



Statement for the Record
SUBMITTED TO THE
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY
by Kandi Tillman

*including Appendix sharing by
Employers & Industry Partners*

for the Dec 2, 2025 Oversight Hearing

“Strengthening the Workforce of Veterans in America”

Dear Chairman Van Orden, Ranking Member Pappas, Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this statement for the record. As the Managing Co-Founder of 50strong, a social-impact startup launched in 2020, we have the honor of supporting many leading employers as they open & share employment pathways with the military community. We connect strong employers and engaged civilian professionals to strong military-affiliated talent - including transitioning service members, veterans, student veterans, and military spouses.

Our mission is straightforward: to help veterans and their families successfully translate military skills into meaningful civilian careers by helping employers that seek to employ them. We do this by building scalable, tech-enabled pathways that reflect what employers actually need to fill their talent pipelines.

50strong was founded on one principle: **if we want better outcomes, we must design around employers that already recognize the incredible strength of military talent.** We listen to what businesses - from Fortune 100s to small companies - need to hire, retain, and advance veteran talent. And then we look for smart ways to improve, support, amplify & simplify their efforts every single day.

This is why 50strong builds tools like our virtual Meetups and our new Mentoring platform for on-demand 1:1 conversations with industry professionals. These tools help

align veteran pathways to real, high-demand opportunities. In 2025, nearly 15,000 military-affiliated job seekers will use these tools. Importantly, they are all built & deployed with zero taxpayer dollars.

Based on our on-the-ground work, I'd like to offer several key insights for the Subcommittee's consideration:

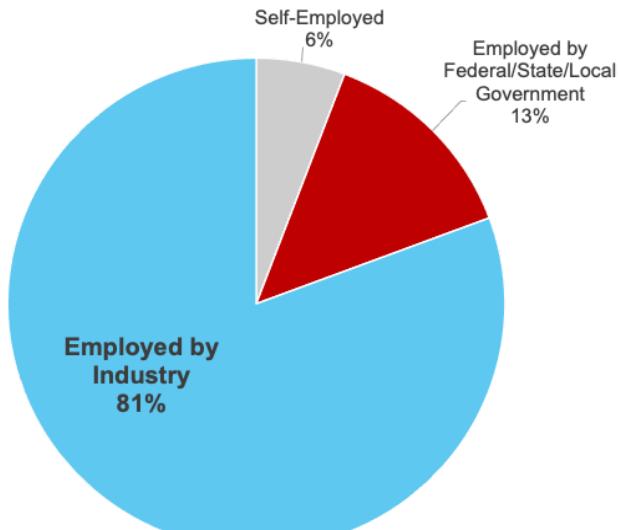
Insight #1: Private Sector Input Is Critical.

The covenant that our government holds with those who serve is sacred. Federal programs form the cornerstone of how our nation repays its debt to service members and their families. Today, our government invests “more than \$13 billion in military-to-civilian employment transition support programs” via 45 federal programs across 12 federal agencies.¹ Yet those programs alone cannot ensure sustained success after military service; this is due to fragmentation, lack of oversight, and an outsized focus on education vs employment - all of which should be addressed.

Therefore, we must embrace private industry as a critical stakeholder in veteran employment - especially as more than 80% of America's workforce is employed by private industry.² Private employers are not an afterthought in the transition journey; they are the destination. They provide the paychecks, purpose, and progression that anchor every successful reintegration. Despite this, employers are too often absent from national veteran discussions.

Sustainable veteran success depends not only on care and community but also on employment and economic opportunity. Employers must continue to be engaged as full partners, not treated as beneficiaries of public programs.

