterans have the resources to find and maintain gainful employment?

Response. DOL funds over 100 Homeless Veteran Reintegration Program (HVRP) service providers and, through these programs, we provide employment training workshops. In Program Year (PY) 2010, we expect to provide training and employment services to over 21,000 homeless Veterans. This includes a program focus on incarcerated Veterans and homeless women Veterans. We also ensure that our Disabled Veterans Outreach Program specialists (DVOPs) are linked to and support our HVRP grantees. VETS also meets regularly with the Veterans Service Organizations (VSO) to discuss a variety of issues to include homelessness, and we work closely with VA and the Department of Housing and Urban Development. We also support VA Secretary Shinseki's goal of ending homelessness among Veterans in five years.

Question 8. You testified that one of your office's new initiatives will focus on partnering with the private sector. How do you plan on incentivizing those employers in the private sector to hire Veterans over their civilian counterparts? In other words, how would you ensure that recently separated servicemembers can compete on equal footing with civilians who, in some case, may have far more training and job experience?

Response. We believe that when employers are aware of the training, experience, attributes, and distinctiveness that Veterans and transitioning Service Members possess, they will be willing to hire them. Therefore, one of our priorities is to properly articulate and communicate a new, more compelling value proposition.

Additionally, we are in the process of developing a new model for employer outreach and engagement that places a particular emphasis on the private sector. A key element of this model involves having our state directors, DVOPs and LVERs engage regularly with leadership from their local Chambers of Commerce, economic development boards, business roundtables and high-tech associations. The purpose is to increase awareness and access to opportunities for Veterans and to facilitate connectivity between Veterans and these employers.

VETS is also committed to raising awareness of the Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC) incentive for hiring unemployed Veterans. The expanded WOTC incentive for hiring an unemployed veteran can be as much as \$2,400 to \$4,800 for the first year of employment depending on the category of the target group. We will be raising awareness of this program through our VETS team members nationwide, DVOPs and LVERs.

Further, VETS will also be convening a roundtable with senior representatives from the Departments Commerce and Veterans Affairs, Small Business Administration, and the Minority Business Development Agency to get aligned on the issue of Veterans' employment and determine how we can work together more synergistically and strategically.

Question 9. You mentioned that a major emphasis for your office will be identifying resources that exist in the private and public sectors and, in essence, "connecting the dots" to ensure that Veterans receive the employment assistance and services that they need. Do you have a strategy for doing this?

Response. VETS believes it is important to create a model for Veterans employment that connects supply (Veterans and transitioning Service Members) with demand (employers) and incorporates the following components: TAP transformation, marketing a new value proposition for Veteran hiring, licensing and certification, skill assessment and translation, and creating a new paradigm for employer outreach and engagement. Creating such a model will involve working in partnership with a broad array of stakeholders—especially the private sector—identifying best practices and bringing these together in a cohesive, synergistic manner. At this point in time, we are developing relationships and are in discussions with relevant stakeholders about what the construction of such a model should be. The construction is in its initial phase and we will be pleased to keep you informed as it progresses.

Question 10. At the August 25, 2009, hearing held in Oahu on returning Guard members, you suggested that VA increase its engagement with the private sector to help decrease Veteran unemployment. I would like to know what measures have been taken toward this goal thus far, and what type of progress has been seen.

Response. DOL/VETS has been working diligently to improve engagement with the private sector as detailed in the response to questions 8 and 9. For example, in Hawaii, we have connected our state team, DVOPs and LVERs, with the President of the Hawaii Chamber of Commerce, President of the Better Business Bureau, the Executive Director of the Hawaii Science and Technology Council, and other leaders in the area of employment.

Question 11. At that same August hearing you mentioned that VA should consider finding a means to provide coverage for Veterans across the Asia-Pacific region, as

there are no VA staff in more remote locations like Guam, Tinian, and Saipan. What measures are you taking to help Veterans in these and other remote areas find employment?

Response. One of our priorities is ensuring that Veterans in remote location such as Guam, Tinian, and Saipan, and in rural locations across America, receive the best possible programs and services. We are currently reviewing the issue of resource allocation within this Asia-Pacific region. Additionally, one of the ways we ensure these Veterans have the best possible service is by providing them priority of service within the DOL One-Stop Career Centers. I have signed a joint policy directive with the Assistant Secretary of the Employment and Training Administration that specifies how priority of service will be implemented. I will be checking on its implementation through field visits and site inspections as well as through reports from other VETS leaders. This will ensure that Veterans are served first and receive priority for training funds.

Question 12. One of our witnesses this morning from America Works, Inc. operates a pay-for-performance model of employment assistance. Are you familiar with this type of model and do you think any lessons learned from this type of program might be of value to the State-grant program of D-VOPS and L-VERS?

Response. We were present to hear firsthand about the operating model of America Works, Inc. One of our on-going activities is to be aware of, and learn from, different models of service delivery. We incorporate these lessons learned in discussions about assessing the merits, impact, and opportunities inherent in different delivery systems.

Question 13. The National Organization on Disability is conducting a pilot program in conjunction with the Department of the Army to provide assistance to soldiers who are seriously disabled while on active duty. It seems to me that much of what they are learning may be of value to your Real Lifeline initiative. What lessons do you think you could learn from this pilot?

Response. VETS is always looking for ideas and ways to improve the effectiveness, efficiency and long term impact of its programs. The NOD model substantiates our belief that effective transition assistance to seriously disabled Veterans requires a holistic, multi-service model. The role of VETS' REALifelines program in this model is to provide the life and career planning component. Nevertheless, there are other necessary components, such as transportation needs, child care, and payment of incidental expenses (e.g. utility bills). REALifelines plays a critical role in the recovery and reintegration of severely disabled Veterans. In addition, through a joint initiative between VETS and DOL's Office of Disability Employment Policy, entitled "America's Heroes at Work" (which specifically targets returning Service Members with PTSD/TBI injuries, VETS staff have twice met with NOD project staff to discuss areas of collaboration.

Question 14. What type of "assessment" do DVOPs and L-V ERs carry out to determine whether a Veteran or servicemember is emotionally or mentally ready to pursue employment opportunities?

Response. Our DVOPs and LVERs do not provide professional or formal assessments of a Veteran or Service Member's emotional or mental suitability for employment. Assessments of this type require a great deal of training and experience and are best restricted to licensed practitioners. Our DVOP and LVER staff is trained to recognize some of the traits and signs of PTSD and refer individuals having them to appropriate professional service providers. Of note, DOL's relationship with VA permits referral of Veterans to VA's VR&E program for specialized assessments and tailored rehabilitation services that will assist them with job readiness training leading to successful employment.

Question 15. How many Veterans were served by the Homeless Veterans Reintegration Programs in FY 2009?

Response. The program operates on the basis of a program year (July 1-June 30) and not a fiscal year (October 1-September 30). During Program Year 2008, which began July 1, 2008, and ended on June 30, 2009, HVRP served 13,735 homeless Veterans and placed 7,265 of them into employment.

RESPONSE TO POST-HEARING QUESTION SUBMITTED BY HON. PATTY MURRAY TO RAYMOND JEFFERSON, ASSISTANT SECRETARY, VETERANS' EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING SERVICE, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR

Question 1. The recent case of *Kirkendall v. Department of the Army*, which concerned Veteran's preferences in Federal employment, highlighted the challenge of making sure Veterans' preferences in Federal employment are uniformly applied. As

I understand the case, a U.S. Court of Appeals court held that the Army had violated Kirkendall's right to have his Veteran's preference considered, after years of pressing for his Veteran's preference status to be applied in a hiring evaluation.

Do you think the Federal Government or the Department of Labor has a role in making it easier for a Veteran to include his Veteran status in the Federal job application process? Does it make sense to explore an automated job application process? Does it make sense to explore an automated job application system that includes Veterans status? I understand, for instance, that an automated system is already configured and tested for DOD and endorsed by the American Legion—is the Department of Labor or other Federal agencies considering the implementation of such a system?

Response. The Federal Government already has access to an automated job applications process. The Department of Labor, as with many other Federal agencies, currently has user-friendly processes and procedures in place that make it easier for Veterans to apply for Federal positions. The automated job application system permits the Veteran to provide specific information about military service and Veterans preference acquired from that honorable service. However, improvements can be made. John Berry, Director of the Office of Personnel Management has committed to making improvements to this process and is utilizing his Chief Human Capital Officer's Council to aid in this pursuit. We do not have any information on the DOD system referenced in your question, but we will follow up with DOD to learn more.

Chairman AKAKA. Thank you very much, Mr. Secretary.

Let me ask Senator Begich for any opening remarks that he may have.

**STATEMENT OF HON. MARK BEGICH,
U.S. SENATOR FROM ALASKA**

Senator BEGICH. Mr. Chairman, not at this time. I will just get into questions. That is fine.

Chairman AKAKA. Thank you very much, Senator Begich.

Secretary Jefferson, you have many resources and tools available to you, including all the assets of the Labor Department. And, of course, the question is, what else do you need?

Secretary JEFFERSON. Yes.

Chairman AKAKA. So my question to you is what one tool do you think you are missing that would help you most?

Secretary JEFFERSON. That is a great question, Senator. Truthfully, it is one that I have reflected on. I would say not a tool that I am missing but a tool which I continue to look forward to, which is learning what other service providers in the community are doing to serve veterans. We are aware of the programs and services that we have. We are developing relationships with other service providers in government and the private sector and in the non-profit arena.

But one of the things which is very helpful to me and my team and this Committee has been very supportive of that and provided tremendous assistance is making us aware of other programs. I have recently become aware of Hire America's Heroes, which Senator Murray recently spoke about. When I look at models like that, it gives us ideas on how we can better improve our programs and share best practices.

Chairman AKAKA. President Obama recently signed an executive order to establish a Council on Veterans' Employment. Secretary of Labor Hilda Solis has been named co-chair of the new council.

What will your role and that of Veterans' Employment and Training Services be?

Secretary JEFFERSON. Well, Senator, this is something that we are very excited about—essentially mobilizing the entire Federal Government. We will be doing several things. One, we have access to the supply, roughly 150,000 transitioning servicemembers every year who come through the Transition Assistance Program and our 2,000 employment representatives and DVOPs and LVERs. So, we will be mobilizing them to make the unemployed veterans and the transitioning servicemembers aware of this new opportunity.

We are also going to be working very closely with the other departments to see which are the best practices that are emerging. We know that the Department of Homeland Security recently came up with a very good Web site that they are using; looking at all the different steps that each department is taking to make progress on and get the most impact out of this initiative and communicating those throughout the Federal Government, but also really emphasizing to make sure that the veterans and servicemembers through our staff and the staff we work with are aware of these programs and encouraging them to take advantage of this significant opportunity.

Chairman AKAKA. Over the years, Secretary, Congress has made many attempts to reinforce veterans preference laws and to provide many veteran hiring authorities to make certain that individuals who have served their country have opportunities to continue their service in a civilian capacity. However, there are those who would suggest that veterans' preference is not properly honored.

How will this new council make sure that veterans do receive the hiring preferences they have earned?

Secretary JEFFERSON. Yes. Well, Senator, veterans' preference—we will be emphasizing that as a very important complement to the veterans' hiring initiative. The veterans' preference is an important step that takes place, of course, when the veterans apply for these positions, and this council will be emphasizing veterans' preference and the application of that and ensure that it is integrated into all of the applications of veterans who are applying for these new roles. So, we will be emphasizing its importance throughout the Department and ensuring that the potential that it has to help veterans in their employment is fully realized.

Chairman AKAKA. According to OPM's latest report, DOL has more than 15,000 employees but less than 1,600—that is about 17 percent—are veterans. What plans do you have to increase those numbers?

Secretary JEFFERSON. A lot. And I just want to reiterate, Senator, that this is a top priority of Secretary Solis. We will be looking at all aspects of the hiring process to make sure that they are veteran-friendly, to make sure we will be doing more outreach into new communities, and also ensuring that we mobilize all of our top facilitators and team members throughout the Nation and also our employment representatives to make sure that they are aware of all the opportunities in all Federal agencies.

Specifically, at Labor, we will be looking and working very closely with our H.R. team to develop—through Web sites, through our outreach programs—more targeted efforts and messages that speak directly to veterans and transitioning servicemembers. This is a huge opportunity for us, and it is one we are very excited about.

Chairman AKAKA. Thank you for your responses.

Senator TESTER?

Senator TESTER. Thank you, Chairman Akaka.

Once again, welcome, Assistant Secretary Jefferson.

Let me touch on a couple things, the incarcerated veterans program that you spoke of, that is in your purview, correct?

Secretary JEFFERSON. Yes, sir.

Senator TESTER. We just had a hearing last week in a different committee, about 130,000 homeless vets and about 40,000 veterans that have come out of incarceration every year. I do not know if that figure is absolutely correct. You can probably correct me if I am wrong, but there is quite a few.

Secretary JEFFERSON. Yes, sir.

Senator TESTER. Could you explain to me what you are able to do with that program? Are you able to catch them while they are still being incarcerated or is it a program that works with the vets only after they get out? Just give me a real brief rundown on what it does and how effective it is.

Secretary JEFFERSON. Yes, sir. This is a program which used to be in existence, was not, and we are bringing it back. We are doing this in cooperation with the Department of Veterans Affairs. We think that there is a holistic approach that needs to be taken that involves the employment pieces that I will talk about but also veterans courts, which is something that the VA is making progress on.

Specifically, sir, the model essentially is going into the prisons and facilities, providing employment training there. It is not like the Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Program sites where incarcerated veterans transitioning would come and would live there full-time. But we would be going in to provide them employment training provide them access to jobs, and take in some of the TAP-type training, which we have, and providing those to the incarcerated veterans so that they can make a seamless transition.

Senator TESTER. OK. And how long—the program was reestablished when?

Secretary JEFFERSON. We are in the process right now, sir, of reestablishing that. We are going to have 12 sites and, roughly, we have funding to serve about 1,500 incarcerated veterans through those 12 sites.

Senator TESTER. I got you. OK.

Well, at some point, could you give me a rundown on where those sites are?

Secretary JEFFERSON. Yes, sir.

Senator TESTER. You do not have to do now, just give it to us for the record.

Secretary JEFFERSON. Yes, sir.

Senator TESTER. I appreciate that.

You talked about new content in the workshop for review.

Secretary JEFFERSON. Yes, sir.

Senator TESTER. Could you give me an example of what kind of new content you have?

Secretary JEFFERSON. Sir, right now, there is a tremendous emphasis on building the resume. What we have been doing over the 100 days is talking to different experts in the field of transition, in

areas relating to human development, to look at what can be brought in differently; so, more experiential training, training on how to develop one's network, training on what they call how to articulate your value proposition and, also, to have better approaches to those topics than the ones we currently have.

Senator TESTER. OK. Currently, with the Local Veterans' Employment reps, it is a half-time person for every 350 vets in the region. I think that is correct.

Secretary JEFFERSON. Well, sir, we have our LVERs and DVOPs who are serving full-time.

Senator TESTER. Yes, OK. But you have to have—the information I have got is if you have 350 vets—

Secretary JEFFERSON. Yes, sir.

Senator TESTER [continuing]. That is where you start with a half-time position. If you have more than that, I assume it goes up.

Secretary JEFFERSON. Yes, sir.

Senator TESTER. You had talked about—and we can talk about outside Indian country in a minute. But you said inside Indian country there was a tribal leader summit.

Secretary JEFFERSON. Yes, sir.

Senator TESTER. They came forth, hopefully offered you some creative ideas on how you can help them because there are some big issues out there.

I guess the question I have is how do you serve Indian country right now, Native American reservations right now? And are those leaders part of the equation? And, if so, how is that working?

Secretary JEFFERSON. Yes.

Senator TESTER. Are you bringing people from the outside in or are you hiring people from the inside? How is that working?

Secretary JEFFERSON. Sir, first let me say that we need to do a much better job with this, very candidly, and it is a huge opportunity. We have a study right now, which is talking to a lot of the tribal leaders and representatives from different Native American groups to give us an accurate present-time assessment of what we should be doing.

But right now, we are providing service through our DVOPs, through our LVERs, through our State directors and teams. I have asked my regional administrators to spend more time on the tribal lands, and we will be working with and connecting with the tribal nation leaders to develop new and more effective ways to provide that service.

Senator TESTER. OK. I think, you said it best in your very first words when you said, we have got a problem, but there is tremendous opportunity in the solution to that problem.

Secretary JEFFERSON. Yes, sir.

Senator TESTER. And I wish you the best. Anything I can help you with on with that, I would be more than happy to put you at least in contact with folks.

The Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program, from your perspective, 100 days on the job, how is it working in rural and frontier America?

