



March 5, 2019

The Honorable Frank Pallone, Jr.  
Chairman  
U.S. House Energy and Commerce Committee  
2125 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Greg Walden  
Ranking Member  
U.S. House Energy and Commerce Committee  
2322A Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Jan Schakowsky  
Chairman  
U.S. House Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Communications and Technology  
2125 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Cathy McMorris  
Ranking Member  
U.S. House Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Communications and Technology  
2322A Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Pallone and Ranking Member Walden, Chairman Schakowsky, and Ranking Member McMorris,

As a post-9/11 Navy veteran I experienced a difficult transition from active-duty. I was unaware of what resources, if any, existed to help guide my career decision-making. I enrolled in college to gain an education in a career field separate from my military job. There wasn't a veteran group or focus for me at my University, and I felt lost and alone in a post-9/11 world. I was so uncomfortable in the traditional classroom that I transitioned to distance learning. I stuck out like a sore thumb. I would compare it to feeling as though I had been held back a few grades, now being an older, unfamiliar student amongst recent high-school graduates. No one knew how to talk to me, and I didn't know how to talk to them.

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After graduating I spent more than 10 years as a Technical Recruiter, working for six different companies. It took years to fit in and find my niche. At every company I worked for, all highly technical, I couldn't successfully implement a veteran hiring initiative. It wasn't for a lack of strong effort or determination. It wasn't a priority for the business. This created a void that I needed to fill. I felt undervalued and my potential was capped at much lower level than I was comfortable with. Countless veterans and spouses feel this way. I began volunteering as a professional mentor to help fellow veterans and military spouses find meaningful careers.

Through mentorship, I found my true purpose. It became my goal to build my own business that would pair the power of mentorship with full-lifecycle technical recruitment. I would ensure that free mentorship services would be provided to every active-duty service-member, veteran, military spouse, and gold-star family member, and personally see that they were well-matched to careers that were meaningful to them. My veteran-owned, woman-owned small business launched full-time on July 1, 2018. Since then, we have mentored every day, and matched veterans and spouses to meaningful careers every week. At Military Talent Partners, we work with all veterans from all branches, across all ranks, of both enlisted and commissioned.

In addition to my personal experience, I have personally witnessed the daily struggles of over 3,000 transitioning military service-members, veterans, and their spouses since 2016. The commonality they share, regardless of rank or service, is that they are not prepared to transition into a civilian career. While the military provides transition assistance, it is not the military's priority to equip its members with skills outside of their military commitment. Transition Assistance Program (TAP) classes are designed to prepare them to understand and utilize their benefits as they become veterans. They are given outdated resume templates and maybe a quick glance of machine-matched jobs that they may or may not actually qualify for, or be interested in.

Underemployment is a major concern for veterans and military spouses, more so than unemployment. Lack of a meaningful career can lead to feeling undervalued, loss of impact and mission-focus. A derivative of this problem in an extreme case is that a failed transition can contribute to the statistic of 22 suicides a day amongst veterans. A lesser example being a hostile work environment, or unemployment.

Military Spouses on the other hand face massive unemployment issues. 52% of spouses were unemployed last year. Transitioning from the military takes BAH (housing allowance) off the table and creates the need for a two-income household. Military Spouses often have gaps in employment, or are seen as "job-hoppers," who suffer in a competitive job market and interview process. This is one example of many barriers to meaningful employment that Military Spouses face. There are extenuating

stereotypes spouses face outside of this example including being seen only as homemakers, when in reality, they are degreed, technically-competent candidates. They are assumed to be female only. Although there are many male military spouses who support their family while their spouse serves. We have a lot of work to do for our force behind the force.

In today's job market, if you were to sit a newly separated veteran beside a recent college graduate in an interview, the hiring manager is far more likely to hire the recent college graduate. A recent graduate is seen as a blank slate - highly trainable, moldable, and more likely to quickly acclimate to the corporate culture. Veterans however, are often seen as rigid, stiff, or "set in their ways," making them more difficult to train. Overcoming these stereotypes in a technical career can be impossible. But it is necessary to effect change and to enhance employment opportunities for veterans.

Diversity and inclusion are more popular now than ever before – and that's a wonderful accomplishment. The definition of diversity often stops with women, minorities, and people with disabilities. Veterans are overlooked as being a diverse group and that is a dialogue that needs widespread empowerment.

Tax incentives for hiring post-9/11 veterans in transition are not widely known. There must be more education and knowledge sharing of these incentives. They can't be leveraged if no one knows about them. This is the same with DoD Skill bridge programs. Employers need to know what opportunities exist in order to consider taking advantage of these benefits.

Military Talent Partners has created an online career accelerator for anyone in a career transition. Designed with military transition for active duty, veterans and spouses in mind, it's accessible from anywhere in the world on their own schedule. Collaborative group participation drives the focus of the program, alongside six power-packed lessons that will better prepare any participant to gain a meaningful career post military. It is our hope that this will enhance the value of existing TAP classes and better equip our veterans and spouses to command their own success after the service.

The more support we show our military and spouse community as they transition into civilianhood, the more we empower their future. We have the ability to diversify and grow our nation's workforce by sharing knowledge of resources available to the service-members and spouses as well as the benefits available for companies to take advantage of. While our program is just one program, launched by a small business, we are making a big difference every day. That proof of concept shows that change can be made, and that the need is there. Political influence and government support can vastly impact the progress made for our service-members and their families. The resources exist, the benefits have been approved, but the message hasn't yet been heard. Including veterans in the diversity

conversation will bridge the gap in understanding and uncover the limitless potential that lives in this minority.

In closing, I want to convey that by better preparing veterans and spouses for successful transition, we are investing in a stronger future – not just for them as they have more than earned it, but for our country. Veterans in our workforce are a win-win for the American economy as they are strong leaders, creators, and hard-workers who will fulfill the goals of any business, across all industries, and locations to best serve the mission at hand. I hope that you as members of the House Energy and Commerce Committee find this argument from a veteran minority helpful in conducting your hearing on Inclusion in Tech: How Diversity Affects All Americans.

Very Respectfully,

Natalie Oliverio

Founder + CEO, Military Talent Partners