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# Hiring Our Heroes

U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation

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## Statement of Hiring Our Heroes, U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation

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**ON:** "Veterans Serving Veterans: The Impact of America's  
Businesses on Veteran Employment and Opportunity"

**TO:** U.S. House Committee on Veterans' Affairs

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

**DATE:** November 7, 2023

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

**"Veterans Serving Veterans: The Impact of America's Businesses on  
Veteran Employment and Opportunity"**

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

Good afternoon, Chairman Bost, Ranking Member Takano, and distinguished members of the Committee. My name is Eric Eversole and I am the president of Hiring Our Heroes and a vice president at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. I also am a retired Captain in the U.S. Navy Reserve, Judge Advocate General's Corps.

Hiring Our Heroes (HOH) is a national, grassroots organization committed to serving veterans, transitioning service members, and military spouses. Founded in 2011 as part of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation, we provide a full range of tools and resources to connect the military community with meaningful careers.

Since 2011, we have served more than one million members of the military community. There is no "one size fits all" approach to finding meaningful careers. We work to understand the unique needs and deliver best in class events and programs. No matter where or when, we stand ready to serve the employment needs of the military community.

HOH is a program of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit affiliate of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. The U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation harnesses the power of business to create solutions for the good of America and the world. It anticipates, develops, and deploys solutions to challenges facing communities—today and tomorrow.

## Employment Landscape for Veterans and Military Spouses

### *Veteran Employment Landscape*

In 2011, the United States faced a crisis in veteran unemployment. As the nation started to wind down military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, there were hundreds of thousands of transitioning service members—most of whom were under the age of 25—returning home from war zones and finding a difficult job market. Young veterans especially struggled as their unemployment rate soared to 30%.

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation leapt into action. For our part, we launched HOH, leveraging our state and local chambers and relationships with business community. Other companies and organizations, like JP Morgan Chase & Co. and Syracuse University, followed suit by creating veteran-focused hiring and training programs. The federal government also undertook significant efforts. Led by the White House and its Joining Forces campaign, federal agencies made veteran employment a top priority.

This joint private/public sector effort yielded significant dividends. Within a few short years, post-9/11 veteran unemployment was cut in half from 12.1%<sup>1</sup> to 5.8% in 2015.<sup>2</sup> Veterans under the age of 25 saw a more dramatic decrease. Their unemployment rate dropped from 30.2% in 2011<sup>1</sup> to 13.0% by the end of 2015.<sup>2</sup> These trends have continued as veteran unemployment remains at historic lows of 3.0% or below.

Perhaps more impressive was the paradigm shift in how veterans found employment prior to leaving military service. For decades, most military members began to search for employment after leaving service, forcing many of them to rely upon unemployment compensation (UCX) as their transition safety net. Many would spend months, if not years, trying to find the right career. The economic and societal costs were staggering.

Chart A represents the annual number of UCX claims filed by newly transitioned service members since 1985. As the chart shows, military members have long relied upon UCX as part of their transition, especially after significant military operations like Iraq and Afghanistan. This fact was evidenced below as more than two million UCX claims were filed by newly