Secretary JEFFERSON. Yes. Two thoughts, sir. First, we need to do a much more effective job with our outreach to employers. And that is a new model that I am developing where our DVOPs and

LVERs are connecting with the Chambers of Commerce in the local areas, the high-tech associations, and the economic develop boards in bringing them together with the veterans and transitioning servicemembers.

In terms of rural America, sir, I have some thoughts. One is partnerships. We need to broaden our capacity, and I have called a meeting together with the Corporation for National Service for the first 2 weeks of December, which now has a veterans volunteer initiative as well as Service Nation, which also have a veterans volunteer initiative. Both of these are—the first is a government agency; the second is supported by the White House—we want to talk with them about how we can leverage volunteers to assist us with greater outreach to the rural communities.

Senator TESTER. OK. I am hoping we are having a second round, and we will follow up with some more questions.

Secretary JEFFERSON. Thank you, sir.

Senator TESTER. Thank you, Mr. Secretary.

Chairman AKAKA. Thank you very much, Senator Tester.

Senator Begich?

Senator BEGICH. Thank you very much.

Secretary, thank you for your work in regards to veterans and employment. If I can expand a little bit on Senator Tester's commentary, being from Alaska, we also have a very strong rural component of our State but also of Indian country.

I was listening carefully to what you were describing to Senator Tester. What it sounds like—and I do not want to put words in your mouth and I want this viewed as positive—that there has been not an aggressive approach to reaching out to rural communities, especially American Indian country.

Is that a fair statement?

Secretary JEFFERSON. Senator, when I took office 100 years ago—

Senator BEGICH. A 100 days ago. [Laughter.]

I like the way he looks for 100 years.

Secretary JEFFERSON. It has been a lot of midnights.

Senator BEGICH. It feels like 100 years, I know.

Secretary JEFFERSON. But, Senator, I am just not satisfied.

Senator BEGICH. OK.

Secretary JEFFERSON. I realize that with the resources we have, we have to work—working harder is not going to get it. We have to work more innovatively. And I think there are just two key components. The first is the dialog we are having with the Native American veterans and tribal leaders; and also, as Senator Tester earlier alluded to, broadening that to the representatives of the rural community to find out from them what will best serve them.

Then what I am looking at is partnerships—partnerships with other government agencies and, specifically, non-profits. I think some of these new veteran volunteer initiatives can be helpful there.

Senator BEGICH. Because this is another issue I am dealing with and I know others who have Indian country are dealing it; are you familiar with the 8(a) programs?

Secretary JEFFERSON. Yes, sir.

Senator BEGICH. Do you see an opportunity that 8(a) programs could—in Alaska it is very unique because all our native village corporations and corporations have some component of 8(a)s and are in the efforts of hiring thousands of people throughout the world, literally.

Do you see that as an opening of opportunity to work with the 8(a) corporations to look at veteran hires among Indian country veterans?

Secretary JEFFERSON. Yes, sir. One of the things that we are doing right now is bringing together the Department of Commerce, Small Business Administration, VA's employment representatives, Minority Business Development Agency, and other government agencies who work in the area of commerce and also entrepreneurship, to look at how together we can work more synergistically to promote more veterans' employment but also veterans' entrepreneurship. Programs such as 8(a) can be a very valuable tool to increased hiring not just of Native American veterans but other veterans who are underrepresented in the workplace.

Senator BEGICH. Very good. One, this is more of a footnote, and we will be happy to follow this up with you. You know we have DVOPs and LVERs—a pretty good staff—within Alaska, but one of the areas that we have a gap is the Regional Technical Assistance Center. And that is, we do not have one. Our closest one is in Washington State.

I love my Senator Murray, but we would love also to be considered because of our vastness. As I describe to people, you go from Kodiak, AK, kind of in the low-mid interior area, down deeper up to the North Slope. That is like going from New York to Louisiana.

Secretary JEFFERSON. Yes.

Senator BEGICH. So, is it something if we—I am going to write you a note on this. I would like you to kind of give us some feedback. We think the Regional Technical Assistance Center is critical for how vast our State is, and we have more and more veterans living in rural Alaska and growing very rapidly.

So, is that something that you would at least consider looking at to see how that fits in?

Secretary JEFFERSON. Sir, we would love to. I welcome that suggestion and any others ideas that you have.

Senator BEGICH. Great. The other is—and I do not know if this falls in your area, but as you do employment and training, what do you do in the area—and if you do not, who does—in the area of the self-employed? I know a lot of veterans create their own business opportunities, and it is a very exciting opportunity, and in a lot of ways they are very successful.

Secretary JEFFERSON. Yes.

Senator BEGICH. There have been great success stories by self-employed veterans. What role do you play and what role do you think you could play additionally?

Secretary JEFFERSON. Well, the reason I am smiling is this is something that I am very excited about. We are working to connect Commerce Department, Small Business Administration, and Minority Business Development Administration. One of the things we are focusing on is entrepreneurship, promoting veterans' entrepreneurship. We have broadened our stakeholder outreach for the vet-

erans service organizations. We have broadened the V.O.B.A. that serves as the voice of veterans entrepreneurs.

So, this is a huge opportunity. Helping veterans and transitioning servicemembers obtain meaningful careers with large or small companies is fantastic. Equally important is emphasizing their potential and supporting them to become entrepreneurs in their own right. And as the Senator saw from retired Captain Dawn Halfaker, many of these veteran CEOs hire extraordinary numbers of veterans. In her company, around 200 to 300 employees, 85 percent, are veterans. So, we are going to be really pushing and championing veteran entrepreneurship.

Senator BEGICH. As you progress on that, I would be very interested in that as you have these joint meetings.

Secretary JEFFERSON. Yes, sir.

Senator BEGICH. Just because I think there is a lot of opportunity—

Secretary JEFFERSON. Significant.

Senator BEGICH [continuing]. In the role here in the Veterans Committee, but I also sit on the Commerce Committee. So, I would be very interested in what your thoughts are, and those initiatives.

Secretary JEFFERSON. Yes.

Senator BEGICH. Again, in Alaska, 52 percent of our employment is driven by small business, self-employed. So I would be very interested in this area.

Secretary JEFFERSON. I am just pleased to share that the Deputy Secretary of Commerce, Dennis Hightower, also a Vietnam veteran, is a partner with us in this. We have already been working together seamlessly, and we are also connecting with the Innovation and Entrepreneurship Council at the Commerce Department on this.

Senator BEGICH. Very good. Thank you very much. I will see you in your next hundred years.

[Laughter.]

Secretary JEFFERSON. All right. Hopefully, I will be just as energetic. All right, sir.

Chairman AKAKA. Thank you, Senator Begich.

And now we will have questions from Senator Murray.

Senator MURRAY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Secretary Jefferson, I have held a lot of roundtables around my State talking to both veterans and employers about this issue of jobs and creating jobs and the obstacles that they face. One of them that I hear constantly is how do we match a veteran's skills and their experience with the needs of potential employers.

I know that as our veterans move through their military careers, they gain a lot of really important skills, especially for a lot of these mid-level jobs that are available that the employers are interested in. But when a veteran tries to present their skills on a piece of paper, on a resume, the transferability of those skills is often lost in translation by the time the resume sits in a stack with a whole lot of others in front of an employer.

Secretary JEFFERSON. Yes.

Senator MURRAY. And I wanted to ask you how you were working with our veterans to help them better translate the skills and

experience they have into something that they can put on a resume.

Secretary JEFFERSON. Yes, Senator, what you shared is one of the potentially greatest opportunities before us. We are going to be doing two demonstration projects with the Employment Training Administration to look at how we can do accelerated credentialing and certifications, and a component of that will be the translation.

Truthfully, what I realize is between the supply—the unemployed veterans and transitioning servicemembers—and the demand—the companies, government, non-profit, public sector that want veterans—there are a lot of programs and Web sites out there that deal with translation, but it is almost confusing. I have gotten this feedback from veterans service organizations and from the veterans themselves.

The huge opportunity is for us to develop a way to bring order and some organization to the many efforts to do military skills translation into the civilian job needs. So, we are working on that. I do not have the answer, but I know that is one of the top questions and a significant opportunity.

Senator MURRAY. OK. It is not in just how the veterans put it on the paper. It is how an employer reads that resume.

Secretary JEFFERSON. Yes.

Senator MURRAY. Are we working with employers on that?

Secretary JEFFERSON. Senator, we want to connect with the Society for Human Resource Management to work with the human resource departments, and we will be talking about this in our meeting with the Chamber of Commerce in early 2010 because you are exactly right.

There is an educational element in the human resource departments for them to be able to interpret, translate, match, and allocate the human talent of the veterans. But we also want to start on the front end to make sure that veterans make it easy for the private sector employers and other employers to know how to best leverage their military skills and training.

Senator MURRAY. OK. Do you have any recommendations how we can improve TAP to help our servicemembers?

Secretary JEFFERSON. Significantly. First of all, the content is a huge thing. TAP really has not been transformed or really improved since 1992, so we have a program which is roughly 17 years old. One of the things is to look at the different topics: how do you articulate your value proposition; how do you develop a customer service mindset; what are the nuances of succeeding in a civilian environment versus a military; and then bringing in the latest best practices and thinking. We are talking to different leaders in the areas to find out what is the latest thinking, and then presenting it in a way in which is engaging so veterans not only learn and find immediately applicable content, but they enjoy the experience and they become a champion and a spokesman to encourage other veterans.

So, we are working on that very hard, and I expect that we will have information that we can share in early 2010.

Senator MURRAY. OK. Great. I look forward to that.

The other part of the equation is our educational institutions. We have a program in my home State—the University of Washington

runs a physician assistant training program. It is called MEDEX. It is focused on training people with prior health experience who want to get into a new profession in health as a physician assistant. And as part of the program application, veterans with military medical training and experience get basic credit toward that PA training.

It is having great results for the students, the veterans, the university, as well as all those communities that those trained people then go into, especially in our rural areas. And I think it is a great example of how we can match a veteran's experience with one of the real growing needs for our country.

So I wanted to ask you, first of all, if you are aware of the program, but second, what we are doing with educational institutions to accept those kinds of—

Secretary JEFFERSON. Right. I was not aware of that program, but my special assistant in the back is taking copious notes and we will be looking into it after this.

Senator MURRAY. OK.

Secretary JEFFERSON. But two things, Senator. The first is working very closely with VA, raising awareness of the new GI Bill as we work with our folks in TAP and also unemployed veterans, for those who would qualify, making sure they are aware of it.

But the other part is this, learning from those folks who have the need. We have broadened our veterans service organization outreach. We have developed a relationship with the Student Veterans of America. This is probably at this point one of the premier, if not the premier, veterans service organizations serving the transitioning servicemembers who are on the campuses. We are working very closely with them. We have had several meetings to find out how we mobilize our resources to support exactly what you are talking about, the veterans who are coming back and who are on the campuses right now.

Senator MURRAY. Because one of the things I hear from veterans a lot is they do not get credit at educational institutions for a lot of the work and experience they have.

Secretary JEFFERSON. Yes.

Senator MURRAY. Mr. Chairman, thank you very much. I appreciate the opportunity.

Chairman AKAKA. Thank you very much, Senator Murray.

We will do a second round of questions here.

Secretary Jefferson, I know that the Department submitted comments in writing on S. 1607—

Secretary JEFFERSON. Yes.

Chairman AKAKA [continuing]. The proposed Wounded Veterans Job Security Act of 2009.

For the benefit of those who may not have had the opportunity to review those comments, could you briefly summarize the Department's view on that measure?

Secretary JEFFERSON. Yes, Senator. Senator, we want to make sure that the overall purpose of the bill, which is ensuring that servicemembers who are now working as employees, who have a service-connected disability, do not need to choose between work and risking losing their jobs by taking time off from work. We want to ensure that they are not in that situation.

At the same time, we feel that the current state of the legislation could have a chilling effect, that it could reduce employer's likelihood of hiring veterans and maybe choose a non-veteran so they do not have to worry about losing that person for a portion of time.

Both of these, ensuring that employers do not have reduced veterans hiring and also protecting our veterans and ensuring that they can get the medical attention they need while they are working, are very important priorities. What we would like to do is to work with the bill's sponsors on crafting the legislation so that both of these important goals can be accomplished.

Chairman AKAKA. Secretary Jefferson, do you see any merit in making TAP participation mandatory across the service branches?

Secretary JEFFERSON. Yes. Well, Senator, I know that is a question that we have discussed in the past. I do need to say that we honor and respect the Department of Defense's role in that decision to determine if it is mandatory or not. And the area that we want to focus on is improving the employment outcomes for those participants but also making it a more engaging program.

One of the ways—when you have a program which is voluntary for all the services besides the Marine Corps, to increase participation is when the word in the servicemember community is that this is an outstanding program.

Chairman AKAKA. Secretary Jefferson, in your testimony, you discussed DOL's efforts to engage employers and promote the value of hiring veterans.

Secretary JEFFERSON. Yes.

Chairman AKAKA. Does DOL have or plan to have any efforts to coordinate with non-government agencies that provide employment services such as some of the groups on our second panel?

Secretary JEFFERSON. Yes. Senator, we are always interested to meet service providers, especially in the area of employment, to look at ways that we can partner to increase capacity, provide stronger outreach, or to share ideas which can result in more best practices.

Chairman AKAKA. It seems that we need to be focusing on helping veterans find meaningful and productive careers.

Secretary JEFFERSON. Yes.

Chairman AKAKA. What will you do to prioritize this need?

Secretary JEFFERSON. Sure. Well, Senator, several things. One is the outreach that we are doing with employers. So, with the private sector outreach, working with the business associations, making sure that they are aware of the value proposition of hiring veterans and looking to develop targeted partnerships so we can have accelerated hiring of veterans. Second, also raising awareness of and emphasizing the Federal Government's hiring initiative. Third, there is the work opportunity tax credit, also known as WOTC, which provides tax incentives for hiring veterans. We want to work with our stakeholders to raise awareness of this among employers.

Then, the fourth is making sure that there are no veterans lost. We have the America's Heroes at Work program for the returning warriors who have PTSD/TBI. We also have the REALifelines for those who have had severe injuries. So, we are making sure that we capture and serve all and really emphasize the outreach compo-

ment. The employers have the jobs; we want to connect them with the veterans and servicemembers.

Chairman AKAKA. Thank you very much.

Senator Murray, do you have—

Senator MURRAY. I will pass on the second round.

Chairman AKAKA. Senator Tester?

Senator TESTER. Thank you, Chairman Akaka.

Just very quickly, as you could tell by my first round of questions, I have got concerns about rural and frontier areas where veterans live—

Secretary JEFFERSON. Yes, sir.

Senator TESTER [continuing]. Whether it is with the Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Program, whether it is with the Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program, LVERs and others.

I mean, 100 days is not very long, a little over 3 months.

Secretary JEFFERSON. Yes, sir.

Senator TESTER. Have you really had a chance to sit down and evaluate how these programs are working in rural/frontier America? All of Montana is rural. We have got towns of 100,000 that I think is a big city, from my perspective.

Secretary JEFFERSON. Yes.

Senator TESTER. We have got towns, a lot of towns, of 700, 300, 150 and so on.

Secretary JEFFERSON. Yes.

Senator TESTER. Have you had a chance to take a look and see how these programs are working in those areas?

Secretary JEFFERSON. Sir, yes—

Senator TESTER. Because 100 days ain't a lot.

Secretary JEFFERSON. Sir, I have asked for several things. First, shortly after being confirmed, I directed my staff to connect with VA to see what they are doing, how can we partner, what best practices they have. They have a rural initiative, I understand. We have learned that it focuses on health, but we are working to see what can we do to either share resources, to increase our outreach, to bring more employment; is there any way that we can partner there. So, recognizing that Veterans Affairs has tremendous resources, that is one.

Second, through my regional administrators, I have gotten feedback from them and ideas on how we can better serve the rural communities. And then third, specifically, going deep with the Native American veterans and the tribal leaders on that.

The area that I think—the potential here is through partnerships. The question I have asked myself is how do we serve veterans who are geographically disbursed over broad areas, and I think two things. One is this new idea I wanted to explore, which is working with Service Nation and the Corporation for National Service through their veterans initiative to see if we can get some real capacity and assistance there. I think that could really be an opportunity.

The second, sir, is leveraging technology. For those who have Internet access, looking at how we can do more with technology. Very candidly, I am not satisfied yet. This is a priority, and I recognize that we need to come up with more innovative ways and also leverage partnerships.

Senator TESTER. I am not going to put you on the spot on the example that I had in my opening, at the very end of it, about the veteran that comes back. I think that situation is real, and I think it happens a lot. But the whole line of question indicates—it really does indicate to me that I really need to get you to places like Montana, Alaska, Eastern Washington, wherever—

Secretary JEFFERSON. Yes.

Senator TESTER [continuing]. So we can see if that infrastructure that you are talking about is even there to be able to partner with.

