

**Statement of Vice Admiral Joseph Kernan (U.S. Navy, Ret.)  
Chairman, NS2 Serves**

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Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity  
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Chairman Wenstrup, Ranking Member Takano and Members of the Subcommittee. My name is Joseph Kernan. I am a retired U.S. Navy Vice Admiral – having spent over 36 years on active duty. I am currently the Senior Vice President of Corporate Development and Marketing for SAP National Security Services. But I am here today to testify in my other role as Chairman of NS2 Serves, a non-profit training and employment program for veterans.

It is an honor to appear before you today to talk about an issue that is very important to me – the successful transitioning of our military service members into the civilian workplace. As you will see today, I am very passionate about this topic and this subcommittee has my heartfelt thanks for its continued work in assisting veterans returning home.

My commitment to this issue stems from my years serving in the US Navy. After graduating from the US Naval Academy in 1977, I spent my years on active duty developing deep experience in naval, joint and special operations and in government interagency and national security matters. After serving at sea on Navy warships for 4 years, I transitioned to the SEAL program in 1981 and served in each of six geographic regions and in all Naval Special Warfare leadership career milestone positions. These include commanding SEAL Team Two, the Naval Special Warfare Development Group and the Naval Special Warfare Command – overseeing all resourcing, readiness and employment requirements for the SEAL/Naval Special Warfare community. I recommissioned and served as Commander of the United States Fourth Fleet, overseeing US and foreign counterpart naval activities in the Caribbean and Central and South America – my final career tours were as the Senior Military Assistant to former Defense Secretary Robert Gates and Deputy Commander, US Southern Command.

### **Today's veteran**

Veterans have chosen to devote a portion of their lives to public service. During their service, they develop a wide variety of work and life skills that are invaluable in the civilian workplace. The challenge of translating these skills when applying for a job or at the workplace is often daunting for the aforementioned veteran population. These young men and women do not want a handout, but rather an opportunity for a fresh start in post-military life and a chance for a fulfilling career. Unquestionably, this can help mitigate many of the personal challenges veterans face as a result of the traumas they may have experienced in conflict zones.

The commercial information technology field is ideally suited to veterans, regardless of their military occupational specialty. For example, service men and women routinely use commercial technology to manage mission planning, human resource management, systems operations and maintenance, and supply chain and financial management functions common in the commercial business sector. This, combined with the generational trend to leverage technology for everyday activities, ideally suits veterans for work in the I.T. field. It is important for employers to understand that veterans not

only serve our country's national security interests but as well must run the day-to-day business of the Department of Defense.

The personal traits and attributes developed over the course of service in the military are truly the extraordinary commercial work place differentiators. From the very start of their military service, young men and women are instilled with a strong sense of character and develop invaluable work traits:

**1. Veterans strive to be leaders.**

In the military, leadership is continually fostered to the point of becoming an ingrained attribute. Veterans respect and understand the roles of leaders and willingly accept and seek leadership opportunities. Very importantly, there is a clear understanding of the preeminent responsibility of those entrusted with leadership roles. They learn from some of this nation's best leaders – allowing these veterans to become successful leaders themselves.

**2. Veterans know how to work as a team.**

Working successfully in a team is an essential attribute in an effective workplace. It is also the foundation on which safe and successful military operations are conducted. Veterans have developed an uncompromising responsibility to their peers, subordinates and superiors alike. Veterans have learned to work indifferently and respectfully with teammates and co-workers, regardless of race, gender, religion, ethnicity and national origin. They understand that there is “no ‘I’ in team” and that success is invariably related to their collective efforts. While military duties stress teamwork and group productivity, they also build individuals who are able to perform independently when the situation demands it.

**3. Veterans are trained to quickly learn new skills and concepts.**

While in the service, members of the military are continually trained in a multitude of cross-functional skills and routinely become adept at mastering the tools that enable success. The demand for both administrative and occupational skills is high, and the ability to quickly adapt to dynamic operational environments or emerging technology enhancements is essential to mission success. The risk and dire consequences of complacency are well understood by every veteran.

**4. Veterans are mission/goal oriented.**

In the military, the mission is paramount. Veterans have been trained to plan extensively for a particular task and adapt to the circumstances they face during mission execution. Their sense of duty, responsibility and accountability for job performance and mission success are not compromised and remain priorities. The culture, leadership and proficiency within our military are respected and envied around the world.

**5. Veterans excel in high stress situations.**

In today's fast paced work environment, having the ability to persevere under difficult or stressful circumstances is critical. Veterans are trained and expected to perform under

stress, accomplishing assigned tasks in a timely and effective manner. They learn to do so with the resources at hand.

**6. Veterans are highly effectively in a structured environment.**

Companies may hesitate to hire a veteran, believing their military experiences don't translate to a corporate setting. To the contrary, veterans have a deep sense of accountability and they understand how policies and procedures are necessary for stability, safety, and productivity. They are able to follow rules and schedules, and value organization and discipline.

**7. Veterans have strong communication skills.**

Finally, regardless of varying intellectual and physical abilities, each individual is respected for his or her role in the organization. Military personnel are taught to have a questioning and thoughtful mentality, and they are not afraid to respectfully offer perspective and recommendations to supervisors.

**NS2 Serves**

In order to help address the challenge of unemployment among young veterans, SAP National Security Services Inc. ® (SAP NS2®) - an independent subsidiary of SAP SE, comprised of U.S. citizens operating on U.S. soil - established a non-profit organization in 2014, NS2 Serves, to train and find employment for veterans in high-tech careers. SAP NS2 is the predominant funder for this program – but we continue to look for partners within the business and philanthropic community.