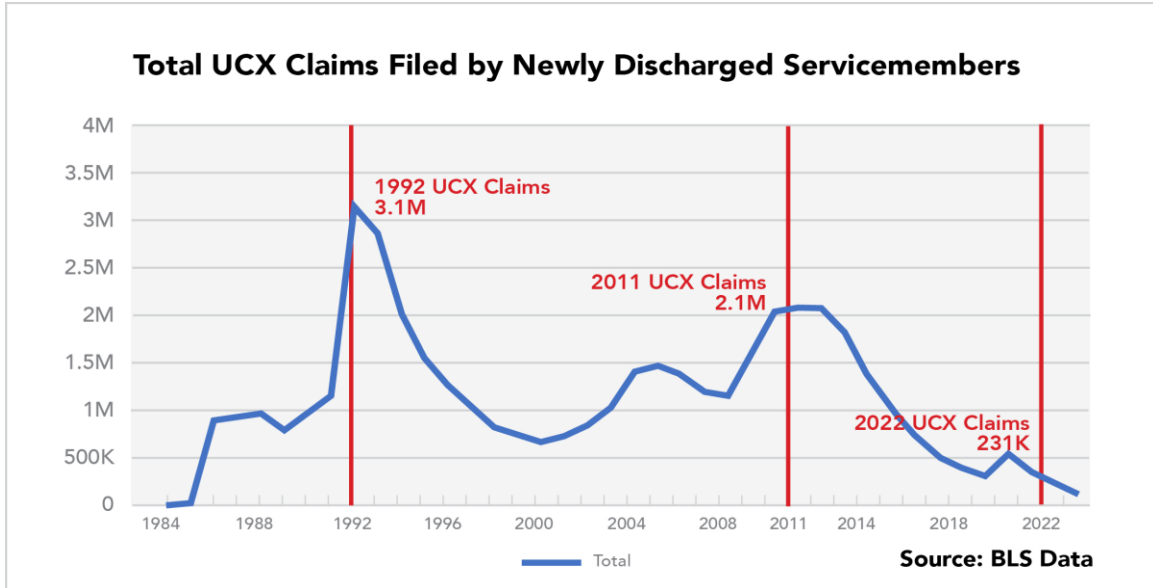
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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of Labor (2012, March 20). *Employment Situation of Veteran-2011*. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Retrieved November 1, 2023, from [https://www.bls.gov/news.release/archives/vet\\_03202012.pdf](https://www.bls.gov/news.release/archives/vet_03202012.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Department of Labor (2016, March 22). *Employment Situation of Veteran-2015*. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Retrieved November 1, 2023, from [https://www.bls.gov/news.release/archives/vet\\_03222016.pdf](https://www.bls.gov/news.release/archives/vet_03222016.pdf)

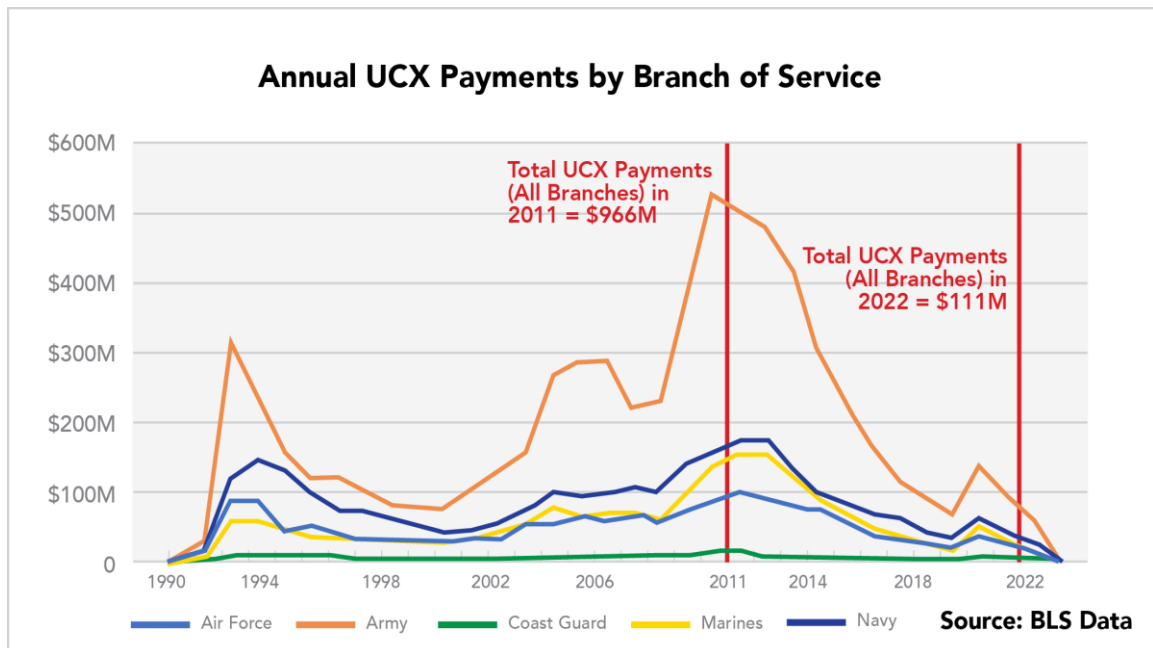
transitioned veterans in 2011. By 2022, the number of claims dropped to an historic low of 231,000—a 9-fold reduction since 2011.