Secretary JEFFERSON. Yes.

Senator TESTER. And then if it is not there, what do we do.

Secretary JEFFERSON. Sir, if your schedule will allow it, I would be honored to come after having these meetings at the end of this year, to explore these possible partnerships, maybe to connect with you and some of the other Senators to talk about ways that we can—and obtain insights from yourselves and your staff, show you what we have been developing and really develop something which will work or at least some pilot programs.

Senator TESTER. I appreciate that. I appreciate your service very much.

Secretary JEFFERSON. All right, sir. Thank you, sir.

Chairman AKAKA. Thank you.

Senator BEGICH. Mr. Chairman, just a quick additional question.

And thank you, Secretary, for that offer. I think all of us, at least this table, would probably take up that offer. I think that is a great offer, an opportunity for us to really hone in on what we can do in rural and frontier America, and make sure we have the programs that are meeting the needs of our veterans, but especially veterans living on Indian country. So, thank you for that willingness.

Secretary JEFFERSON. Yes, sir.

Senator BEGICH. This is more of a question, and I do not know if there is a real solid answer that you can give at this point. But as I was looking at some of the data points, the one that stuck out to me was veterans' unemployment rate. When you look at October 1980 compared to October 1990, you go from about 4.9 to 11.9. The rate just skyrockets.

Can you give me some commentary on why you think that occurred in that one specific group in a pretty significant way?

Secretary JEFFERSON. Well, I think there are four reasons why we have the high veterans' unemployment rate, especially for the veterans ages 20 to 24.

Senator BEGICH. And especially in the women category.

Secretary JEFFERSON. Yes, sir. So actually, with regards to the women, I would like to provide more details for the record, if I could.

Senator BEGICH. Sure.

Secretary JEFFERSON. But some general reasons why we see this spike. One is with the increased service overseas, many veterans when they come back, they have been in a very stressful situation, so they are just taking some time off to transition. They have access to unemployment insurance, so they are using that unemployment insurance to live off of. Some of them have decided to go for the new GI Bill, so they are not working and they are waiting to

enter school. So, those are three of the sources from our feedback and assessments as to why we are seeing that rate.

Senator BEGICH. Very good. And if you could then, for the record, I appreciate that, with regards to the women and the change, that would be great.

Secretary JEFFERSON. Yes, sir.

Senator BEGICH. Thank you very much.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman AKAKA. Thank you very much, Senator Begich.

I want to thank the first panelist and witness, Mr. Secretary, for your responses. It will be helpful. We want to continue to work closely with you and really move the employment for our veterans throughout the country.

Secretary JEFFERSON. Well, Senator, if I can just say in closing, we take this very seriously. And there are some things that we are making progress on and we feel good about that, but there are some other opportunities. We are only going to address these challenges in partnership with your support and with your insights. And I just want to acknowledge many members of my team who are here today, many members of the veterans service organizations who are an invaluable source of insight, and the other stakeholders. So thank you so much, and we will look forward to the next opportunity to brief you.

Chairman AKAKA. Thank you for your closing statement, and I wish you well.

Secretary JEFFERSON. Thank you, sir. Aloha.

Chairman AKAKA. Aloha.

Now, I want to welcome our second panel to the desk.

Our first witness is Lutz Ziob, general manager for Microsoft. The next witness on the panel is Captain Peter "Bull Frog" Wikul, USN retired, America Works of New York, Incorporated. Next we have Joshua Lawton-Belous, an OIF veteran and business analyst at Oracle Corporation. We also have Dexter Daniel, a Vietnam veteran and now a senior event coordinator for Marriott. Our final witness on the second panel is Helen Tymes, a career specialist at the National Organization on Disability.

I thank you all for being here this morning. Your full testimony will, of course, appear in the record.

Mr. Ziob, will you please present your testimony first?

**STATEMENT OF LUTZ ZIOB, GENERAL MANAGER,
MICROSOFT LEARNING, MICROSOFT, INC.**

Mr. ZIOB. Thank you. Good morning, Chairman Akaka, Senator Murray, Senators. I really appreciate the opportunity to appear here today and discuss matters related to the employment and training issues 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 what we call 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.

In the 21st century, occupations are evolving faster than ever before, largely driven by the rapid pace of technology innovation. Information technology has become so pervasive in the working world that almost every job requires some level of IT skills. This transformation gives birth to totally new job categories like a cyber forensic specialist. But it also affects traditional non-IT-related jobs, for example, in manufacturing, construction, hospitality, or even health care.

Veterans returning to civilian employment will encounter a new world of work whether they find ways into IT jobs or not. They will be expected to communicate via e-mail and instant messaging; participate and run virtual meetings; collaborate on projects with team members who rarely meet face-to-face, if at all; find and analyze data online and demonstrate an aptitude for adapting constantly to changing circumstances.

How we prepare citizens for jobs is rapidly evolving as well. Education itself has changed and veterans will have to become 21st century learners. The new world of learning mirrors the new world of working. Both worlds heavily rely on the use of information technology. Information technology has consequently grown to be the fourth foundational knowledge domain joining our traditional three Rs of education.

Industry and defense have enjoyed a longstanding history of sharing talent. Investment in training and education have created a few bridges for soldiers to move successfully from civilian to Armed Services responsibilities and vice versa. However, evolving job responsibilities and requirements and changing hiring expectations make more formalized approaches to creating these bridges necessary.

We need bridges that support accountability and measurability in addition to establishing standards of excellence in training and development. Amongst U.S. businesses, the most widely accepted proof of employee's technical skills are industry certifications, especially for job seekers without the relevant work experience. Military organizations have also learned to recognize the value of certifications for their workforce needs in addition to formal degrees or proven work experience. For example, Directive 8570 from the U.S. Department of Defense itself provides for specific job roles, funding for industry credentials that meet quality standards under the ANSI 17024 accreditation.

Members of the Armed Forces are taught early in their training to rely on experience and mentorship of those cohorts to achieve professional excellence. We at Microsoft have witnessed the powerful impact of mentoring veterans first-hand through a joint project with veterans at the Walter Reed Army Medical Center.

Working with soldiers on medical hold recovering from injuries, volunteers from our Microsoft Certified Trainer community mentored soldiers as they studied for their Microsoft certification examinations. Soldiers were matched with experienced trainers whose areas of expertise matched the veterans' areas of study, thus helping the learner soldier to benefit from the mentor's real-world experience and professional background.

Motivated by the community support, the majority of veterans went to tackle the exams successfully. Mentoring and coaching, hence, are proven ways for established IT workers to give back to the local communities and service communities. I call it a form of professional citizenship. Creating mentoring relationships and internships are critically important, especially for younger veterans who lack the hands-on experience.

Another important consideration for current returning veterans is the economic stability of their families. Service-disabled veterans face the challenge of coping with their injuries in addition to the challenge of changing employment. The recent reports of veterans' families receiving food stamps while they are on deployment 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 for months for extended veterans benefits, retraining benefits should be accessible to servicemembers before they exit military hospital facilities.

The recent economic events have strained the capacity of career education programs at community and technical colleges at a time when student demand is, in fact, rising. Meanwhile, unused teaching capacity exists among high-quality private education providers faced with reduced demand from their existing commercial customer base. These training institutions have certified trainers, well-equipped classrooms and access to state-of-the-art information technology. Providing veterans training and certification benefits through these private training organizations in partnership with other workforce readiness stakeholders is worthy of serious consideration by policymakers.

Affordable access to modern information technology for teaching and learning purpose is of the utmost importance. Programs like the Microsoft IT Academy or Cisco Networking Academy program ensure that community colleges, technical colleges, and other schools have access to the latest technology and curriculum. Additionally, we can quickly expand the capacity for teaching and learning by tapping into the rich system of online courses, virtual classrooms, and online hands on apps.

In conclusion, there is clear evidence that all jobs that veterans are likely to return to in the U.S. market will increasingly be technology rich. Whether these new jobs are in clean or green industries, health care or manufacturing, hospitality or financial services, they all require a certain level of information technology and productivity skills if workers are to compete successfully.

Job-seeking veterans also need improved access to the most current technology instruction combined with hands-on exposure to this technology plus real-world experience, for example, in the form of mentoring, industry internships and career guidance. To effectively reach a larger group of returning veterans, we clearly have to make better use of modern technology.

We strongly advocate a truly cooperative tripartite approach, especially in times of economic crisis. Public and private sectors need to work hand-in-hand with all branches of our Armed Services to provide real-world training and highly valued credentials that will lead to promising and well-paying careers. We applaud the new GI

Bill which recognizes the role of private training providers and expanding the availability of industry-supported instructions and certifications.

We look forward to working with this Committee, other Members of Congress, veterans service organizations, and key Federal Government departments to provide our returning servicemembers the skills and qualifications that will help them to secure family wage jobs of the future.

This concludes my statement, and I am looking forward to answering questions later on.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Ziob follows:]

WRITTEN TESTIMONY OF LUTZ ZIOB, GENERAL MANAGER, MICROSOFT LEARNING,
MICROSOFT CORPORATION

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 servicemembers. 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 servicemembers 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 benefiting 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 policymakers. 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 servicemembers. 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 of-

ferings “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-servicemembers (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 benefiting 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 policymakers, 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 life-long 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 Web site 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 servicemembers 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 servicemembers 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.

Chairman AKAKA. Thank you very much, Mr. Ziob.

And now we have the statement and testimony of Captain Wikul.

STATEMENT OF CAPTAIN PETER "BULL FROG" WIKUL, U.S. NAVY (RET.), DIRECTOR, AMERICA WORKS OF NEW YORK, INC.

Captain WIKUL. Chairman Akaka, Aloha. Ranking Member Burr, distinguished members of the U.S. Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs, Good morning.

Chairman AKAKA. Good morning.

Captain WIKUL. On behalf of America Works of New York, Inc., Chief Executive Officer Dr. Lee Bowes and, founder, Mr. Peter Cove, I would like to express our gratitude for the opportunity to be here today to address the U.S. Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs about our veterans' employment programs.

My name is Captain Pete Wikul. I served 39 years and 4 months in the U.S. Navy, 38 years as a Navy SEAL. I was known as the Bull Frog, which is a title used to refer to the longest serving U.S. Navy SEAL on active duty. I recently retired on October 1. In 1988, I was honored to share the Nobel Peace Prize as one of the few U.S. Naval officers assigned to the United Nations military observer group in Lebanon. I am here today as Director for America Works veterans programs.

America Works is a private, for-profit, performance-based workforce development firm that has placed hard-to-serve populations in employment since 1984. We get people jobs. We are right down in the trenches. We have helped low-income individuals and public assistance recipients across a broad demographic spectrum become self-sufficient by obtaining and retaining jobs—not just getting them but keeping them—or improving on their career positions. We work with Americans who are on public assistance, receiving food stamps, the formerly incarcerated, youths aging out of foster care, the homeless and sheltered, non-custodial parents, people living with HIV/AIDS and veterans of the U.S. Armed Forces.

America Works was the pioneer company whose work led to the 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act, moving national welfare programs from subsistence to back-to-work programs. To date, America Works has placed over 175,000 hard-to-serve individuals into jobs in cities across the United States. That is 175,000 jobs in 25 years. That is a very good metric.

We currently have offices throughout New York State, New Jersey, Maryland, and California, and soon in North Carolina and Pennsylvania, and now I am an office of one in Washington, D.C.

Why veterans? Over the last few years, America Works has seen a growing number of veterans coming into our offices seeking employment. These veterans come to us through our homeless programs, food stamp programs, welfare programs and frequently through our ex-offender programs.

Concerned about our country's heroes rapidly sinking into the depths of poverty, we began researching what services were available for veterans. We found that while the Department of Veterans Affairs states that nearly 200,000 servicemembers separate from the military each year, and right now another 200,000 veterans are incarcerated, there are few to no direct employment service provided to veterans by either the Department of Veteran Affairs or by the Department of Defense.

At a time when our national unemployment rate tops 10.2 percent and the national poverty rate grows every day, we need to pro-

vide better enhanced services to the men and women who risk their lives for our country. In order to do this, America Works has begun leveraging funds from other national-scale programs to provide services to some of the veterans in most need, but still significantly more needs to be done.

The types of veterans we serve. Currently, we serve veterans through several different programs. We actively serve veterans receiving public assistance, food stamps, veterans who have HIV/AIDS, veterans receiving SSI and SSDI benefits, formerly incarcerated veterans, veterans who are non-custodial parents, and homeless and sheltered veterans who participate in our Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Program, the HRVP.

While it seems we are serving many veterans through our numerous programs, we lack the funding to provide preventative direct employment services so that veterans do not have to become homeless or receive welfare or steal for their food to be in our programs. It is too much of a tragedy to allow these veterans to languish on poverty after they have given everything they could for our country to not provide them better services.

Our model. So what is the answer? How do we provide appropriate, effective and timely services for veterans from transition onwards? The answer is work-first programs that provide direct, rapid attachment to the workforce. These are not programs that provide training for a job that does not exist, and these are not programs that refer veterans to Web sites where they can virtually apply to jobs for which they will not receive a call back. These are programs that directly link the veteran—the man or woman, who has served and protected us—to a real, live job that exists in the job market right now. We get them interviews so they can get on the job immediately.

To ensure performance, the government only pays these programs after the veteran is actively working on the job. There is no room for error in this model because if you cannot get people jobs, you simply lose the program. These programs do not make money until the veteran, him or herself, is making money. These concepts have been the bedrock upon which America Works has been built. This bedrock has led to over 175,000 individuals obtaining and retaining employment across the United States.

What we have learned. Through our work with these amazing servicemen and women, we have learned many lessons that should be taken to heart. First, our Nation's veterans want to work. Our veterans will certainly experience difficulties and hardships, but they want to work and continue to be the breadwinner for themselves and their families.

In the first 9 months of 2009, we have placed over 180 veterans in employment in New York City with an average hourly salary of approximately \$10. That is above the minimum wage, so that is good. And we did the majority of this without even having a direct veteran funded program.

Second, there is an exigent need for direct employment services for veterans. While veterans are motivated, many cannot find employers and they will struggle with barriers that will prevent them from successfully obtaining and retaining employment on their own.

Performance-based contracted services are needed to effectively provide job placement service to veterans today. Our veterans are fighting with over 20 million other unemployed Americans for a limited amount of jobs, and they deserve a leg up in the competition.

Third, companies are not only willing to hire veterans but actively seek out veterans to employ. The problem is one of time and resources. Companies need to fill positions quickly, and they do not have the resources to advertise at length for veteran-only employment opportunities. Through a service like ours, companies can call us up and ask us to fill jobs with veterans that same day, and that is how we get them interviews.

Finally, the VA alone should not be the only champion in this fight to implement employment programs of the breadth and scale necessary for today's veteran population. We believe that through strategic partnerships, the Department of Defense, the Department of Veteran Affairs, and private contractors can provide performance-based transition programs and assist in programs to current veterans nationwide.

Our recommendations. We have four, and I will finish this up quickly. We recommend the following steps to be taken immediately to help our veterans from today onwards.

One, we need to design and provide specific direct-service employment programs to aid in transitioning today's military into successfully employing veterans. This service should be offered from transition onwards and would work in collaboration with current services, including the Transition Assistance Program and vocational rehabilitation. These programs will be pay-for-performance to ensure that our servicemen and women obtain and retain civilian employment.

Two, in light of the number of wounded warriors returning from our 21st century conflicts, we need to provide these direct employment services to spouses and dependents of veterans. A wounded warrior needs his family to heal, but he or she also needs income to provide stability. We propose to offer these employment programs for the spouses and dependents of wounded warriors nationwide. This can begin by working with families who are staying at Fisher Houses as well as wounded warriors beginning the healing process. Jobs will be found to accommodate caring for the wounded warrior while also providing economic stability.

Three, the U.S. Department of Labor has designed specialized employment programs for veterans, and these need to be expanded. In particular, the Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Program has provided much needed help to homeless veterans nationwide. This program should be expanded to help thousands of other homeless veterans. Programs for incarcerated veterans should also be provided nationwide to address the particular needs of incarcerated veterans.

Finally, let us show you an America Works veterans' employment program. In D.C. today, there are over 30,000 veterans and an unemployment rate of 11.4 percent. Allow America Works to provide a direct employment program here in Washington, DC, to some of the unemployed veterans and show you that our model works. With \$1 million in funding, we can place and retain at least 200 veterans

in permanent employment. We could bring you 200 success stories on this day next year, and I will have it done before then.

As a veteran and brother in arms with the men and women I have met in America Works programs, I ask you today to make a real change for veterans and their families nationwide. Our servicemen and servicewomen have served us, and it is now our responsibility to serve them.