Employment by Sector, 2024



Source: Source: Employment Projections program, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

¹ Rand, “Federal and Nonprofit Support for Veterans Transitioning to the Civilian Workforce”, https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_briefs/RBA1363-3.html

² U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Current Employment Statistics – Employment by Major Industry Sector*, September 2025. <https://www.bls.gov/emp/tables/employment-by-major-industry-sector.htm>

Further, the private sector is built to innovate - to iterate quickly, scale efficiently, and measure outcomes through performance and value creation. Private companies have both the technical expertise and incentive to build sustainable, scalable solutions that can complement and extend public programs. In the veteran support ecosystem, we need this innovation.

Insight #2: Non-Traditional Pathways Must Be Embraced.

In my testimony before this Subcommittee earlier this year, I emphasized the importance of employment outcomes for military-affiliated students.³ Currently, nearly one million students use GI Bill benefits across 36,794 VA-approved programs.⁴ But too often, veterans use their hard-earned education benefits to pursue traditional degree programs by default to help “correct” this gap. Higher education can certainly provide value, but employers increasingly tell us they need faster, skills-based pipelines - apprenticeships, licensure, certifications, and on-the-job training opportunities that bypass the four-year degree requirement. A degree is one approach, but it cannot be the only one.

The VA spends billions annually on higher education benefits, yet outcomes are not systematically tracked, and schools are not required to invest in career preparation. This matters not only for taxpayer accountability but also for military recruiting, which depends on demonstrating the long-term return of these benefits. At the same time, education itself is evolving: it is becoming more online, more modular, and more ROI-driven. A college degree is no longer a guaranteed ticket to economic mobility for anyone, as research from the Burning Glass Institute has shown⁵.

Therefore, we must ensure that the services we provide to veterans reflect this new reality of the civilian workforce.

However, VA’s own funding patterns highlight a gap for meaningful on-the-job training pathways. More than half (approximately 52%) of all programs approved by VA for GI Bill benefits are on-the-job training or apprenticeship opportunities. Yet only about 0.5% of GI Bill students actually enroll in them⁶. Many of the approved programs are concentrated in government agencies or linked to lower-paying occupations, which do

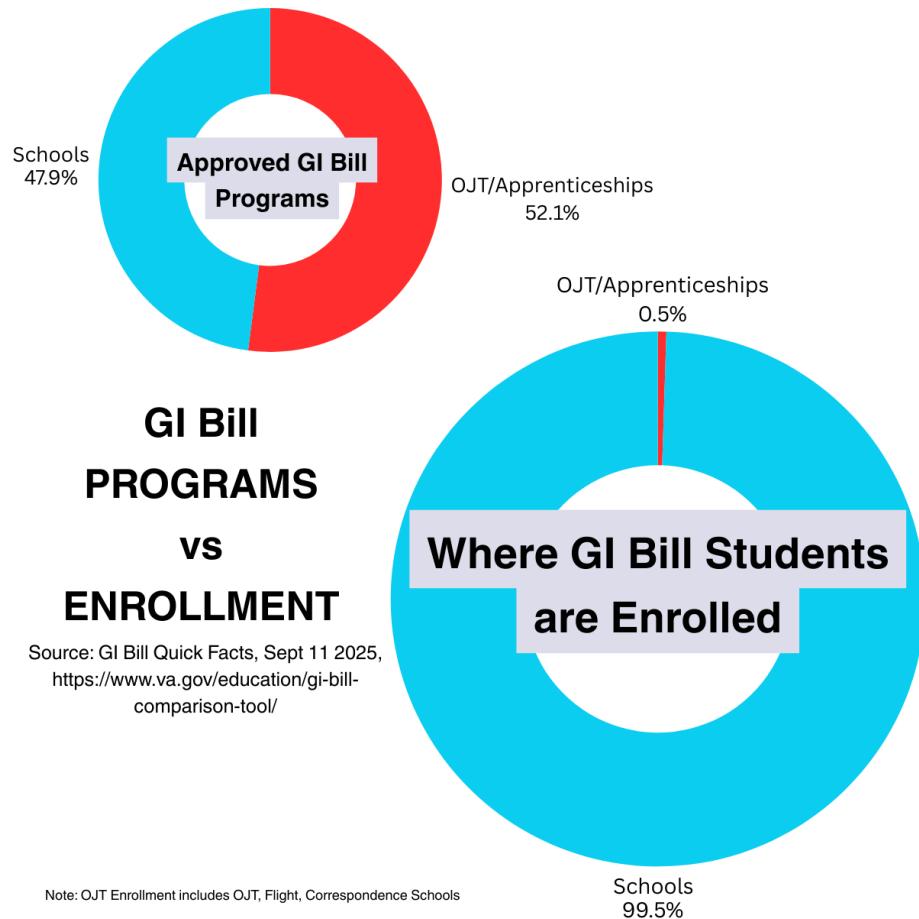
³ Written Statement of Kandi Tillman, U.S. House of Representatives, <https://www.congress.gov/119/meeting/house/118028/witnesses/HHRG-119-VR10-Wstate-TillmanK-20250325.pdf>