**Chart A.**



Not surprisingly, the reduction in UCX claims saved the Department of Defense millions in costs. The total amount of UCX compensation dropped from \$966 million in 2011 to \$111M in 2022.

**Chart B.**



The importance of this shift in UCX cannot be overstated. Beyond the financial savings to the military, it underscores the speed and efficiency in which many transitioning service members find new careers. It demonstrates a shift in how military members plan for transition and how quickly they find employment. It also highlights why pre-transition employment programs are so important to the Department of Defense.

### *Military Spouse Employment Landscape*

Unfortunately, our country has not witnessed the same improvement for military spouses. For too long, military spouses have faced double digit unemployment rates. That trend continues today as military spouses face an unemployment rate of 21%, leaving too many military families with the economic realities caused by a single income. For many, it is forcing them to decide between continued military service or leaving service for two incomes.

This latter fact was evidenced by the recent Blue Star Families Military Family Lifestyle Survey.<sup>3</sup> That survey indicated that military spouse employment was a top concern for military families at 48%. This point was further made by the 2023 Army engagement survey indicating that 27.4% of soldiers intend to leave because of the impact of Army life on their significant other's career plans and goals.<sup>4</sup>

## **Evolution of HOH and Overview of Programs**

HOH focused its early efforts on connecting unemployed veterans to employers in local communities. Leveraging our broad network of state and local chambers, as well as our network of employers, we hosted nearly 800 hiring events in three years. Our mission, at least in those early years, was focused on solving widespread unemployment and underemployment.

As veteran unemployment eased, HOH shifted its strategic and programmatic focus in three important ways. First, we moved "left of transition" by providing more services to on-base military populations. That included both transitioning service members and military spouses. Second, we transformed our hiring events to provide much needed career advice and job search

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<sup>3</sup> Blue Star Families (2023). *Military Family Lifestyle Survey 2023*. Retrieved November 1, 2023, from <https://bluestarfam.org/research/mfls-survey-release-2023/>

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Department of the Army (2023). *Career Engagement Survey Third Annual Report*. Retrieved November 1, 2023, from [https://talent.army.mil/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/DACES-Third-Annual-Report\\_Final.pdf](https://talent.army.mil/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/DACES-Third-Annual-Report_Final.pdf)

training from industry experts. Finally, we invested heavily in providing internships for both transitioning service members and military spouses.

Much of our early evolution started with the creation and execution of Career Summits. Working closely with our private and public sector partners, including the Army, Joint Forces, the Department of Veterans Affairs, and the Department of Labor, HOH re-imagined hiring events to better serve transitioning service members. These events not only created an environment where transitioning service members, especially junior military personnel, could connect with employers across industries, it provided them an opportunity to learn best practices for landing a job. In their simplest form, these summits opened the aperture for service members to think more broadly about their abilities and value to civilian employers.

HOH hosted its first Career Summit in early 2014 on Ft. Bliss, Texas, and since that time, has hosted more than 186 Summits serving nearly 70,000 active duty service members and military spouses. We are honored to work closely with the Department of Defense, all branches of the military, and local base leadership to execute these events. In our view, they are the hallmark of private/public partnership and serve as a critical connection point for the military community.

That same year, HOH was one of the first organizations to implement a SkillBridge program, providing internship opportunities to transitioning service members at Joint Base Lewis-McChord. Our SkillBridge program, known as the Corporate Fellowship Program, provided transitioning service members with a 12-week internship with companies for on-the-job training and an opportunity to showcase their soft skills. With an 85% offer rate for our fellows and an average salary of more than \$100,000, it is not surprising that the program now serves more than 2,000 service members each year.