One final thing. On the way over here to testify, I was walking across from Union Station, and I saw the homeless sleeping out on the benches. And I stopped to one of them, and he was wearing a fatigue jacket with 101st Airborne symbol. So I asked him. I said, "Are you a veteran?" And he looked at me, and he said, "Yes, sir." And so I stopped to talk to him, and I said, "Are you homeless?" He said, "Yes, sir." "Do you have a job?" "No, sir."

So we chatted a little bit, and I took out my wallet and I gave him a 20-dollar-bill. And I said, "I would like you to have a nice lunch, God bless you," and I walked away.

This needs to be fixed, and I aim to help fix it.

Chairman Akaka, Ranking Member Burr, and Distinguished Members of the U.S. Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs, thank you very much for your time.

[The prepared statement of Captain Wikul follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF RETIRED CAPTAIN PETER "BULL FROG" WIKUL,
DIRECTOR, AMERICA WORKS OF NEW YORK, INC.

Chairman Akaka, Ranking Member Burr, and Distinguished Members of the U.S. Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs, good morning.

On behalf of America Works of New York, Inc. Chief Executive Officer Dr. Lee Bowes and Founder Mr. Peter Cove, I would like to express our gratitude for the opportunity to be here today to address the U.S. Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs about our Veterans Employment Programs.

My name is Captain Pete Wikul. I served thirty nine years in the United States Navy. I was known as the "Bullfrog" which is a title used to refer to the longest serving US Navy SEAL on active duty. I recently retired on October 1st. In 1988 I was honored to share the Nobel Peace Prize as one of the few US Naval Officers assigned as a United Nations Military Observer in Lebanon. I am here today as Director for America Works Veterans' Programs.

WHO WE ARE

America Works is a private, for-profit performance-based workforce development firm that has places hard-to-serve populations in employment since 1984. We have helped low-income individuals and public assistance recipients across a broad demographic spectrum become self-sufficient by obtaining and retaining jobs, or improving their career positions. We work with Americans who are on public assistance, receiving food stamps, the formerly incarcerated, youths aging out of foster care, the homeless and sheltered, non-custodial parents, people living with HIV/AIDS and Veterans of the United States Armed Forces.

America Works was the pioneer company whose work led to the 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act, moving national welfare programs from subsistence to back-to-work programs.

To date, America Works has placed over 175,000 hard-to-serve individuals into jobs in cities across the United States. We currently have offices throughout New York State, New Jersey, Maryland, and California, and soon in North Carolina and Pennsylvania.

WHY VETERANS

Over the last few years America Works has seen a growing number of Veterans coming into our offices seeking employment. These Veterans came to us through our homeless programs, food stamps programs, welfare programs, and frequently through our ex-offender programs. Concerned about our country's heroes rapidly sinking into the depths of poverty, we began researching what services were avail-

able for Veterans. We found that while the Department of Veterans Affairs states that “nearly 200,000 servicemembers separate from the military each year” and that right now another 200,000 Veterans are incarcerated, there are few to no direct employment services provided to Veterans by either the Department of Veteran Affairs or by the Department of Defense. In a time when our national unemployment rate tops 10.2% and the national poverty rate grows every day, we need to provide better, enhanced services to the men and women who risk their lives for our country. In order to do this, America Works has begun leveraging funds from other national scale programs to provide services to some of the Veterans in most need, but still, significantly more needs to be done.

TYPES OF VETERANS WE SERVE

Currently, we serve Veterans through several different programs. We actively serve Veterans receiving:

1. Public Assistance
2. Food Stamps
3. Veterans who have HIV / AIDS
4. Veterans receiving SSI and SSDI Benefits
5. Formerly Incarcerated Veterans
6. Veterans who are Non-custodial parents
7. Homeless and Sheltered Veterans who participate in our Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Program (HVRP)

While it seems we are serving many Veterans through our numerous programs, we lack the funding to provide preventive, direct employment services so that Veterans do not have to become homeless or receive welfare or steal for their food to be in our programs. It is too much of a tragedy to allow these Veterans to languish in poverty after they have given everything they could for their country to not provide them better services.

OUR MODEL

So what is the answer? How do we provide appropriate, effective, and timely services for Veterans from transition onwards? The answer is work-first programming; programs that provide direct, rapid attachment to the workforce. These are not programs that provide training for a job that doesn't exist and, these are not programs that refer Veterans to Web sites where they can virtually apply to jobs for which they will not receive a call back. These are programs that directly link the Veteran, the man or woman who served and protected us, to a real live job that exists in the job market right now. To ensure performance, the government only pays these programs after the Veteran is actively working on the job. There is no room for error in this model because if you can't get people jobs, you simply lose the program. These programs don't make money until the Veteran, him or herself, is making money. These concepts have been the bedrock upon which America Works has been built. This bedrock has led to over 175,000 individuals obtaining and retaining employment across the United States.

WHAT WE HAVE LEARNED

Through our work with these amazing servicemen and women, we have learned many lessons that should be taken to heart. First, our Nation's Veterans want to work. Our Veterans will certainly experience difficulties and hardships, but they want to work and continue to be the breadwinner for themselves and their families. In the first nine months of 2009, we have placed over 180 Veterans in employment in New York City with an average hourly salary of approximately \$10.00. And we did the majority of this without even having a direct Veteran funded program.

Second, there is an exigent need for direct employment services for Veterans. While Veterans are motivated, many cannot find employers and they will struggle with barriers that will prevent them from successfully obtaining and retaining employment on their own. Performance-based contracted services are needed to effectively provide job placement services to Veterans today. Our Veterans are fighting with over 20 million other unemployed Americans for a limited amount of jobs and they deserve a leg up in the competition.

Third, companies are not only willing to hire Veterans but actively seek out Veterans to employ. The problem is one of time and resources. Companies need to fill positions quickly and they don't have the resources to advertise at length for Veteran-only employment opportunities. Through a service like ours, companies can call us up and ask us to fill jobs with Veterans that same day.

Finally, the VA alone should not be the only champion in this fight to implement employment programs of the breadth and scale necessary for today's Veteran population. We believe that through strategic partnerships, the Department of Defense, the Department of Veteran Affairs and private contractors can provide performance-based transition programs and assistance programs to current Veterans nationwide.

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

We recommend the following steps be taken immediately to help our Veterans from today onwards:

1. We need to design and provide specific, direct service employment programs to aide in transitioning today's military into successfully employed Veterans. This service should be offered from transition onwards, and would work in collaboration with current services, including the Transition Assistance Program and Vocational Rehabilitation. These programs will be pay-for-performance to ensure that our service men and women obtain and retain civilian employment.

2. In light of the number of wounded warriors returning from our 21st century conflicts, we also need to provide these direct employment services to spouses and dependents of Veterans. A wounded warrior needs his family to heal, but he or she also needs income to provide stability. We propose to offer these employment programs for the spouses and dependents of wounded warriors nationwide. This can begin by working with families who are staying at Fisher Houses as their wounded warriors begin the healing process. Jobs will be found to accommodate caring for the wounded warrior while also providing economic stability.

3. The United State Department of Labor has designed specialized employment programs for Veterans, and these need to be expanded. In particular, the Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Program has provided much needed help to homeless Veterans nationwide. This program should be expanded to help thousands of other homeless Veterans. Programs for incarcerated Veterans should also be provided nationwide to address the particular needs of incarcerated Veterans.

4. Finally, let us show you an America Works Veterans Employment Program. In DC today, there are over 30,000 Veterans, and an unemployment rate of 11.4%. Allow America Works to provide a direct employment program here in DC to some of the unemployed Veterans to show you that our model works. With \$1 million in funding, we can place and retain at least 200 Veterans in permanent employment. We can then bring you 200 success stories on this day next year.

As a Veteran and brother in arms with the men and women I've met at the America Works programs, I ask you today to make a real change for Veterans and their families nationwide. Our servicemen and women have served us; it is now our responsibility to serve them.

Chairman Akaka, Ranking Member Burr, and distinguished members of the U.S. Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs, thank you for your time.

RESPONSE TO POST-HEARING QUESTION SUBMITTED BY HON. DANIEL K. AKAKA TO RETIRED CAPTAIN PETER "BULL FROG" WIKUL, DIRECTOR, AMERICA WORKS OF NEW YORK, INC.

Question. In your testimony you stated that, to provide appropriate, effective, and timely services for Veterans from transition onwards, programs must provide direct, rapid attachment to the workforce. You also stated that programs that refer Veterans to Web sites where they can virtually apply to jobs for which they will not receive a call back are not adequate programs. With limited resources to provide personal services to all servicemembers and veterans in need and the increased use of the internet, can you suggest ways to improve on Web sites that offer employment assistance to make them more appropriate, effective, and timely?

Response. While the internet has received increased usage and tremendous improvements over the past two decades, the internet is not a substitute for human services. The internet can match resumes to employers, but much more goes into the hiring process than just a resume. For instance, if an employer is seeking a young, energetic individual to help grow his/her business, the personality of potential employees may receive more attention than the skills and work experience on the resume itself. The key to finding long term, stable employment with true career ladders for an individual goes well beyond the work history documented on a resume.

Moreover, dependence on an internet based job search is extremely limiting, and is an isolating experience. A benefit of the world of work is its role in our socialization, helping employees learn and improve their own work, as well as team based

goal setting and achievement. Reliance on a wholly internet based employment program leaves the Veteran, who was used to doing everything in a team setting, to sit alone and go through the difficulties of job search in isolation. This leads to increased severity of PTSD and Depression, and provides greater barriers to employment in the long term.

Additionally, employers struggle with internet based "job matching" systems, receiving hundreds, if not thousands, of resumes for a few open positions. Since they do not have time to review all the resumes, they are left with networking to find an employee, or choosing from a brief sampling of all the resumes. This process does not give a Veteran the "leg up" in the competition he/she deserves, and does not provide the best service possible to the employer.

Instead of pouring all too limited funding into internet based programming, America Works provides "performance based" programs, which provide immediate assistance to both Veterans and employers, bringing the human element back to human services. Since its programs are performance based, funds are not wasted because America Works is not paid until a Veteran is employed and retained in the job for a given time. This programming is fast-paced, and proves to save thousands of dollars in funding due to the rapid attachment to work, leading to rapid reduction in the assistance needs of Veterans.

For instance, for a Veteran to receive a partial disability payment is \$4,200 every 6 months, his/her family to receive Food Stamps to supplement the lack of income is another \$1,362 every 6 months, and for the Veteran to receive PTSD/Depression treatments for 6 months the cost is, on average, \$4,221, for a total of \$9,783. Additionally, if the Veteran seeks out Vocational Rehabilitation services from the VA, the cost for 6 months is another \$7,774.76, and a Section 8 Voucher for 6 months is valued at \$25,559.14 in NYC. This is a total of \$43,116.90, and the Veteran still does not have a job. On the other hand, America Works' programs cost between \$5,000 and \$7,500 per person depending on job retention and earnings levels, for a total cost to the government of \$4,315 (subtracting taxes from taxable wages equaling \$3,185 for 6 months of \$10/hr at 35 hours per week). This provides a cost savings of \$38,801.90 per Veteran, and does not disrupt the current DVOP/LVER funding (which provides for an average per DVOP/LVER cost of \$85,655.22).

Needless to say, for a program that is of no risk to the government because payments are not given unless the work has already been done, it seems economically sensible especially considering the limited resources available, to rely on sensitive, effective, in-person based programming which saves funding both in the short and long term. Web sites can be improved to provide support to programs and employers, but they cannot replace the human services element of recruiting and hiring.

Chairman AKAKA. Thank you, Captain Wikul.
Mr. Lawton-Belous, your testimony, please.

**STATEMENT OF JOSHUA LAWTON-BELOUS, IRAQ VETERAN
AND BUSINESS ANALYST, ORACLE CORPORATION**

Mr. LAWTON-BELOUS. Chairman Akaka, Honorable Members of this Committee, I appreciate being here before you to testify about transition services that are provided to America's men and women serving in uniform.

These services are oftentimes overlooked when considering how to make a servicemember's transition from the military to civilian life successful, yet the services provided by programs like the Army Career Alumni Program, commonly referred to as ACAP, and Transition Assistance Program, commonly referred to as TAPs, are in some respects the most crucial elements to a servicemember's successful transition.

As a former soldier who used programs like ACAP extensively during my recovery at Walter Reed Army Medical Center and as an interviewer for Oracle Corporation's Wounded Warrior program, I have had the unique experience to both understand the process of transitioning as servicemember and the important end result, the resume.

While the Army Career Alumni Program at Walter Reed Army Medical Center and throughout the rest of the Army should be the first stop for all soldiers transitioning out of the Army, the ACAP office is all too often relegated to a check-the-box function because of command decisions which often inhibit or prohibit the ability of a soldier to obtain career separation counseling in a timely manner. This inability to obtain timely career separation counseling has a detrimental ripple effect. Due to the inability of soldiers to discuss their transitioning and career prospects with transition services, many soldiers are provided with limited career counseling and therefore assemble generic resumes. These generic resumes are competitive with neither those resumes that are assembled within the industry or by those at colleges and universities.

Since these resumes are not competitive, soldiers do not obtain jobs that they believe themselves qualified for. This inability to obtain qualified employment reinforces a belief by those soldiers who remain in the military that transition services add no value to their transition and therefore are not worth fighting with their command to obtain.

Due to the average age of those enlisting in the military, few of them understand the opportunities and culture of the civilian workforce. While these servicemembers have often earned roles and responsibilities that few of their civilian counterparts have obtained, many veterans do not realize, until they have obtained their first civilian job, the value of their experiences during their military careers.

To these veterans, it was normal for a 21-year-old sergeant to counsel, supervise and establish goals for a team of five other soldiers. Without understanding the unique nature of their military careers, veterans do not translate the important aspects of their military careers into civilian language because they have not yet grasped what skills, characteristics, experiences, et cetera, that employers are looking for.

Yet even if ACAP and TAPs were given the highest priority for servicemembers who are separating from the military and those separating servicemembers were able to translate their military experience into civilian language, many veterans would still be missing a crucial aspect of every resume, education.

America's current labor market requires those seeking employment to have either a degree or industry-standard certifications, if not both. The reality for many enlisted members of the Armed Forces, specifically Marines and soldiers, is that upon leaving the military, they lack both the degree and industry-standard certifications. While veterans are rightly given preference in certain career fields, the lack of formal education often prevents them from obtaining employment even in the Federal Government.

If we as a country are serious about wanting to decrease the unemployment situation among veterans, our government must take the following steps: One, fix the Post-9/11 GI Bill payment debacle. Two, strengthen the importance of formal education while still in the military. Three, enforce a military command structure that supports those servicemembers transitioning out of the military.

Chairman Akaka, Honorable Members of this Committee, I am humbled by being here before you to testify about transition serv-

ices that are provided to America's men and women serving in uniform. I thank you for listening, but more importantly, I thank you for your continual support of veterans and those still wearing the uniform of our country. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Lawton-Belous follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF JOSHUA LAWTON-BELOUS, IRAQ VETERAN AND BUSINESS ANALYST, ORACLE CORPORATION

Chairman Akaka, Ranking Member Burr, Honorable Members of the Committee, I appreciate being here before you to today testify about transition services that are provided to America's men and women serving in uniform. My name is Joshua Lawton-Belous and I am a recently medically discharged veteran who served two tours in Iraq. Currently, I am a business analyst at Oracle Corporation. I believe that the transition services that I am here to speak about today are often times overlooked when considering how to make a servicemember's transition from the military to civilian life successful. Yet the services provided by programs like the Army Career Alumni Program referred to commonly as ACAP and Transition Assistance Program commonly referred to as TAPs are in some respects the most crucial elements to a servicemember's successful transition. As a former soldier who used programs like ACAP extensively during my recovery at Walter Reed Army Medical Center, and as an interviewer for Oracle Corporation's Wounded Warrior Program, I have had the unique experience to both understand the process of transitioning a servicemember and the important end result—the resume.

While the Army Career Alumni Program at Walter Reed Army Medical Center, and throughout the rest of the Army, should be the first stop for all soldiers transitioning out of the Army, the ACAP office is all too often relegated to a "check the box" function because of command decisions made at different levels, which inhibit or prohibit, the ability of a soldier to obtain career separation counseling in a timely manner. This inability to obtain timely career separation counseling has a detrimental ripple effect. Due to the inability of soldiers to discuss their transitioning and career prospects with transition services many soldiers are provided with limited career counseling and therefore assemble generic resumes. These generic resumes are competitive with neither those resumes that are assembled by those within the industry or by those at colleges and universities. Since these resumes are not competitive soldiers do not obtain jobs that they believe themselves qualified for. This inability to obtain qualified employment reinforces the belief by those soldiers who remain in the military, that transition services add no value to their transition and therefore are not worth fighting with their command to obtain.