⁴ Department of Veterans Affairs <https://www.va.gov/education/gi-bill-comparison-tool/>, under “Download data for all schools”

⁵ The Burning Glass Institute, “No Country for Young Grads”, <https://www.burningglassinstitute.org/research/no-country-for-young-grads>

⁶ Department of Veterans Affairs <https://www.va.gov/education/gi-bill-comparison-tool/>, under “Download data for all schools”

not align with the high-demand, higher-wage roles in technology, advanced manufacturing, healthcare, and skilled trades. This creates a lost opportunity for both veterans and employers. Veterans are often funneled into four-year degrees by default, while industries critical to our economy continue to face persistent talent shortages.



Insight #3: Industry-Driven Training-to-Employment Pathways are Key.

Leveraging Proven Models as a Starting Point

SkillBridge has been revolutionary for employers because it creates a clear on-ramp to evaluate talent before making a hiring commitment. It is truly one of the strongest pathways for transitioning service members, and for many employers, it serves as the very first entry point to building a veteran hiring strategy. Companies can see firsthand

the leadership, technical skill, and adaptability that service members bring, and that experience often builds the internal confidence and business case to expand veteran hiring across the enterprise.

As one strong example, one of our closest partners, **Lowe's**, has established a best-practice SkillBridge program that enables fellowship opportunities at any of their locations across the country. Their 12-week program, which begins at the start of each month, is designed to help service members bring their skills and military experience to leadership positions in the civilian sector, regardless of their education level. Last year, 90% of their fellows received a full-time job offer at the end of their fellowship.⁷ *This means that a service member returning home to Oshkosh, Wisconsin or Bedford, New Hampshire or Buckeye, Arizona after serving a 4-year enlistment has a pathway to a bright future in their own community on Day 1 of their post-Active Duty service.*

I'll also highlight another strong employer **Cushman & Wakefield**. They are a global commercial real estate services B2B company and a much lesser known entity to the military. They utilize SkillBridge to train service members into virtually any role from a variety of military occupations that don't often have a direct civilian equivalent. *They've taken on more than 100 Skillbridge interns into over 30 different types of roles with a 90%+ full time offer rate.*

Source: *Written Statement of Kandi Tillman, March 2025*⁷

Another 50strong win at HCA!
Transitioning USN female with
no healthcare background who
is now on her pathway to
become a nurse at HCA in a
Skillbridge capacity. Starts in
November and will move to a full
time role in January. She is now
an official student at HCA's
Galen College of Nursing.