HOH also hosts industry-focused virtual hiring events for veterans, transitioning service members and military spouses. Launched in response to COVID-19, these virtual events are supported by Brazen, a virtual hiring event platform provider, and help connect members of the military community with military-ready employers. These events have greatly expanded HOH's reach into the military regardless of an attendee's geographic location.

While all of our programs, events, and resources are open to military spouses, we know that military spouses face unique challenges and thus we offer unique programs to meet their needs. The transitory nature of military life

often creates long periods of unemployment and/or underemployment. Work opportunities are further limited by issues associated with childcare, remote duty locations, state licensing requirements, and status of force agreements (SOFAs).

To meet these challenges, HOH has created a suite of programs and training geared toward military spouses. In 2017, we launched Amplify—a career-intensive workshop tailored to military spouses who are re-entering the workforce or looking for a career change. Amplify attendees spend two full days in career development workshops and interactive sessions, focusing on public/professional speaking, salary negotiations, networking skills, personal branding, interview techniques, and military spouse entrepreneurial options. Amplify has become an incredibly important tool as more and more military spouses, 92% of whom are women, return to work after the pandemic.

HOH also manages the nation’s largest network of career-focused military spouses as part of our Military Spouse Professional Network. That network—tens of thousands strong—provides vital peer-to-peer support to military spouses in more than 60 locations. It not only provides professional connections around the world but also brings employment leads and ongoing professional development at the installation level to these communities. By fostering these networks, we have created a sense of belonging among military spouses that enables them to navigate the challenges of their unique lifestyle with resilience and success.

More recently, HOH helped to launch an internship pilot for active duty military spouses in collaboration with the Department of Defense (DoD) and Deloitte. That pilot, known as the Military Spouse Career Accelerator Pilot (MSCAP), provides military spouses with a 12-week internship modeled after our Fellows Program. While the program is still a pilot, we have seen incredible impact thus far and look forward to continuing the program in the future.

Finally, HOH developed and launched an upskilling program with the support of Google in 2021. That program, known as Career Forward, allows learners to develop industry-recognized skillsets and earn an industry-validated credential at no cost to the veteran, service members or military spouse. Current Google Career Certificates include data analytics, IT support, project management, user experience (UX) design, digital marketing & e-commerce, and cybersecurity. Once these certificates are completed, HOH works to connect completers with ready-to-hire employers.

## Impact of HOH Programs

2023 has been a year of growth and impact for HOH. Coming off the heels of COVID-19, it is the first full year our teams have been able to engage populations in-person and without the significant limitations created by the pandemic. This year, we have worked closely with military installations to host Career Summits and provide internship opportunities as part of our Fellows Program. We also continued to grow our digital hiring events and online Google certificate program, reaching deeper into the military community regardless of an individual's duty station. Finally, we expanded our impact for military spouses by hosting more Amplify training events, as well as hiring events, and launched the highly successful internship pilot known as MSCAP.

### *1. Career Summits*

Career Summits continue to serve as an important employment gateway for transitioning service members and military spouses. Not only do these on-base events allow attendees to connect with and be hired by military ready employers, but they also provide attendees with an opportunity to explore career pathways, hone their jobseeker skills, and learn about employment services being provided by HOH and other private and public sector partners.

Our Career Summits have rebounded fully since the pandemic and saw steady growth in attendance and impact in 2023. Thus far in 2023, we have hosted 38 events on military installations across the world, including events in Germany and Great Britain, and served more than 9,100 transitioning service members and military spouses. Additionally, more than 1,000 employers have attended these events and extended more than 7,500 job offers.

### *2. Virtual Hiring Events*

Created out of necessity during COVID, virtual hiring events allow us to reach deeper into the military community regardless of an individual's duty location. These industry focused events, much like our Career Summits, not only provide attendees with an opportunity to connect with employers but allows them to open their aperture on a wide array of companies and career paths.

Year to date in 2023, we have hosted 31 events with 393 employers and more than 12,500 attendees. Importantly, these employers have referred 83%



of the candidates to “next steps” in their companies’ hiring process—i.e., either an interview, candidate pipeline or individual screen.