Due to the average age of those enlisting in the military, few of them understand the opportunities and culture of the civilian workforce. While these servicemembers have often earned roles and responsibilities that few of their civilian counterparts have obtained, many veterans do not realize until they have obtained their first civilian job, the value of their experiences during their military careers. To these veterans it was normal for a 21-year-old Sergeant to counsel, supervise, and establish goals for a team of 5 other soldiers. Without understanding the unique nature of their military careers, veterans do not translate the important aspects of their military careers into civilian language, because they have not yet grasped what skills, characteristics, experiences, etc. that employers are looking for.

Yet even if ACAP and TAPs were given the highest priority for servicemembers who are separating from the military, and those separating servicemembers were able to translate their military experiences into civilian language, many veterans would still be missing a crucial aspect of every resume—Education. America's current labor market requires those seeking employment to have either a degree or industry standard certifications, if not both. The reality for many enlisted members of the Armed Forces, specifically Marines and Soldiers, is that upon leaving the military they lack both a degree and industry standard certifications. While veterans are rightly given preference in certain career fields, their lack of formal education often prevents them from obtaining employment even in the Federal Government.

If we as a country are serious about wanting to decrease the unemployment situation among veterans, our government must take the following steps: (1) Fix the Post-9/11 GI Bill payment debacle; (2) Strengthen the importance of formal education while still in the military; and (3) Enforce a military command structure that supports those servicemembers transitioning out of the military.

Chairman Akaka, Ranking Member Burr, Honorable Members of the Committee, I am humbled by being here before you to testify about transition services that are provided to America's men and women serving in uniform. I thank you for listening,

but more importantly I thank you for your continual support of veterans and those still wearing the uniform of our country. I look forward to answering any questions you may have.

Chairman AKAKA. Thank you very much, Mr. Lawton-Belous.
And now we will have the testimony of Dexter Daniel.

**STATEMENT OF DEXTER DANIEL,
U.S. ARMY VIETNAM VETERAN**

Mr. DANIEL. Mr. Chairman, very good morning, Senate Committee Members, I thank you very much for allowing me to share my testimony with you this morning.

My name is Dexter Daniel, and I am a U.S. Army veteran. I was honorably discharged in October 1976 after a 5-year tour in Germany. My primary MOS was 73C20, finance payroll specialist. And upon my release, I looked forward to returning home even though I knew in my heart I had multiple apprehensions. On the outer appearance, I looked great to immediate family members who hadn't seen me for quite some time. But even though I knew that my family members would be glad to see me, there was a war raging inside of me.

Throughout my entire tenured time in Germany, I actively became involved with alcohol and drugs during social times. Initially, I never addressed—I want to reemphasize, I never addressed any of my addiction to drugs or my behavioral problems that I was experiencing.

When I did return home, because of lack of knowledge of addictive behavior, I really began getting into a lot of difficult-type situations. I really had no problem gaining employment, and I had no real difficulty in the aspect of convincing people that I would probably be the most qualified person to work for them. However, keeping a job and being responsible became my real problems, and eventually, it ended up being my demise.

As my addiction progressed, my self-esteem and self-worth plummeted, and I eventually became alienated, homeless, and destitute. Throughout these times, suicidal thoughts visited me far too often, and I was engulfed to the core of my being in anger, resentment, and fear. I had a culmination of 31 years active addiction, 26 years of incarceration, 17 years of homelessness, 18 years of being unemployed along with family alienation and society withdrawal. Those were the consequences of my choices, my ignorance, and my rebellion.

In 1999 while facing multiple drug-related criminal charges, I completely surrendered to the reality of my condition and my circumstances. I needed help, and I appealed to the circuit court judge that would preside over my case. If I was convicted—and I absolutely knew in my heart that I was guilty of all charges—my sentence would be 120 years, which would be life.

By the divine grace and mercy of God, through fervent prayer, and the intervention of drug court in the State of Maryland and inclusion and acceptance into the Maryland Center for Veterans Education and Training center, I was given an alternative to prison and renewed opportunity for a restored life.

Regeneration into society would take time, so I became fully engaged in the structure of the program, which included the fol-

lowing: foundational concepts, spiritual steps, 12-step program, and applications of recovery. Mental and physical stabilization was available with a reconnection with the VA.

Job readiness, training, and placement assistance also became available as I began to transition on. Financial management, I felt that that was extremely important because as a financial payroll specialist, I really never had a problem getting money. The problem was managing it and knowing exactly what to do.

Housing referral assistance also became available. Family reconciliation, which is something that is very, very important to me because I alienated my family for so long, which I had a daughter and she never really knew her dad. And finally, aftercare—primary and general aftercare—is available to me even up to this day.

So, today I humbly and I honestly confess that my heart is filled with hope, my life is filled with love, and my soul has a focus and renewed strength. I have remained drug free and incarceration free since 1999. I have completed all the requirements stipulated by the circuit courts of Maryland, and I remain an alumnus of the Maryland Center for Veterans Education and Training center.

In addition, I am also so blessed—and I mean that sincerely—very, very blessed to be employed as a senior event service supervisor within the hospitality industry as was aforementioned, the Marriott. They gave me a tremendous opportunity. They knew of my background, and when I applied with them, I primarily wanted them to see and understand that the person that was before them today was not the person that I used to be. And I wanted a full consideration of who I am today with the hope of who I would like to become tomorrow if they gave me an opportunity.

Again, through prayer, that opportunity came my way, and I continue to give back in several areas. I am allowed to be able to correspond with others that are still in various programs as well as the Maryland Center for Veterans Education and Training to give them opportunities as well; to show them that it is possible for a veteran to be able to heal. And I have been able to—or been empowered to accomplish many numerous personal, professional, and social goals.

Finally, it is my hope that current and future veterans seize their opportunity to integrate into society as acceptable, responsible, and productive citizens. I am eternally grateful to God for touching the hearts of those who were and still are willing to support veterans with compassion, constructive dialog, and goodwill. I also believe that the economy and the integrity of the United States of America can and will recover through dedication, teamwork, and personalized effort. Thank you, and God bless you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Daniel follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF DEXTER H. DANIEL, U.S. ARMY VIETNAM VETERAN

My name is Dexter Daniel and I am a U.S. Army veteran. I was honorably discharged in October 1976 after a 5 year tour of duty in West Germany. My primary MOS was 73C20, finance payroll specialist. Upon my release, I looked forward to returning home even though I knew in my heart I had multiple apprehensions. On the outer appearance, I looked great to immediate family members who had not seen me for some time and even though I had left the military, a “war” was still raging inside of me. Throughout my tenure in Germany, I actively became involved with alcohol and drugs during social times. Initially, I never addressed my addiction when I returned home due to a lack of knowledge regarding addictive behavior.

When applying for employment, I had no real difficulty getting a job; however, keeping a job and being responsible eventually lead to my demise. As my addiction progressed, my self esteem and sense of worth plummeted and I eventually became alienated, homeless and destitute. Throughout these times, suicidal thoughts visited me far too often and I was engulfed at the core of my being with anger, resentment and fear. A culmination of 26 years of incarceration, 17 years of homelessness and 18 years being unemployed along with family alienation and society withdrawal were the consequences of my choices, ignorance and rebellion.

In 1999, while facing multiple drug related criminal charges, I completely surrendered to the reality of my condition and circumstances. I needed help and appealed to the Circuit Court Judge that would preside over my case. If convicted, my sentence would be 120 yrs. Life!

By the divine grace and mercy of God and through fervent prayer and the intervention of Drug Court and inclusion of acceptance into the Maryland Center for Veterans Education and Training Center, I was given an alternative to prison and a renewed opportunity to restore my life. Reintegration into society would take time so I became fully engaged in the Structure of the program which included the following:

1. Foundational concepts, steps and applications of Recovery
2. Mental and Physical stabilization
3. Educational Assistance
4. Job readiness, training and placement assistance
5. Financial Management
6. Housing referral Assistance
7. Family Reconciliation Assistance
8. Primary and General Aftercare

Today, I humbly and honestly confess that my heart is filled with hope, my life is filled with love and my soul has a focused renewed strength. I have remained "drug free" since 1999, completed all requirements stipulated by the Circuit Courts and remain an Alumnus of the Maryland Center for Veterans Education and Training Center. In addition, I'm so blessed to be employed as a Sr. Event Services Supervisor within the Hospitality Industry since March 2001 with a Fortune 500 global Hotel Corporation. I have been empowered and have accomplished numerous renewed personal, professional and social goals.

Finally, it is my sincere hope that current and future Veterans seize their opportunity to integrate into society as acceptable, responsible and productive citizens. I am eternally grateful to God for touching the hearts of those who were and still are willing to support Veterans with compassion, constructive dialog and goodwill. I also believe that the economy and integrity of the United States of America can and will "recover" through Dedication, Teamwork and Personalized effort.

Chairman AKAKA. Thank you very much, Mr. Daniel.
Now we will hear from Ms. Tymes.

**STATEMENT OF HELEN TYMES, CAREER SPECIALIST,
NATIONAL ORGANIZATION ON DISABILITY (NOD)**

Ms. TYMES. Thank you, Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee.

My name is Helen Tymes, and I am a career specialist with the National Organization on Disabilities in Fayetteville, NC. My partner Dwayne D. Beason, Sr. and I staff the North Carolina office of the NOD Army Wounded Warrior Career Demonstration Program. The two of us are both veterans. Mr. Beason served 30 years in the U.S. Army, and I served 21. I was pleased to accept this invitation today to testify.

NOD is a 28-year-old non-profit organization that has long worked to improve the quality-of-life with disabilities by advocating their fullest inclusions in all aspects of life. The NOD board, led by the former Secretary of Homeland Security, Tom Ridge, decided that for the next 5 years, NOD will devote the bulk of our resources to promoting economic self-sufficiency among America's 33 million working-age people with disabilities.

Within this focus, we are helping the most severely injured veterans returning home from Iraq and Afghanistan to become productive contributing members of society. We are doing this by helping them enter or resume a career and/or education upon their return home. NOD is proud to assist by providing proactive, high-touch services individualized to one-quarter of the AW2 veteran population in North Carolina, and at this time, it is at 270.

Our AW2 careers demonstration is an entirely privately-funded initiative conducted by NOD under a memorandum of understanding with the U.S. Army and its Army Wounded Warrior program, also known as AW2. Today, NOD career specialists ensure that career services and other assistance is provided to over 180 soldiers, veterans, and their families in the Dallas Metroplex, and the States of Colorado and North Carolina. We link soldiers, veterans and family members to existing services in various agencies within the community.

Many observers still expect veterans to live out their lives independently. However, we at AW2 and at NOD strongly believe that most of these young men and women can become independent contributing members of society. This is the Army's admirable vision for its AW2 soldiers and veterans. Our mission is to help veterans return to school and to some form of work.

The Nation placed these young men and women in harm's way, and now we have an obligation to support their successful transition into the community and to learn via this program what works in the transition process from the military to the civilian sector.

I would like to give just one small example of some of the situations that we are serving as far as our veterans today that have served in the global war on terror.

With our assistance, we are serving a veteran right now who has been given a 70 percent disability by the Army and 100 percent disability with the VA. During the initial interview that we do, we were able to discover that the veteran was not being paid his full retirement benefits and immediately we had to go to his advocate to let them know.

It became apparent during this visit that the veteran was suffering from some degree of PTSD—which he was diagnosed with PTSD and TBI—in which the veteran could not remember some of the basic things about himself. He had lost his DD-2 form, his retired military identification form, and he could not recall his Army Knowledge Online password, which he needed that to access his MyPay account. The veteran was also unable to access other services that were available to him.

As career specialists, we were able to individually take this veteran to the places that he needed to go. We escorted him to Seymour Johnson Air Force Base to get his DD-2 form and his retired military ID. The career specialist also assisted the veteran with obtaining a new password for his MyPay and assisted with getting his pay straightened out.

The NOD career specialists program provides immediate real-time assistance and problem resolution for veterans and their family members. We get the name of the veteran and family referred to us from the AW2 advocate—which North Carolina is staffed with eight—and the career specialist. We make the initial contact.

We work closely with the veterans. We perform an assessment of the veteran's needs and help develop education and training goals associated with a specific career plan. We are mobile, often visiting the veteran at his home and traveling to various local, State and Federal agencies to make face-to-face contact instead of merely waiting for agencies to return phone calls.

As you may know, certain veterans' conditions such as PTSD and/or TBI can cause severe stress, frustration, and anger. As the career specialist, we often relieve such anxiety by accompanying the veteran to various appointments and helping that veteran get the information that they need from the specific agency.

This personalized approach and commitment typifies the nature of the NOD model. To date, approximately one-half of the cases managed by the NOD career specialists have been placed in education, training, or employment. NOD career specialists are privately funded by organizations such as the Kessler Foundation and the Cumberland Community Foundation. This funding also allows us to provide immediate financial assistance to veterans for textbooks, educational supplies, utilities, moving expenditures and even transportation needs. We also collect data on our activities and the progress of the 180 veterans that we serve. We are also assembling lessons learned and best practices associated with our model.

The model for the NOD AW2 careers program is a proactive approach. We provide continuous and prolonged support to the veterans that we do assist. We develop an individualized career plan and administer interest inventories. We assist veterans with making realistic career choices and goals. We assist veterans to help them stay on track with goals, and we continually follow up and reassess. Our proactive and prolonged relationship allows us to gain the trust of our veterans, and we believe it accounts for the high positive results that we have had thus far.

In closing I would like to state that we strongly believe in our proactive and prolonged approach to serve our veterans. Our model ensures that we provide high-touch, individualized, personalized services to our veterans. This allows and helps with successful outcomes.

NOD asks that the Committee support funding for the expansion of our collaborative program. We would like to see our collaboration effort with the Army expanded to many more locations and to also serve other military services. NOD hopes to continue to collaborate with the Veterans' Affairs Committee regarding program results and broader application of the model's best practices.

I thank you for this opportunity today.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Tymes follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF HELEN TYMES, CAREER SPECIALIST, NATIONAL ORGANIZATION ON DISABILITY (NOD)

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee: I am Helen Tymes, Career Specialist with the National Organization on Disability. My partner, Dwayne Beason, and I staff the North Carolina office of the NOD's Army Wounded Warrior Career Demonstration Program, or AW2 Careers. I was pleased to accept your invitation to testify before your hearing on "Easing the Burdens Through Employment" in relation to severely wounded veterans returning to civilian life from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

As one who is laboring “on the ground” to help veterans and their families to adjust effectively to their often very difficult circumstances, I am very heartened that this Committee is devoting time and energy to examining what we and others are doing to make good things happen on these fronts.

ABOUT NOD

NOD is a 28-year old national nonprofit organization that has long worked to improve the quality of life of people with disabilities by advocating their fullest inclusion in all aspects of life. We are one of only three so-called “cross-disability” organizations working to improve the quality of life for all of America’s 54 million people with disabilities.

Over our nearly 20-year history, we’ve worked with scores of communities across the country to help them improve the quality of life for their citizens with disabilities and honor those that do it well. Our World Committee on Disabilities honors countries that do the same with an award presented by the Secretary General of the United Nations.

We’re perhaps best known for our Harris polls, which have tracked various quality of life indicators through statistically valid sampling of 1,000 people with disabilities. For more than 20 years, the Harris Interactive firm’s researchers have tracked everything from access to health care, to transportation, degree of optimism about the future, social interactions with friends and community, religious participation, and even voting.

Needless to say, the gaps in these quality of life indicators between people with and without disabilities remain very wide, notwithstanding gains we’ve made through the ADA and other policy reforms in the last ten to twenty years. Among these indicators, it should be no surprise that economic self-sufficiency displays the greatest gap. People with disabilities suffer a poverty rate that is three times the national average and our Harris polls have reported a 67% rate of unemployment, a number that’s remained virtually unchanged since the end of WW II.

For this reason, the NOD board, led by our chairman, former Secretary of Homeland Security Tom Ridge, has decided that for the next five years NOD will devote the bulk of our resources to promoting economic self sufficiency among America’s 33 million working-age people with disabilities. Within this focus, we are working on helping the most severely injured veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan become productive, contributing members of their communities by entering or resuming careers upon their transition home.

THE NOD AW2 CAREERS DEMONSTRATION

Today, I want mainly to share with you what we are learning from the early phases of AW2 Careers. While this demonstration is focusing on helping the most severely injured soldiers in the Army’s AW2 Program access careers upon transitioning home, the model we are piloting has applicability to a broad range of services beyond those devoted to increasing economic self sufficiency. It is a model that deals not only with veterans but also with their families. We strongly believe that the population of severely injured servicemembers, like the rest of the country’s people with disabilities, faces a very complex recovery process that affects a family over a prolonged period and requires an array of services and supports for it to gain a semblance of a good quality of life.