Source: *Shared on LinkedIn via 50strong Partner, HCA Healthcare, Nov 2025*⁸

⁷ Written Statement of Kandi Tillman, U.S. House of Representatives, <https://www.congress.gov/119/meeting/house/118028/witnesses/HHRG-119-VR10-Wstate-TillmanK-20250325.pdf>

⁸ Post on LinkedIn, https://www.linkedin.com/posts/kanditillman_happy-monday-i-love-getting-texts-like-this-activity-7391118142904782848-WbrF?utm_source=share&utm_medium=member_desktop&rcm=ACoAAAB9h9UB6ZabJxsVjYpS99MajSEzIRkfCQE

Yet, while SkillBridge is an important success story, it is limited to those still on active duty. Once a service member separates, that pathway disappears. Veterans who are already out of uniform often have just as much to offer - but employers lose that structured, low-risk opportunity to bring them onboard. If we want to close the translation gap, we must create parallel on-ramps for separated veterans: internships, apprenticeships, and fellowship-style programs that allow employers to evaluate talent while veterans gain meaningful civilian experience.

Similarly, the **Military Spouse Career Accelerator Pilot (MSCAP)**⁹ has shown how structured, employer-driven opportunities can accelerate workforce participation for military families. This pilot yielded "...more than 1,200 fellowship placements and an 86% employment offer rate..."¹⁰ and is now a permanent program.

Current Examples from Industry Leaders

Importantly, employers are funding & opening innovative pathways for military-affiliated talent. Examples include the Hiring Our Heroes Skilled Trades Academy with initial funding by **Lowe's Foundation**, **John Deere's** Tech Program (a two-year associate's degree program that trains students to become technicians at dealerships across the U.S.), **Wells Fargo's** Julie Scammahorn National Military Apprenticeship Program that supports various banking industry roles and **Amazon's** Data Center Engineering Operations (DCEO) Pilot.

Amplifying the Role of Apprenticeship Intermediaries

One of the most practical solutions to accelerate veteran participation in Department of Labor-registered apprenticeships is to strengthen the role of apprenticeship intermediaries. These are organizations that act as connectors between employers, training providers, and federal or state agencies. They help employers navigate the complex Department of Labor registration process, standardize paperwork, align training curricula, and often shoulder much of the administrative burden that would otherwise deter small and mid-sized businesses from participating.

For large corporations, intermediaries create efficiencies that allow them to scale apprenticeships across multiple states. For small businesses, they make participation possible in the first place. With 33 million small businesses employing nearly half of the

⁹ DoD Spouse Education and Career Opportunities,
<https://myseco.militaryonesource.mil/portal/article/military-spouse-career-accelerator-pilot>

¹⁰ DoD Spouse Education and Career Opportunities,
<https://myseco.militaryonesource.mil/portal/article/military-spouse-career-accelerator-pilot>

U.S. private-sector workforce, intermediaries are essential to opening these opportunities to a much broader set of employers.

Unfortunately, the role of intermediaries is not well understood outside of workforce policy circles, and many employers are unaware that these resources even exist. Congress has an opportunity to amplify the role of these intermediaries, ensuring they are visible, well-funded, and equipped to extend apprenticeship access to veterans nationwide.

Policy Recommendations

For this Subcommittee's consideration:

- 1. Establish a pilot to evaluate the outcomes of a paid training program for veterans that have recently separated and that were not able to participate in a SkillBridge opportunity prior to separation.** While SkillBridge has proven highly effective for active-duty service members, there remains a gap for those who have already separated but still need structured training pathways to gain civilian experience. A targeted pilot could extend paid, employer-sponsored training opportunities to recent veterans within their first 12 months after separation, helping bridge the final step from service to sustained employment in industries of high need. Too often, service members leave the military, enroll in higher education by default, and then struggle to connect their degree - or lack of degree - to real employment opportunities. Meanwhile, employers continue to face critical shortages in advanced manufacturing, technology, healthcare, and the skilled trades. What's missing is a structured, employer-driven pathway that allows separated veterans to translate their skills into meaningful careers without requiring a four-year degree. *The pilot should be for similar funding & duration as what was originally approved for MSCAP.*
- 2. Modernize the VA Work-Study Program to include private-sector employers as potential “employers” for student veterans.** Currently, VA work-study opportunities are limited to roles within government or approved nonprofits and educational institutions. Expanding eligibility to include **civilian private employers** - particularly in high-demand industries - would give student veterans hands-on experience that is directly relevant to their field of study and increases employability upon graduation.
- 3. Renew DoL VETS’s focus on apprenticeship and earn-and-learn pathways.** Apprenticeships are a proven, debt-free bridge between education and employment. Expanding veteran participation across emerging sectors such as skilled trades, technology, healthcare, and advanced manufacturing can

strengthen both our workforce and our economy while honoring the skills veterans already possess.