Much of our success is due to the individualized approach we take with virtual event attendees. Each of the 12,500+ candidates are screened by our “Career Connectors” prior to the event. This team of subject matter experts reviews each candidate’s resume, provides advice, and, when helpful, referrals to other programs to improve a candidate’s profile. This year, Career Connectors have made more than 54,600 referrals to other nonprofit and government agencies.

### *3. Fellows Program*

SkillBridge and our Fellows Program is one of the most important, if not the most important, transition programs available to transitioning service members. It provides an experiential bridge to showcase a service member’s soft skills—e.g., leadership, communication, problem-solving—and helps to ensure the right fit and job level. Additionally, as most jobs are secured through networking, the program focuses on building much needed civilian networks to support smooth transitions to careers in the private sector.

Since 2014, we have seen an exponential growth of our Fellows program, from one location (Joint Base Lewis McChord) to a program meeting the needs of transitioning service members around the globe. This year alone, we hosted nearly 2,400 active duty who came from and/or were stationed at more than 100 different military locations, both in the United States and around the world.

The impact of the program is undeniable. Over the last four years, we have hosted more than 7,500 fellows with more than 1,000 employers. Eighty-eight percent of those fellows have received a job offer within three months, and the average salary has been more than \$100,000. This year has been no exception with 2,398 active duty service members participating in the Fellows Program.

Our internal data further underscores the importance of SkillBridge. In a survey conducted in 2022, which included both SkillBridge participants and non-participants, SkillBridge participants were far more likely to find transition to be “easy or very easy” (40% compared to 25%) and report positive employment outcomes within three months of transition (79% compared to 58%). SkillBridge participants also were more likely to report positive reasons

for taking a first job (e.g., “it was a great opportunity” versus “I didn’t feel like I had a choice”) as compared the non-participants.

#### *4. Military Spouse Programs*

Military spouse employment is a top priority for HOH as military spouses continue to face a 21% unemployment rate. While the challenges are many, HOH has taken a comprehensive approach to military spouse employment by focusing on localized, more personalized approach to spouse employment. We provide military spouses with a range of tools and resources, as well as connections to companies, to help them be successful. This year alone, Amplify has served 2,283 military spouses, with 79% of attendees reporting favorable job outcomes within 90 days of the event.

To compliment the Amplify program, our team provides a yearlong calendar of virtual and in-person hiring events focused solely on connecting military spouses to American businesses. This year we have hosted over a dozen of these hiring events with nearly 2,000 military spouse job seekers resulting in 83% being hired or referred to next steps—i.e., interviews, placement in a talent pipeline or next-level candidate screening.

Our work on the military spouse internship pilot (“Military Spouse Career Accelerator Pilot” or MSCAP), in collaboration with the Department of Defense and Deloitte, has yielded significant results over the last 10 months. This pioneering three-year initiative, funded by the DoD, has established a pivotal linkage between military spouses and coveted 12-week fellowships, connecting them with employers actively seeking to augment their workforce with exceptional talent. Since its inception in late December, the program has ushered nearly 400 military spouses into internships and an offer rate, thus far, of more than 83%. Perhaps more importantly, more than 60% of the internships have been remote, creating longer-term employment solutions for military spouses.

#### *5. Career Forward*

Career Forward—our certificate training program sponsored by Google—is creating unprecedented pathways for transitioning service members, veterans, and military spouses. As noted above, Career Forward provides members of the military community with the ability to earn certificates in high-demand industries. The training, along with wraparound support, is 100% virtual and provided at no cost to the enrollee.

In two short years of existence, the program has enrolled 8,000 members of the military community. Nearly 50% have completed their certificates and 1,500 have already received a positive job outcome as a result of the new certificate, such as a promotion with their current employer or placement with a new employer. The top two certificates are project management and data analytics.

## **Looking Forward**

### *1. Importance of Internships*

Programs like SkillBridge and the new MSCAP program are instrumental to achieving our mission and to the military community. Over the last decade, HOH and our private and public sector partners have worked to promote and highlight the value proposition of military talent. Collectively, we have made great progress and fundamentally shifted how military members prepare for transition and how companies view military talent.