Our AW2 Careers Demonstration is an entirely privately funded¹ initiative conducted by NOD under a Memorandum of Understanding with the U.S. Army and its Army Wounded Warrior Program (AW2). Today, NOD Career Specialists ensure that career services and other assistance are provided to 188 soldiers, veterans, and their families² (soon to top 200) in the Dallas Metroplex and the states of Colorado and North Carolina. We link soldiers/veterans and family members to existing career services in the community—or provide them directly ourselves where such services are inadequate.

I want to proceed directly to address the Subcommittee’s interest in our on-the-ground work with returning veterans and their families. But:

- First, let me stress that to understand fully what I will present it is important to know something about the nature of both the Army’s Wounded Warrior Program

¹NOD’s AW2 Careers Demonstration is funded by 17 private foundations and two corporate donors. It is a 4.5-year, \$4.8 million project.

²We will henceforth mainly use “veterans” to represent all of those served by AW2 and AW2 Careers—Regular Army, Reserve, or National Guard soldiers who mainly veterans separated from active duty, though in some cases still on active duty or still in the Reserves or National Guard—and their family members.

and of the NOD AW2 Careers Demonstration. Brief descriptions of both (and of NOD) are in Attachment 1 and I urge those not familiar with these programs to read Attachment I before proceeding here.

- Second, Attachment 2 is a one-page summary of AW2 Careers outcomes and progress to date, drawn from our most recent evaluation records.

- Finally, Attachment 3 is perhaps the most important document we would like to present. It describes how the service model of AW2—the Army’s own program—and of AW2 Careers differs in essential ways from the service models of others trying to serve the most severely wounded soldiers, veterans, and their families. We are convinced that it is this pro-active, “high touch” service model that makes the difference in progress for these severely wounded populations—and that the comprehensive independent evaluation we have funded will confirm that.

Here, let us stress that most veterans separated from active duty for medical reasons are given travel to their homes and disappear from the DOD radar screen. They are left to find their own ways to the VA, the Labor Department, and the other Federal, state, and local government and nonprofit agencies with benefits and services to which they are entitled or they need. It is different for severely injured veterans eligible for AW2. They too are separated and given travel to “home.” But also, AW2 puts their name and contact information on the caseloads of one of AW2’s 150 Advocates who covers that veteran’s hometown. That Advocate is charged with reaching out pro-actively to find and engage that veteran and his/her family and sticking with him/her to ensure that s/he gets the benefits/services to which s/he is entitled or needs. When that veteran is ready for career activity, the Advocate passes the veteran’s name to the NOD Career Specialist for that area, who similarly pro-actively reaches out to the veteran and establishes the same kind of supportive relationship “for as long as it takes.” Neither AW2 Advocates nor NOD Career Specialists wait for a knock on the door or a phone call or an email from a veteran in need. We find and engage them.

Now, let me begin by noting that many of the most severely injured OIF/OEF veterans would have died in previous wars. Battlefield medicine, however, has advanced to the point that their lives endure but are frequently deeply impaired in both the physical and mental realms. Many observers still expect many of these veterans to live out lives in dependency, but we at AW2 and NOD strongly believe that most of these young men and women can become “self-sufficient, contributing members of their communities” (the Army’s admirable vision for its AW2 soldiers/veterans) by returning to school and some form of work. We, the Nation that placed these young men and women in harm’s way, need to see this situation as an opportunity to learn “what works” to do that.

This, indeed, is the purpose animating AW2 and NOD’s AW2 Careers. It is important to note, however, that many of the challenges facing these veterans will not be surmounted quickly or easily. The effort must be long term in nature.

Let me begin with a summary of our statistics. We are only 11 months old, having opened our shop in late December 2008. We now have a caseload of 67 soldiers/veterans (mainly veterans) and are heading toward 100 in a few weeks. Of this 67, we have helped 28 to move into education, training, or work of some kind in less than a year. That number will, of course, increase as we move into our second and third years.

HERE ARE TWO STORIES ABOUT VETERANS AND THEIR FAMILIES.

- *Veteran 1:* The veteran called me to state he received a letter from the VA’s Vocational Rehabilitation folks stating he was denied benefits of VR & E. I asked the veteran if the letter stated ‘why’ and he replied no. The veteran was immediately informed by me that I would follow-up on the situation and get back to him within 24–48 hrs. I contacted the VA/Winston-Salem to find out how it is that a Wounded Warrior with Severe PTSD and a 70% VA rated disability could be denied Vocational Rehabilitation. The VA representative stated, “That should have never happened. Unfortunately, we do have Case Managers that are handling a multitude of cases which cause many veterans to either be denied services or completely fall through the cracks.” I gave the contact the veteran’s information, and she researched the case to find out if the decision of ‘no’ was incorrect. The VA contact gave me the new VA Case Manager’s name with a consent form to allow me to discuss the veteran’s case. I arranged a teleconference with the veteran and his case manager, and an initial face-to-face appointment was then scheduled. I transported the veteran to Winston-Salem and attended his initial appointment with him. The Case Manager approved him to receive an Extended Evaluation and Plan, education funding and a voice recorder to record the Instructor’s session and help the veteran recall what was said and took place in the classroom. Veteran will take a placement

test at Fayetteville Technical Community College and enter the Computer Programming Curriculum in January 2010.

- *Veteran 2*: A veteran received a disability rating by the Army of 70% with other physical injuries sustained in the Global War on Terrorism. The veteran received a 100% disability rating from the VA. During the initial interview with the veteran, the CS discovered that the veteran was not being paid his full retirement benefits and immediately informed the Army's Advocate. It became apparent during the visit that the veteran was suffering from some degree of PTSD. He could not remember some basic things about himself and was unable to recall where his military documents were located. The veteran lost his DD Form 2, Retired Military Identification card, and could not account for his Army Knowledge On-line password to access his e-mail account. Also, the veteran was unable to access his military MyPay account. During the intake, the CS discovered that he was pending several charges of violating laws and had to attend court. CS transported the veteran to Seymour Johnson AFB in Goldsboro to obtain a new DD Form 2, Retired Military ID. CS also assisted veteran with obtaining a new ID and Password to access his MyPay account to submit the process and verification for a pay correction. We continue to work with him.

In these cases you can see the role we play in action. Let me highlight some of the things we do as in these cases.

- NOD's AW2 Careers program provides immediate, real time, pro-active assistance and problem resolution for veterans and their family members. We do not sit behind a desk and wait for other agencies to assist. We are mobile and have the latitude to go to agencies and make face-to-face contact versus waiting for an agency to hopefully return a phone call. We assist the veteran with what needs to be asked or ask the hard questions ourselves.

- Due to the nature of our private funding, we have the ability to make immediate financial assistance for tuition, textbooks, educational supplies and needs, utilities, moving expenditures and transportation needs.

- NOD's AW2 Careers develops an Individualized Career Plan, administers Interest Inventories and assists veterans with making realistic career choices and goals. We assist veterans with staying on track with goals and continually follow—up and re-assess. We are able to obtain and maintain trust from the veterans we serve by establishing an initial, trustworthy relationship and by showing that we have genuine concern for their needs and goals.

When I talk with my colleagues at our other sites in Colorado and Texas and with our leaders in the New York headquarters of NOD, we can step back and stress some early lessons emerging from our work to date.

1. *A Fundamental Mismatch: Seriously Injured Veterans and Reactive Agencies*: Sometimes by design and more often from funding limitations, many of the government, and, indeed, private programs in place to help veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan are constrained to a reactive service model, only responding when a veteran seeks services and thus placing the burden on veterans to find and approach the agencies. But we find that the most seriously injured veterans with whom we work are not really able to effectively access services from reactive agencies.

Many veterans, especially the most severely injured who often also suffer from cognitive disabilities, do not know the benefits to which they are entitled, which agencies offer them, and how to approach them.³ Further, many are isolated, geographically, socially, and/or psychologically. Their needs call for an entirely different service model—in our view along the lines of what we are testing in AW2 Careers. That model is to actively reach out to the veterans and ensure their needs are being met. The terms NOD uses to describe our service model are “pro-active, intensive, and prolonged, high touch case management relationships” with the veterans being served. It is important to note that few, if any, other government agencies and or private veterans' service organizations can employ the service model adopted by AW2 and AW2 Careers.

When a soldier is going through the Army Board process leading to medical discharge—or shortly thereafter—that soldier, if s/he meets AW2 admission criteria regarding severity of injury, is, in effect, automatically enrolled as a “member” of AW2. When the new veteran is medically separated and heads for home, his/her

³The Army Career and Alumni Program (ACAP) briefing syllabi for soldiers departing active duty are comprehensive and thorough, but many veterans report that they didn't get these briefings or understand them or remember them. Some may have been diverted by their injuries—or simply young enough to not pay attention to seemingly remote matters until they become very proximate, back home.

name is added to a caseload list of an Army Advocate (and later, where applicable, an NOD Career Specialist) serving the geographical region that soldier calls home. That Advocate and Career Specialist are charged with reaching out and finding that soldier/veteran; establishing a close, supportive relationship; and ensuring s/he gets the benefits and services due her/him.

In NOD's case, we require Career Specialists to contact "their" veterans at least once a month, usually electronically (but including face-to-face meetings early on and, later, once every six months, often by getting in their cars and going to see the veteran at home, where we get a much fuller picture of his/her situation). We do not sit in our offices and wait for a veteran to knock on our door.

Further, we have early indicators and even some evidence that this service model is much better received by the veterans. Anecdotally, it is clear that the close NOD Career Specialist outreach relationships have lifted some veterans out of their isolation and immobility and started them re-engaging in both their lives and careers. These relationships have also resulted in spouses and children moving forward on career paths. This is reflected in early survey results, including the below veterans' ratings of satisfaction with "how helpful" the services to date of various agencies have been:

	A Lot	Some	A Little	Not at All
NOD Career Specialist	61%	30%	7%	2%
AW2 Advocate	56%	29%	14%	2%
One Stop Center	29%	29%	29%	14%
Voc Rehab & Empt	28%	48%	20%	4%
ACAP	16%	43%	39%	11%
Other Agencies	0%	67%	33%	0%

Finally, we acknowledge that the AW2/AW2 Careers service model is more expensive than office-based, reactive models. To this we respond that our final evaluation is likely to confirm our early operating judgment that this model works more effectively, certainly for this population of most severely wounded veterans. Moreover, a broadly based cost-benefit analysis should weigh direct program costs against the benefits of reduced dependency costs, increased tax revenues from veterans' earnings, reduced costs for shelters and imprisonment, more successful marriages and parenting, and the restoration of self-confidence from a veteran's again being an "self sufficient, contributing member of his/her community," which is the Army's admirable vision for this population.

2. *The Need to Deal with both the Veteran and the Family:* The process of recovering from injury and coming to terms with disability is a complex process that is all consuming not only for the veteran but the entire family. Retired parents may have to become caregivers to a veteran. Spouses whose job it was to take care of the children and household find them-selves suddenly in the role of caregivers to the veteran and/or even family breadwinners. Children may have to come to grips with a parent they no longer recognize. Investing in support for spouses, parents of veterans, and veterans' children who are drawn into this process is, in our view, a necessary and cost effective investment that the VA must consider as it administers ancillary benefits. And these benefits must be as flexible as are many of the benefits available through VR and E.

3. *Unaddressed Mental Health Needs:* More than half the AW2 population, including those in AW2 Careers, suffers from primary diagnoses of PTSD/TBI, with many having both, often also with physical injuries. But the behavioral/mental health concerns do not stop there. Many veterans suffer depression or other mental health issues (including violent or suicidal ideations) that require appropriate mental health services (especially including marital/family counseling). But, we find that these needs are largely unaddressed and can impede career progress by contributing to veterans' dropping out of education or training or losing a job. It is not a criticism of the VA to say that despite its efforts to expand such services, it simply isn't able to adequately service these needs. Sometimes the veteran denies these needs; or finds the local VA has no or limited mental health services or they are not close enough; or does not like what they perceive as the VA's reliance on problematic medications (not uncommon in other populations using psychotropic medications), with only limited therapy. We feel that the VA should supplement its direct mental health services by mobilizing and applying mental health services from other local agencies that are anxious to be helpful to veterans but need to be recruited, supported, and trained to do so.

4. *Criminal Charges:* We have encountered several situations where some behaviors associated with PTSD/TBI have resulted in veterans facing criminal charges

(e.g., erratic driving, substance abuse, violence, including family abuse, etc.). It is hard to help a veteran stay on a career path when s/he is in court or jail. We have examples of our Career Specialists intervening with police, prosecutors, or the courts to request that notice be taken of the soldier/veteran's disability and considered as a mitigating factor in charges or sentence. This has sometimes resulted in remanding the soldier/veteran to treatment rather than incarceration. There is need for all agencies serving this population to intervene in such circumstances, bringing these factors to the consideration of such local authorities. (Indeed, one of our Career Specialists has led the effort in his part of his state to create a "Veterans Court" to which criminal charges against soldiers or veterans are referred for disposition taking such factors into account.)

5. *Personal/Family Financial Management*: Young veterans often have little or no experience or knowledge of properly managing family finances, despite ACAP and other Army training thereon. Our Career Specialists frequently find veterans in dire financial straits requiring emergency advice, training, and assistance. There is clearly a need for continuing personal/family financial management training and guidance.

6. *Peer Support Mechanisms*: The fact that so many of our veterans/families are isolated geographically, socially, and psychologically has led our Career Specialists to try various peer meetings and other peer supports, often with heartening results. Our sense is that this needs broader application.

7. *Inadequate Education and Job Skills*: We have not been surprised to find that many of our veterans lack the education credentials and job skills needed to succeed in the labor markets of today and the foreseeable future. Our response is to urge veterans to use the education and training benefits available to them to upgrade their credentials on either or both fronts. Many have responded positively. But others working with these veterans need to adopt the same emphasis.

8. *The Need for Flexible Work Support Funds*: The soldiers, veterans, and family members we serve frequently have very limited incomes. In addition, they face the need to spend modest amounts of money on things that can advance their career prospects—or impede them if such expenditures are not possible. These needs include things like tuition payments where Federal educational benefits are delayed and the veteran cannot afford payments up front. Or, books, work clothes, computer repairs or software, travel expenses for a job fair or interview, license or other work related fees, and more. To meet such needs, we provide small grants from our work support funds that can facilitate career progress.

NEXT STEPS

As indicated above, our sense is that our model of services is highly promising and that its early indicators confirm this. But, we think we should take this developmental and testing phase further to generate firmer results, outcomes, and lessons.

Our present set-up of three sites over three operating years was devised three or so years ago, early in the then understandably chaotic period of our Nation becoming aware of the challenge and opportunity of responding to these severely wounded returning veterans—and of the initially chaotic and understaffed period of establishing the AW2 program. The private sector then stepped forward, with an impressive, welcome, but still limited support of our demonstration program.

Our sense, as experienced operators of demonstration projects, is that the present pilot project, while important as a source of early lessons, is still nonetheless too limited. Three sites are too few; three years are too few. Far better in terms of both serving more people but more important in generating more reliable data to support lessons learned, would be more sites for more time with more staff. We feel that expanding our present three sites to twelve and to five years instead of three and to two Career Specialists in all of the sites would yield important dividends in lessons learned and confirmed. Moreover, expanding the number of sites would yield similar dividends. Hence, we argue for up to nine additional sites, or a dozen in all.

Moreover, additional sites would allow clusters of sites to focus on potentially important themes. For instance, we would envision a cluster including concentrated mental health services; another including concerted advice to employers on both ways to accommodate the needs of disabled veterans in order to be productive and ways to "sculpt" or structure job requirements to the same end; yet others emphasize peer group supports. Then, too, some or all of the additional sites should provide career services to the severely disabled veterans from all DOD uniformed services. To these ends, we seek Congressional and agency support as well as the continuation of private funding.

On broader fronts, we would urge that the Committee support:

- Expansion of the AW2 program and the inclusion by it of severely wounded veterans of the other DOD uniformed services. This model of service is not only applicable to “Army Green” but also to similarly injured Marines, Sailors, and Air Force people; and these services should “try out” this approach by partaking of our demonstration project.

- That the VA consider a demonstration project along the lines of AW2 Careers. This would mean that the VA would establish a two-tiered structure, at least for exploratory, demonstration project purposes, with a “high touch” pro-active program like AW2 Careers for those so eligible, with revamped “regular” services for those not so severely disabled.

Thank you for your invitation and attention.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment I to Testimony of Helen Tymes: Brief descriptions of NOD, of the Army's Wounded Warrior Program (AW2), and of NOD's AW2 Careers Demonstration Project.The National Organization on Disability

The mission of the National Organization on Disability (NOD) is to expand the participation and contribution of America's 54 million men, women, and children with disabilities in all aspects of life. NOD was established in 1982 with the goal of inclusion for people with disabilities. It was a key player in the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) in 1990 and the placement of the statue of Franklin Delano Roosevelt in a wheelchair in the nation's capital.