Employer Perspectives (Appendices)

The strongest validation of these ideas comes not from me, but from employers themselves. In the attached appendices, you will find direct statements from our partners - including Fortune 100 corporations, healthcare systems, and a local chamber of commerce.

I urge the Subcommittee to consider these industry perspectives as evidence that **when business needs align with veteran strengths, everyone wins** - veterans, employers, and the American economy.

Appendix: Statement Provided by Lowe's Companies Inc.

as shared by

Michael Piper, Sr. Manager, Early and Emerging Talent

At Lowe's, we view the military community as one of our vital talent pipelines, strengthening our workforce and driving business performance. Nearly 26,000 of our associates are veterans, service members, or military spouses. More than 11 percent of Lowe's 2024 new hires came from the military community. Military experience brings the technical and leadership skills that our business depends on. We are focused on translating those capabilities into career pathways that meet real labor market needs and also help members of the military community build successful careers.

Our approach centers on skills-based hiring and workforce development, not credentials alone. Through on-the-job training and the Lowe's SkillBridge Fellowship, we provide structured entry points into retail management, supply chain, and IT and technical careers. In 2024, 90 percent of SkillBridge fellowships were store-based, 95 percent of participants received a full-time offer following completion, and 80 percent were enlisted service members transitioning directly into civilian careers. These pathways align talent supply with operational demand, helping Lowe's close workforce gaps while creating lasting career opportunities for the military community.

This is more than a social commitment; it is a business imperative. By investing in the military community, we are advancing a workforce defined by skill and dependability that supports Lowe's long-term growth and advances the future of the skilled trades sector through the Lowe's Foundation.

Appendix: Statement Provided by Lowe's Foundation

as shared by

Betsy Conway, Director, Lowe's Foundation

The Lowe's Foundation has committed \$50 million over five years to prepare 50,000 people for skilled trades careers, a critical investment in addressing America's widening skilled labor gap. This commitment is focused on expanding access to training programs, fostering alternative career pathways, and ensuring that underserved communities have opportunities to pursue sustainable careers in trades such as electrical, plumbing, HVAC, and carpentry.

As part of this initiative, the Lowe's Foundation partnered with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation's Hiring Our Heroes to launch the Skilled Trades Academy. The Academy provides members of the military community, including transitioning service members, veterans, and military spouses, with hands-on training, industry-recognized credentials, and direct connections to employers. Its goal is to bridge the gap between military experience and civilian career opportunities by equipping participants with both the technical skills and the career readiness needed to thrive in high-demand trades.

Through these efforts, the Lowe's Foundation is helping build a stronger, more resilient workforce while honoring the service of military families and supporting their transition into meaningful civilian careers.

Appendix: Statement Provided by Wells Fargo

as shared by

Sean Passmore, Head of Enterprise Military and Veteran Initiatives

Wells Fargo's **Julie Scammahorn National Military Apprenticeship Program** is a U.S. Department of Labor-registered, competency-based training program designed to support U.S. military veterans - including Guard and Reserve members - transitioning into roles at the company. Apprentices are hired as full-time employees and receive comprehensive support through assigned job coaches, bi-monthly check-ins, and instructor-led training.