Through this program, predominantly targeting enlisted men and women from all military services and skill specialties, we arm graduates with SAP technology certifications and other attributes highly sought by commercial human resource managers and others in the technology arena. The NS2 Serves program is unique in nature and there are a number of key distinguishers worth mentioning. I have attached a document to my statement with specific details and qualifications for the NS2 Serves program - but let me highlight them for you today.

- First, the program specifically targets enlisted men and women rather than the officer corps, who tend to have far fewer problems finding post-service employment. Unemployment continues to plague many veterans once they leave the military, particularly in the case of enlisted men and women between the ages of 25 and 34. The Bureau of Labor Statistics reported in 2014 that the unemployment rate for veterans was 25 percent higher than the nonveteran unemployment rate - and that statistic has stayed fairly consistent over time. Unlike veteran hiring programs marketed by many companies, which as well have many benefits, NS2 Serves targets younger veterans who have recently left military service or are in the process of leaving the military and are most challenged finding substantive employment. Despite their years of dedicated service, younger veterans are struggling to secure full time, substantive career opportunities to support themselves and their families.

- Second, the program is an in-resident, fully funded, 11-week program that leverages veterans' penchant for teamwork. By having an in-resident program, participants can collectively help each other in the transition and through the challenging academic regimen without other day-to-day demands and distractions associated with commuter or part-time programs. Invariably, participants develop strong friendships and personal commitment to the success of every member of the class. Many hours are spent outside the classroom studying to ensure this goal is met. Ultimately, the class measures their individual success by the success of the entire class.
- Third, each graduate receives a highly valued industry consultant certification and skill set which, to date, has afforded 100% job placement and a minimum starting salary of \$60K, inclusive of family medical and retirement benefits. Select companies that have hired our veterans include: SAP NS2, SAP, Accenture Federal, US Department of Agriculture, Deloitte, Lockheed Martin, Northrop Grumman, CBeyondata, Johnson Technology Systems, Inc., Defense Logistics Agency, Naval Supply Systems Command, and Unisys. The certification that the graduates receive to support SAP software offers them vast employment opportunities within the government and in the private sector. Thousands of companies and organizations worldwide utilize SAP products and require support from trained consultants.
- Fourth, and finally, the program training positions graduates not only for a career in the IT field but also equips them with the relevant skills necessary to branch into many other lines of work. A veteran's military service and military experience - coupled with the NS2 Program training - affords employers with a devoted employee that can become a highly productive member of an organization.

The average NS2 Serves class size ranges from 19 – 23 veterans. By the end of this week, we will have graduated 100 veterans and to date, have successfully helped 100 percent of our graduates gain employment. Our cost per graduate of the program is approximately \$15,000 and we feel this is a worthwhile investment in our nation's veterans.

The NS2 Serves program metric is not about gross numbers of veterans hired into any jobs or numbers hired that have deep military, industry or educational backgrounds. The program targets those with the greatest need, provides them with a high demand, career-centric skill set, and then places graduates in jobs that start careers. The program's success requires all of these components.

## **Recommendations for the increased hiring of veterans**

Since beginning the NS2 Serves Program in 2014, I, and all those at SAP NS2 that voluntarily support the program, have learned much about the continued challenges facing today's veterans.

One of the most important lessons we have learned is that training and placing veterans in jobs that have strong career potential mitigates many of the personal and emotional challenges veterans often face. The horrors of war have taken a great toll on this generation. They need substantive, rewarding work to care for themselves and their families that might negate a future dependence on government subsidies.

As I've stated, programs targeting the hiring of veterans must address the needs of those most challenged to find post-military service employment. In order to help posture veterans for success in transition, the provision of some level of education and training can be critical. This is certainly the case for those jobs that offer strong career potential but the investment does not have to be exorbitant, as veterans are masters at on the job training.

### *Virtual Job Opportunity Forum*

At present, most veterans do not have an understanding of the civilian hiring process nor do they have access to the information that would facilitate their search efforts. A central, easily accessible repository/website of job opportunities and application guidelines would be useful and the Department of Labor's "veterans.gov" website can be a start. However, even this particular online tool can be difficult to navigate. The user has to know the right keywords to input in order to get useful information. In addition, if the user does not use the correct keywords, their resume can be rejected – similar to what frequently happens with the USA Jobs site.

Far too often, veterans looking for employment are overwhelmed by the process and our goal should be to make these kinds of websites easy to use. Prior to the end of their service, veterans should be exposed to this type of tool. This central repository should be populated by the numerous companies that market their intent to hire veterans and must be continually updated in order to be useful and relevant to veterans entering the job market.

### *Investing in veterans*

With so many veterans looking for employment and with limited resources to assist them – we have to find ways to more effectively connect veterans to job opportunities. I would ask that there be strong advocacy for the NS2 Serves model – invest in preparing veterans and give them the entry skills they might need for a particular job. Many companies have the resources to support this model and should be proactive in this regard. They just need to recognize the long term value of veterans in their workforce.

### *Job qualifications*

Most enlisted veterans leaving the service do not have college degrees, often a requirement for securing a career-promising job. Veterans should be recognized for their significant experience. Those programs which give veterans college credits for what they have learned and experienced are extremely helpful. Each veteran who has attended the NS2 Serves program is pursuing their college degree. Their GI Bill benefits are critical to this goal. A key component to the value of the NS2 Serves program is that government or GI Bill benefits are not required for completion. Rather, the program model is for potential employers to invest nominally in veterans so they can begin their post-service careers.

### **Conclusion**

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Takano and Members of this Subcommittee, I would again like to thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. As you can tell, I feel very strongly that more needs to be done to prepare today's veterans for entering into the civilian workplace. Today's veterans have so much more to offer this country. Our task is to help harness their talents and assist them along the way.

I am happy to answer any questions you may have for me today.