With offices in New York City and Washington, DC, NOD works nationally in partnership with international, national, and local organizations. NOD has earned respect for its work as an advocate, program developer, and provider of the field's most important research on the status of Americans with disabilities (the NOD/Harris Surveys). NOD provides direct services to clients only as a part of demonstration programs aimed at developing new approaches and scaling up those that work.

NOD focuses on economic self-sufficiency for people with disabilities. Our most significant projects are AW2 Careers as described below and Start on Success (SOS), a student internship program that transitions young people with disabilities into the workforce and helps prepare special education students—especially from racial or ethnic minorities and low-income, urban families—for competitive employment.

Despite a primary focus on education and employment, NOD remains vigorously involved in the wider range of concerns affecting people with disabilities, including those that arise at the moments of greatest vulnerability. NOD/Harris Surveys reveal that 56% of people with disabilities do not know whom to contact in the event of a disaster. NOD's Emergency Preparedness Initiative (EPI) promotes the inclusion of people with disabilities in emergency preparedness planning and response by participating in emergency planning exercises, hosting conferences and by providing information, technical assistance, and other resources to emergency planners, first responders, disability advocates, and people with disabilities.

NOD is the only disability organization with credentialed personnel experienced in emergency management and disability issues.

The U.S. Army Wounded Warrior Program (AW2)

At this writing, the U.S. Army Wounded Warrior (AW2) Program^{**} assists close to 5,000 of the most severely injured soldiers and veterans of the wars in Iraq/Afghanistan. To be "in" AW2, a soldier/veteran must have one or more severe physical disabilities (e.g., burns, blindness, amputations, spinal cord injuries), often combined with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and/or Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI).

Assistance is provided by a cadre of over 135 "Advocates," Army employees or contractors who are stationed around the country with caseloads averaging 37. Advocates are counselors, advisors, navigators, case managers, and, yes, advocates with respect to the many and often confusing benefits and services available to and needed by such soldiers and veterans. The Advocates' mission is to pro-actively facilitate soldiers/veterans' receipt of the supports and services they need to become "contributing members of their communities," the Army's admirable vision for those in the AW2 caseload. The Advocates are charged with staying engaged with veterans for "as long as it takes." (Family members are also served.)

A culminating step to this goal is sometimes for AW2 soldiers/veterans to return to active duty, or, more commonly, to leave active duty and resume or enter civilian careers as veterans, where one of their options is to resume or enter civilian careers.

^{**} Several years ago, then Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld ordered all uniformed services to establish programs for severely wounded members that would aggressively facilitate their obtaining the services and benefits they need, including when medically separated from active duty. The Army's AW2 Program is the largest of these.

But civilian career development is a specialized activity that the Army and its Advocates have little experience with and limited time to devote to. To develop and learn what approaches the Army could most effectively use to assist severely disabled AW2 soldiers and veterans to move forward on their career paths, the AW2 Program and the nonprofit NOD concluded a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in 2007 for a public/private collaboration under which NOD would assist AW2 in advancing the careers of the soldiers/veterans it serves (including their family members, as well).

NOD's activities with AW2 under this MOU have had two major focuses: First, NOD drafted a *Field Manual on Careers: Education, Training, and Work* for the AW2 Advocates. This primer on career goals and services will shortly be promulgated to AW2 field staff as official guidance for their work on the careers front. Our major project is the AW2 Careers Demonstration Project, the focus of my testimony today. AW2 Careers is a pilot project whose lessons are to be transferred to AW2 both during the project and at its scheduled completion in 2012, when AW2 plans to assume full responsibility for career services and may conduct them in large part on the basis of the demonstration's experiences.

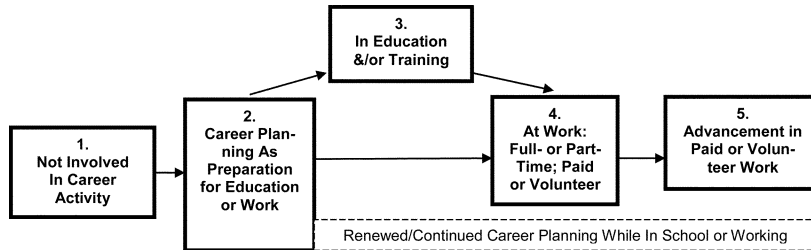
AW2 Careers

NOD's AW2 Career Demonstration Program is a 4.5 year^{***} pilot project (now just into its second full operating year) under which NOD has placed one or more NOD Career Specialists in three locations (the Dallas, Texas, Metroplex; Colorado Springs, serving the state of Colorado; and Fayetteville, serving the state of North Carolina), where, over a three-year period, they team with the local Advocates, concentrating on career development for soldiers, veterans, and family members who are ready for such services.

Operational Model

Like the Advocates, the Career Specialists employ a pro-active, intense, prolonged case management model helping the veterans think about and explore career options; obtain education, skill, aptitude, and interest assessments; devise resumes and career plans; acquire additional education and training; enter into work of various kinds (full- or part-time, paid or volunteer, for nonprofit, for-profit, or governmental employers—or self-employment as entrepreneurs or individual contributors); and advance in that work once so engaged. They do this by finding and linking veterans/families to relevant career services locally or providing the services themselves where local resources are inadequate.

The AW2 career process is represented by the flow chart below, through all or some of which will move an AW2 veteran/family member. This is not necessarily a linear, forward only, process. Some veterans



may backtrack to an earlier cell, to plan a different career or go to college, etc. Some may both work and go to school at the same time—or, may volunteer while working and/or in school. Career planning may be

^{***} This comprises several months for planning and start up, over 3.5 years for site operations on a staggered start-up basis, and several months to finalize the project's evaluation and promulgate its findings.

preparation for work or school and/or may occur while working or in school. Note, too, that Career Specialists "stick with" veterans after job placement for the full duration of the project.

A goal of a Career Specialist is to assist the veteran to move as far and as quickly through these cells as possible during the project's duration. Job placement is not the only criterion of success; equally important is motion forward. A closely linked goal is to learn "what works" to help the veteran move from step to step (see evaluation, below).

Some veterans have already, on their own, entered school or at work, but many are in cell #1 and are our prime target population. They may be still in outpatient rehabilitation, still too injured to consider career steps at this time. Or, they may still be adjusting to the home environment and family situation; content to live on benefits at this time; discouraged from trying and not making progress; or just not ready or interested at this time. Many need time and encouragement to move forward.

Others are dispersed across the other cells of the flow chart. Wherever they find the veterans, our Career Specialists find and establish relations with them, assess their needs, and assist them in moving forward. Attached is our most recent statistical status and progress report as of the end of October 2009.

NOD has undertaken this Careers Demonstration mindful that it must utilize, not duplicate, other resources with the mission of assisting wounded veterans. In AW2 Careers local sites informal collaborators include the public agencies serving disabled veterans (Department of Labor and its VETS and "Real Lifelines" programs; the Veteran's Administration Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment offices; and the Social Security Administration offices); private nonprofit Veteran's Service Organizations (including Disabled American Veterans, VFW, Paralyzed Veteran's Association, AMVETS and American Legion) and a host of new voluntary organizations operating both nationally and locally, such as the Wounded Warrior Project and Yellow Ribbon Fund, that have formed since September 11th. The roster of such collaborators varies from site to site.

In addition, NOD is collaborating with the nonprofit, foundation-funded Give an Hour network, which stimulates local mental health providers to donate, *gratis*, an hour of mental health services per week to returning Iraq/Afghanistan veterans needing such services. Give an Hour advises both AW2 Advocates and NOD Career Specialists on how to make appropriate mental health interventions when needed, and assists in providing such services where appropriate.

Evaluation

The Economic Mobility Corporation (Mobility), a nonprofit organization led by Mark Elliott, a workforce development specialist who helped design the program, is responsible for conducting the program evaluation. AW2 Careers' two main goals: 1) developing effective ways to help veterans achieve better employment and education outcomes; and 2) using what we learn to inform the military and the helping professions and agencies about how best to assist such severely disabled veterans meet career goals.

A final evaluation after the completion of Year 3 will report on: 1) how effectively the program is implemented at each site; 2) the extent to which the initiative increases the level and quality of the employment and educational services that veterans and their families receive; 3) what employment and educational outcomes veterans/families achieve after receiving program services; and 4) what career supports or other factors were most helpful in generating such outcomes.

Funding

NOD designed AW2 Careers to be privately funded (to enable quick actions devoid of bureaucratic impediments) with national funders supporting the national office's management, technical assistance, evaluation, and communication/promotional activities, and local funders supporting each site. At present, AW2 Careers is supported by 17 national and local foundations and two private corporate donors. These funders (counting grants provided and renewals that are likely) support 93 percent of the present 4.5-year project budget of \$4.6 million. NOD is seeking to fill the remaining gap through additional support from present and other potential funders.

Attachment 2: AW2 Careers Monthly Status Report as of October 31, 2009

	TX	CO	NC	All
Number of Soldiers/Veterans on the Careers Caseload as of October 31	62	59	67	188
Enrolled in AW2 Careers in October 2009	0	4	4	8
Current Status of Soldiers/Veterans				
Currently employed ¹ , in education or training and/or volunteering	39	38	36	113
Engaged in career planning	34	25	35	94
Still on active duty	1	2	6	9
Engaged in career planning	0	1	5	6
Currently not on active duty, employed, in education/training or volunteering	21	17	25	63-33%
Engaged in career planning	10	12	23	45
Status not confirmed (unable to contact Soldier/Veteran or data missing)	1	2	0	3
Outcomes Achieved After Receiving Services				
Soldiers/Veterans who ever achieved any outcome after receiving services²	28	38	28	94-50%
Soldiers/Veterans who achieved any outcome in October 2009	1	1	4	6
Soldiers/Veterans currently in an outcome achieved after receiving services	23	29	26	78-41%
Family members currently in an outcome achieved after receiving services	7	0	4	11
Employment among Soldiers/Veterans				
Ever employed in a civilian job since on the caseload	25	29	18	72
Currently employed in a civilian job ³	20	22	17	59
Ever obtained a civilian job after receiving services⁴	13	23	9	45
Obtained a civilian job in October 2009	0	1	0	1
Currently in a civilian job obtained after receiving services	10	18	8	36
Education Among Soldiers/Veterans				
Ever attended education/training since on the caseload	26	21	25	72
Completed education or training	1	2	2	5
Currently attending education or training	21	18	21	60
Ever started education/training after receiving services	14	11	15	40
Started education/training in October 2009	0	0	1	1
Currently in education/training begun after receiving services	12	9	14	35
Volunteering among Soldiers/Veterans				
Ever volunteered since on the caseload	14	15	11	40
Currently in a volunteer activity	13	10	9	32
Ever started a volunteer activity after receiving services	9	11	6	26
Started a volunteer activity in October 2009	1	0	3	4
Currently in a volunteer activity begun after receiving services	7	6	5	18
Contact Since the Start of the Demonstration at Each Site				
Soldiers/Veterans ever contacted	61	57	67	185
Soldiers/Veterans who ever received a service or referral	57	56	67	180
Soldiers/Veterans ever seen in person ⁵	52	39	58	149
Family members who ever received a service or referral	32	0	8	40
Contact in October 2009				
Soldiers/Veterans contacted (service, referral or follow up)	28	43	59	130
Soldiers/Veterans who received a new service or referral	21	25	46	92
Soldiers/Veterans who had follow up or update contacts	25	31	40	96
Soldiers/Veterans where contact attempted but not made	23	6	6	35
Soldiers/Veterans seen in person	2	13	24	39
Family members who received a service, referral or follow up	6	0	7	13

¹ Includes civilian jobs only.² 16 Soldiers/Veterans achieved 2 outcomes: 9 employed + education; 5 employed + volunteering; 2 education + volunteering.³ Currently employed means the last employment assessment indicates that the Soldier/Veteran is employed. However, "current" does not indicate that the status was verified in the current month. The same applies to the education and volunteer information.⁴ In TX, the 13 soldiers have obtained 16 jobs. In CO the 23 soldiers have obtained 31 jobs.⁵ in TX, this figure is the number seen in person since December 2008.

Attachment 3: The essence of NOD's AW2 Careers Demonstration--A Unique Service Model for a Severely Injured Population

NOD's first Career Specialist (CS) told us a revealing story about one of his early home visits to an AW2 veteran:

It was a hot Texas summer day and I found John Doe's small house in a remote area. He was sitting in his living room, the shades closed, the room dark, a gun within reach, a dog at his feet. We talked about his PTSD and what he wanted to do with himself. During this, he mentioned that he could see from his chair's location down the long hall through the house. He frequently saw shadowy figures running toward him, in and out of hall doors along the way. "I know they're not real," he said, "and I won't have to use this gun because my dog is not barking."

(Our CS allowed as to being relieved that the dog had not barked at him when he arrived. He has since helped this veteran enter school and his wife to search for a job.)

Well over half the AW2 population has primary diagnoses of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) or Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)—93% in our AW2-CD caseload in North Carolina—often also with other severe physical injuries (amputations, etc.). And, many entered the Army when young, with few of the civilian experiences and skills today's labor markets value and with few of the coping skills that young adults who did not join the military developed to meet the routine demands of civilian life. While some veterans do well in adjusting to civilian life, many experience financial crisis, marital discord, constant pain, and inadequately addressed PTSD, TBI, depression, and other mental health issues. The results include homelessness, self-medicating with drugs or alcohol, and behaviors (including violence to themselves or others) that sometimes result in incarceration.

Recognizing the complexity of these conditions and that these often young men and women have decades of life before them, top leaders in the military, Veterans Affairs, and other agencies (Admiral Mullen, Brigadier General Sutton, etc.) have recently acknowledged that a "high touch" approach is needed both within the military and in communities to which veterans return. Moreover, they admit, neither DOD nor the VA alone can meet the challenges these populations pose. Rather, a broad array of community resources must be mobilized and applied.

Fortunately, AW2 and NOD are stewards of just such an approach. To successfully serve such a population, AW2 devised—and AW2-CD also adopted—a unique model of services: pro-active, intense, prolonged, "high touch" interpersonal relations between Advocates and CSs, on the one hand, and soldiers/veterans and families on the other. Moreover, Advocates and CSs call on other federal agencies and help communities embrace veterans/families by mobilizing whatever local public or private services are needed.

The key to this model is clearly pro-activity. Normally, when soldiers are medically retired and head for home, they are left to fend for themselves, to find on their own the benefits or services they need and are due from the Veterans Affairs Department and others. Not so for soldiers eligible for AW2 because of the severity of their injuries (30% disability in one area of injury or a total of 50% in more than one). Rather, the new AW2 veterans' names are added by AW2 to the caseload of the Army Advocate (counselor/case manager) serving their home communities—and, when the veterans are ready—also added to the NOD AW2-CD caseloads for career services. Those Advocates and CSs are charged with reaching out and finding the veterans

and establishing supportive relationships. Advocates and CSs do not wait to respond to a phone call or a knock on the door as so many other agency professionals must do; instead they initiate contact by phone, email, and personal visit and begin to make what needs to happen, happen.

It is NOD's sense that, while our CSs are not therapists, the relationship with a caring adult who is always in your corner (and sometimes in your face) is what helps bring these veterans out of their isolation and back into a positive engagement with their families and communities. These Advocates and CSs also find and mobilize and apply various local services; they are the key local coordinating point, the "network tender."

It is further our sense that, for budgetary and other reasons, no other agency providing social and other services to any needful population operates by such a service model at this scale. AW2 and NOD, the Army and DOD, and the Congress, thus have a precious opportunity and responsibility to develop, promote, and, yes, celebrate this model. We believe it is a model that we at NOD can promote to the benefit of the severely disabled not just in the military and not just with veterans but in civilian population groups as well.

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Chairman AKAKA. Thank you very much, Ms. Tymes.

It seems that one of the themes running throughout all of your testimony this morning is mentoring, coaching and hands-on approach to providing assistance. Let me ask each of you to rate this aspect of any program that might be developed in terms of its value and as a factor for success.

Ms. TYMES. I will make a statement on that.

Chairman AKAKA. Ms. Tymes?

Ms. TYMES. Yes. Sir, as far as the effectiveness of our program, it is right now 90 percent. As far as the veterans that we serve and the opportunities that we have assisted the veterans to get, we give individualized services to veterans. As far as the transition from being in the military, as has been stated earlier, into the civilian sector, many of those skill sets, the individual, the veteran, is not aware of what they are.

Because of our education and history and knowledge of the military, we are able to get those skill sets out and come up with resumes that are working resumes, not just a show resume, but something that actually has substance to make that veteran competitive for employment and to also help with any other type of application process, even for education.