Notwithstanding this shift, the need for experiential bridges, like SkillBridge, will remain constant because most service members rely upon their “soft skills”—i.e., interpersonal skills like leadership, communication, listening, problem solving—as their most transferrable skillset. While such skills are prized in corporate America, they are difficult to evaluate without seeing them first-hand. This is especially true for more senior members of the military, especially those retiring, as they lack civilian networks and the industry-specific skills needed to be considered for roles commensurate with their military experience. Programs like SkillBridge allow service members to illustrate their value and provide a risk-free opportunity for assessment for both the service member and a company.

For many of these same reasons, MSCAP serves a critical need for military spouses who are seeking a career change or who quit a job due to a move. The struggles faced by military spouses have long been known. Frequent moves, gaps in work history, and residing in economically underserved and remote locales make it difficult for military spouses to find a job or one at the right level. Programs like MSCAP solve these challenges by getting their foot in the door with employers, allowing them to show their incredible soft skills, work ethic and commitment. From there, hiring decisions are easy.

## 2. *Solving Military Spouse Unemployment and Underemployment*

The challenges faced by military spouses as they search for meaningful careers must be a national priority. For too long, military spouses have faced high unemployment and underemployment rates. Not only does this create near-term economic challenges for military spouses and their families, but the impacts of unemployment are often cumulative, resulting in their inability to plan for, save for, and be ready for retirement.

For many military families, military spouse employment—and the need for two consistent incomes—is forcing them to make tough decisions about continued service. That fact was highlighted by a White House statement in early 2023, noting 1 in 5 military families cite challenges with spousal employment as a reason for considering leaving active duty service.<sup>5</sup> The Army’s engagement survey reached a similar result, indicating that 25% of soldiers intend to leave because of the impact of Army life on their significant other’s career plans and goals.<sup>4</sup>

While much has been accomplished over the last 10 years, much more must be done to provide military spouses with meaningful career pathways. HOH is committed to working with a broad array of private and public sector partners to tackle these challenges.

## 3. *More Individualized Service and Better Data Through Collaboration*

For the last decade, HOH has worked to be more strategic in its approach and provide more personalized approach to transition. We discovered long ago that there is no one size fits all approach to transition. Nor is there any one organization that can meet every need.

Our internal data shows that transitioning service members often use a web of resources as they transition. Many will leverage one organization for resume assistance while leveraging our programs to connect with employers through Career Summits or the Fellows. Many others benefit from mentorship programs or upskilling programs prior to be directly placed with an employer. By working together, HOH and these organizations will be more effective and efficient in their provision of services.

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<sup>5</sup> The White House (2023, June 9). *Executive Order on Advancing Economic Security for Military and Veteran Spouses, Military Caregivers, and Survivors*. The White House Briefing Room. Retrieved November 1, 2023, from <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2023/06/09/executive-order-on-advancing-economic-security-for-military-and-veteran-spouses-military-caregivers-and-survivors/>

As HOH continues to evolve, we believe these strategic partnerships will be critical to our success. By sharing information and resources, we will be able to better understand the core needs of our constituents and provide a customizable approach to their transition and career journeys. In the end, it will make us far more impactful and allow us to better serve the military community.

## **Conclusion**

Over the last twelve years, Hiring Our Heroes has been proud to serve our veterans, transitioning service members, and military spouses in local communities throughout the United States and abroad and to do so with a wide array of private and public sector partners. And with more than 200,000 service members making the transition off active duty annually, there is always more work that needs to be done.

Hiring Our Heroes remains wholly committed to the mission of connecting veterans and military spouses with meaningful career opportunities and is honored to serve on the front line of this movement. We will continue to unite our partners in our common mission as we work together to continue to achieve fundamental change in the veteran and military spouse employment landscape.

Chairman Bost, Ranking Member Takano, and members of the Committee, I thank you again for the opportunity to testify and look forward to answering your questions.