Our veterans today are facing a lot of mental problems: PTSD, TBI, or the combination of both. It makes the veterans upset. They get angry. They have a very low temper tolerance, and because of our services, because of our personalized services, we are able to assist the veteran with what needs to get accomplished.

Mr. DANIEL. I concur with—

Chairman AKAKA. Mr. Daniel?

Mr. DANIEL [continuing]. Ms. Helen.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

What I personally experienced was that I was so ashamed when I came home, I just could not really face the reality of wanting to talk to people about my problems. I just did not reach out. And the shame that I felt caused me to react in a lot of ways that I did.

Again, I always thank God for MCVETs because they reached out in a way that no one else ever had. I was literally in prison,

and they had a representative come around. I was in the cell and at that time I knew was facing a whole lot. And that individual came around, and I found out first and foremost, he was a veteran. Number 2, it was long-term—2-year availability to be able to do it. That, to me, is personalized. And once I got there, the counselors welcomed me with open arms.

I still had a lot on my plate at that time. I still had obligations and commitments to the Division of Parole and Probation who allowed me to come out. They went the extra mile to even talk my probation agent and the judge to solidify this one final—and that was how I felt—one final opportunity that I would have in this life to do good. And they gave me my shot. We just have had a wonderful partnership ever since then. That is the effect that it has had on me.

Chairman AKAKA. Mr. Lawton-Belous?

Mr. LAWTON-BELOUS. Mr. Chairman, as a representative of Oracle Corporation, we have found that there are many reasons why we actually do not need to ask for money from the Federal Government to run our Wounded Warrior program—mainly because each wounded warrior we take in is a value-added proposition for Oracle Corporation. They add something to it.

It is a dual mentorship. It is a two-way street on the mentorship role. One is that those who are in the industry need to mentor wounded warriors, soldiers, Marines, veterans coming out of the military to explain to them the career paths. It is a completely different world when you get into the civilian side and understanding it will take some time. There is always that uptick no matter what job you go to where there is a learning curve.

But second, it behooves veterans to mentor those who are mentoring them to show them that this is actually what I learned in the military. This is what I am capable of doing. What we find now is only one-half of 1 percent of the population is actually serving in the wars that we are fighting today, which means that over time—it has already occurred where those who are hiring do not necessarily understand the value-added proposition that service-members can bring to an organization.

That, I believe is the greatest effect of a mentorship program. That way, programs that we have today to help veterans transition out of the military will be more successful when the vast majority of senior to executive level managers are no longer military veterans.

Chairman AKAKA. Captain?

Captain WIKUL. Chairman Akaka, when America Works is racked and stacked against other companies that do similar-type work in the New York area, we consistently rank number 1 in getting people jobs. People come in the door. We give them mentoring. We give them mentoring. We give them interview skills so that we get them an interview, they give the right answers to the right questions so they can get the jobs.

We do not get them the jobs. We get them the interview. They have to get the job, and we coach them in that process. If you are a veteran and you need a suit, we get you a suit. There is a program to get him in a suit.

I have to tell you, just recently within the last 2 weeks, I went to two homeless veteran shelters in New York City to give a motivational speech. Some of these guys are really whipped down and they are broken. And I start talking to them and I try to motivate them. I tell them, "Look, when we are able to help you get a job, you will get back your self respect and dignity. And it will put you on the road to getting an even better job."

So, we go right into the shelters. We talk to them. We give them a speech. And around town, we have a card that says, "Do you need a job? America Works, if you are a New York City resident having difficulty finding employment, call this number and go here. No fee."

We are right in the trenches. We get these people. We bring them in the door. When I first hooked up with this company, what I really found amazing is, you walk in the door at the beginning of the day and it is loaded with people. You have to fight your way in to get to the offices. We went on some sales calls, and I came back about 5 hours later and I said, "Where are all the people?" And they said out on interviews getting jobs.

So, this is what this company does. Against similar companies, we are ranked number 1. We get people jobs. We are right on the streets. We are in the trenches. We go to the homeless veterans shelters. We talk to the people. We mentor them. We bring them out of their shell. We give them the interview skills and a suit necessary to interview, and we push them out there and we help them restore their dignity and self respect so they can become whole people and good American citizens.

Chairman AKAKA. Mr. Ziob?

Mr. ZIOB. In respect to your question, Chairman Akaka, I believe mentorship and internships are very important. Occupational success is typically the combination of your subject matter expertise. You have to be a good nurse, system administrator, electrician, but also know how to navigate the world of work, the changing world of work. It is your aptitude. It is what you know about your job.

The mentorship and the people that are in the trenches can provide that guidance. The difficulty there is they have a day job as well. So we need to free up their time and find the opportunity to connect them, mentor and mentee, in an effective way.

Chairman AKAKA. Thank you.

Senator Murray.

Senator MURRAY. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you to all of our witnesses for your excellent testimony and all the work you are doing out in the real world to help put our veterans to work and bring back the respect and dignity as you have all described.

Mr. Ziob, I am interested in getting your thoughts on a new program that I am working on that would address some of the challenges that you mentioned in your written testimony about veterans as they face transition into civilian employment. I am working on a proposal for a demonstration project between the Departments of Labor, Defense and Veterans Affairs called the Military Pathways Demonstration Program that will really test projects that look at the feasibility of methods to assist veterans with military IT skills while they are entering the civilian IT workforce, be-

cause what we have found is our military are highly IT oriented. There are a lot of technical that they do in the field, but coming home, transitioning that into skills that they can use in the civilian workforce is extremely challenging.

I wanted to ask you, in your experience as an IT employment specialist, can you expand on some of the challenges that you see servicemembers facing as they transition with these IT skills?

Mr. ZIOB. I think the opportunities are indeed plentiful. I mentioned briefly, but I would like to amplify it again. When you think about the role of IT in today's employment, many of us jump immediately to the typical IT job, a database administrator, system administrator, or other typical IT jobs. And I will come back to them in a second.

It is equally important to understand, and, Senator Murray, you alluded to this, literally all jobs as we know them today and definitely tomorrow will have some element of IT technology and skills as well. So, we are talking about two opportunities: one to bring people into quickly growing IT jobs; but also to make sure that the jobs that they are getting are matching the skill set which today will embrace IT technology as well.

Further to your question is the opportunity that arises if they already come with an aptitude or first iteration of understanding of what technology does to make their military job successful, we already made a big step forward. We do not have to teach them that anymore.

Senator MURRAY. Right.

Mr. ZIOB. We typically have to bring them up to speed on how technology moved forward or they might have a more narrow usage of what they do. And that is today relatively easy to be done. We have a vast opportunity of online and instructor training. We typically have the curricula. We have plentiful credentials out there that can be industry-specific like Oracle or Microsoft. They can be vendor independent like from an association like Com Tier. So, the tools that we want and need are probably already at our disposal.

Coming then, all the way back, to what is the last step that is needed? We actually come back again to understand what success, even in an IT-rich job, means, and that has to do with aptitudes and the way you approach your job. If we can combine those two things, I believe we can indeed build very, very effective pathways.

Senator MURRAY. Well, thank you very much.

Mr. Chairman, I do have several other questions. I have to get to another meeting. I will submit them for the record. And, again, I want to thank everybody and, Mr. Chairman, especially you for doing this hearing on a very, very important topic. Thank you.

Chairman AKAKA. Thank you.

Senator Begich?

Senator BEGICH. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Again, I want to echo the comments from the other Members, that we appreciate you all being here and thank you for your testimony; and thank you for showing or describing some of the projects that are working out there and some of the work you all are doing. So, thank you for that.

I want to, if I can, just ask some specific questions to a couple of individuals. One, I want to follow up on America Works just so I understand it.

Is it only in New York at this point?

Captain WIKUL. Oh, no, sir. As I mentioned, it is in other States. We are in North Carolina. We are in New Jersey. We have got offices throughout New York, and they are going to grow to some other areas.

Senator BEGICH. And America Works, on the veterans side of it, where do you see—and you made a great argument, put a million on the table and I can put 200 to work, which I think is great.

Can you tell me what are the biggest challenges you have in expanding the program?

Captain WIKUL. Well, the biggest challenge is actually funding because you need funding to go to a State or a city to actually build a program there to open up an office. So, it is resources.

Senator BEGICH. OK. And when you say that you are performance-based, which I think is very intriguing, when you place them into a position in a job, what is your follow-up, or what do you do after the fact? What is the next stage after they are placed?

Captain WIKUL. What happens is we do not get paid until they are in their job for 3 months, at least 3 months. So, the counselor or the salesperson has to constantly interact with that person in that 3-month period. Then there is some follow-on programs, too. They can come back in. What is really gratifying is to see people—when I was there last week, people coming back in that maybe we have gotten them a job and then they have moved on to another job by themselves. And they come back in after a year and say thank you for getting me back to work.

What happens is—let me give you a quick case in point. I was at one homeless veterans shelter where there was a young man. He served 5 or 6 years in the military, and he was an enlisted man. He became an officer. He got wounded in Iraq, and he had gotten out of the military. He had a high clearance. He was working in the State Department on a contract. He lost his contract, so he thought he would go to New York and check out the opportunities up there.

Well, he could not find a job, and he had IT skills. He had combat skills. He was articulate. He could write well. I mean, he is anybody's dream for employment, and he just could not find a job. He was kind of immobilized and ground down, and here he was in a homeless shelter.

So, after I gave my motivational speech, this guy stuck out like a sore thumb. I said, "Tell me your story." And he told me, "I got an SCI clearance" and all this stuff. So I say, "We are going to get you a job. Here is our card. You come on in the office. We will get you an interview on a job, and once you are working again, you will see other opportunities." And so there is follow-on in the company.

Senator BEGICH. And in that 3-month period, so if they have difficulty on the job, you have some opportunity to keep them kind of focused, and if there are situations that occur in that first 3 months, especially, to ensure that they are reintegrating back into the workforce?

Captain WIKUL. Absolutely. And that is all part of it because the beauty of that performance-based system, if they do not stay for 3 months, nobody gets paid.

Senator BEGICH. Right.

Captain WIKUL. So there is an incentive to make sure that our people stay employed. But beyond that, when you walk into the place, what really amazed me—and the reason—I could have done any job that I wanted to do with my skill set, and I chose them not only because they were performance-based—and they have the metrics because 175,000, for the size of their staff, 175,000 jobs in 25 years is a lot.

But they are a loving company. You walk in the place, and they really exude love. They exude caring. People come in, and the beauty of it is, we assess your potential. We assess all the skills you have, and then the salesperson knows where all the jobs are. So what they do is they take the skills you already possess, match them with an employer who needs those skills, and gets them to work. And that is why we say it is work first. And you can do training and everything later on. Get them into work so they can start getting their dignity and their self-respect back. And when they get that, they are on the road to being whole again.

Senator BEGICH. Very good.

Captain WIKUL. And I think that model works very well, sir.

Senator BEGICH. Very good.

One quick question. Ms. Tymes, if I could ask you, you had mentioned you have about a 90 percent—I do not know if you used the word “satisfaction rate” or “effective rate” I think was the—

Ms. TYMES. That is correct.

Senator BEGICH. How do you measure that effective rate? Is that customer repeat or what is the—

Ms. TYMES. We actually have a research team that evaluates our cases. We have a database which is called Client Track, and all of the information that we get during an intake, during complete follow-up, and during reassessment, we enter in there. Our research team actually keeps that data, and we do a data dump monthly, which goes to all of our funders and to everyone in the AW2 headquarters so that they can see that we are making progress.

Senator BEGICH. Thank you. Thank you very much.

Mr. Chairman, just a quick comment.

Dexter, thank you for your story. You were very good in listing out all the components that made a difference in the sense of your success. So, I just want to thank you personally and also thank you for those very specific points that you made. I appreciate that.

Mr. DANIEL. Thank you.

Senator BEGICH. Mr. Chairman, thank you very much. I have no other questions, but I think this is a very timely hearing as we are moving forward in regards to dealing with the employment, the increasing unemployment of veterans. It is a higher percentage than the national average. So, I want to thank you for holding this hearing and bringing attention to the need of veterans. Thank you.

Chairman AKAKA. Thank you, Senator Begich.

Mr. Daniel, I want to thank you very much for sharing your story with us.

Can you recall what type of employment assistance you received, if any, when you were separating from the service?

Mr. DANIEL. Mr. Chairman, when I did separate immediately, the only avenue that really was open to me at that time that I knew of was to go to the unemployment building. I connected with them right away. I did not connect with a VA counselor at that time. And based on the skill set that I had, that particular counselor thought that I would be best suited perhaps in the financial field since that is what I was trained for. And so I did. I applied, and the assistance that they gave me landed me the first job that I got when I came out of the military.

But, again, my problem, primarily, I could get a job, but I had some underlying issues that I just did not address. Eventually, the focus of being able, as we call it in recovery, to be a functional addict was not good enough. And I was not able to give a hundred percent.

Chairman AKAKA. Yes. I am looking at a point of time just prior to discharge as to how you prepared to move into civilian life and what happens after that discharge. It was mentioned also that there is a compensation that veterans receive, and many of them take it up and as a result, they delay looking for a job. So, these need to be considered as we try to devise methods of getting veterans to work as soon as they are out of service.

Mr. DANIEL. Yes, sir.

Chairman AKAKA. And there is a period in there that we need to look at as to what happens to veterans.

Mr. DANIEL. Exactly.

Chairman AKAKA. And there is a period when they are roaming, let's say, trying to find something, whatever it is they are looking for. This is a focus that we need to look at.

I want to thank all of you for your responses and, of course, your testimony, which will be helpful to us. We need to work together in continuing to find the best ways and methods of trying to help our veterans as soon as they are discharged.

We are certainly grateful to the Secretary for his efforts and for his team as well and for many of the organizations that some of you belong to now, who are on our second panel, who are working successfully in this area. We would like to see what we can do to even expand that to help the veterans.

So, today's hearing excites me as to what we can begin to look at and do to help our veterans. And, of course, on our side, we are looking at this legislatively as to what we can do legislatively to help you with whatever your programs are and also the Department of Labor and their programs.

So, in closing, I, again, thank all of our witnesses for appearing today. We know that there is much to be done in this area. And all of our Nation's veterans who have served honorably deserve to have adequate and accessible resources available to assist them. I am pleased to hear that the President as well as a number of important executive branch agencies and their leadership, some of which Secretary Jefferson mentioned in his testimony, are as committed as I am to ensuring that this is the standard from here on. I appreciate hearing the personal stories of our veterans, and I thank you all for your suggestions on improvements for the future.

As Chairman, I will also continue to hold the Department of Labor and VA, as well as other agencies, accountable for achieving the results and goals they have set forth.

Again, thank you very much for being here today and for helping us in this respect. This hearing is now adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 11:41 a.m., the Committee was adjourned.]

A P P E N D I X

PREPARED STATEMENT OF HON. ROLAND W. BURRIS, U.S. SENATOR FROM ILLINOIS

Thank you Mr. Chairman, I would like to begin by extending a “Warm Welcome” to our distinguished guests, as well as fellow colleagues from the Committee. Moreover, I would like to say that it is especially nice too see Secretary Jefferson again.

Mr. Chairman, not withstanding Veterans medical care, one of my most important priorities is Veterans employment as well as the subsequent transitional programs which help to mitigate their burdens and reduce homelessness within this community of our Nation’s hero’s.

With this in mind, I would like to share a few appalling facts with the Committee. Currently in Chicago, approximately 1000 Veterans are homeless on any given night. Moreover, it is estimated that more than 131,000 Veterans are homeless on every night in the U.S. and nearly twice as many experience homelessness at some point during the year. This is of course directly linked to the employment challenges that many Veterans’ face and I find this Simply Unacceptable!

A 2005 VA report found about 20,000 permanent housing beds and 10,000 transitional beds are needed to help homeless veterans. Recommendations endorsed by the Chicago and national homeless coalitions include funding 20,000 Section 8 vouchers for the HUD-Veterans Affairs Supported Housing Program.

Among programs that work to serve an estimated 18,000 Chicago-land veterans is St. Leo’s Residence for Veterans. It opened its doors in 2007, and is now home to 141 residents who have access to the adjacent health and employment center.

St. Leo Transitional program is a proven concept model that helps reestablish Veterans back into society by providing them the tools they need to become an active and productive member of the work force and local community.

This past November 3rd, Secretary Shinseki unveiled a plan to end veterans’ homelessness in five years, saying that “the VA will spend \$3.2 billion next year to reduce homelessness among veterans”.

I agree with Secretary Shinseki’s initiative and applaud his efforts to focus the VA’s efforts on getting homeless veterans off the streets; however I want to prevent them from ever becoming homeless in the first place through employment initiative programs as well as transitional assistance programs, such as the example shown at St. Leo’s.

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