The program supports both individual and cohort-based hiring across all business divisions, with commonly filled roles including Branch Management, Business Execution, Data Analytics, Risk Consultation and Technology Consulting. These roles align with 12 approved Department of Labor learning paths, ensuring structured development and career progression opportunity enterprise wide. In partnership with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, eligible veterans and service members enrolled in Registered Apprenticeship programs may access VA education benefits to support their career advancement. Wells Fargo is proud to offer apprenticeship opportunities that meet the criteria for these benefits, allowing participants to leverage their VA entitlements while gaining hands-on experience in high-demand roles. This initiative reflects Wells Fargo's ongoing commitment to supporting the military community and expanding access to meaningful career pathways.

In 2021, the national completion rate for Registered Apprenticeship programs in the United States was below 35%. In contrast, since 2021, Wells Fargo has achieved a 76% completion rate—more than double the national average—highlighting the program's strong engagement and effectiveness. Of those who completed the program since 2021, 88% remain with the company, underscoring Wells Fargo's success in developing and retaining talent.

Appendix: Statement Provided by Cushman & Wakefield

as shared by

Matt Disher, Executive Director of Military & Veterans Programs

As a leading global commercial real estate services business that provides services to other businesses, we are a much lesser-known entity to the military than other consumer-facing brands. Yet we hire veterans into technical positions, among other roles, often by finding smart ways to engage with them directly.

Cushman & Wakefield leverages post-military talent by valuing not only technical skills but also leadership, planning, and operational expertise. We manage 6 billion square feet of property that demands rapid, on-demand staffing so traditional hiring pipelines and manual relationships with government career solutions can be ineffective due to their inability to be reactive.

To meet this need, we've built a best-in-class program featuring a dedicated outreach team, targeted digital campaigns, SkillBridge and fellowship offerings, employee mentoring and direct intake with our MVP team. This human-first approach ensures skilled trades professionals - often absent from traditional channels - are identified, engaged, and connected quickly.

Our targeted digital outreach methods are reaching millions of veteran and military-related households and career seekers each year, gaining tens of millions of unique impressions - allowing us to complement the traditional methods of outreach like career fairs, local/regional veteran service offices that can be under-equipped and hard to manage across a national footprint.

Until military service provides a full, quantifiable and adapted record of experience, employers must remain proactive in recognizing and translating veterans' broad capabilities into career opportunities which requires a dedicated and often manual approach to this very human process.

Appendix: Statement Provided by HCA Healthcare

as shared by

Chambala Roach, Program Manager Military Affairs

And

Jonathan Snider, Director Culture and Workplace Programs

On behalf of HCA Healthcare, we express our gratitude for the opportunity to support the impactful and meaningful work of this Committee. HCA Healthcare proudly champions members of the Armed Forces, veterans, and military families through dedicated hiring initiatives, strategic workforce development partnerships, and programs designed to help military-connected colleagues thrive in healthcare careers.

Currently, over 15,900 veterans, reservists, and military spouses are employed by HCA Healthcare. These individuals have joined our organization through robust military recruiting programs such as SkillBridge, partnerships with Hiring Our Heroes, 50strong, and our everyday recruitment efforts that recognize the exceptional skills and experience of service members. We firmly believe that structured talent pipelines create opportunities to highlight the unique expertise and leadership our military community brings to the workforce.

HCA Healthcare also provides military leave and supplemental pay for colleagues serving on active duty and maintains a Military Colleague Network with chapters nationwide to foster community and support. For those transitioning from service, our SkillBridge program offers clinical and non-clinical pathways to gain valuable civilian experience before separation.

Further investment in transition initiatives, upskilling programs, and career pathways will enable HCA Healthcare to continue leveraging this tremendously talented community and foster meaningful careers in healthcare. We remain committed to honoring their service and creating opportunities for military-connected colleagues to thrive.

Thank you for your consideration and for your continued support of this Committee's endeavors.

Appendix: Statement Provided by **Fiserv**

as shared by

*Meg Hendricks, Vice President, Head of Military and Veteran Affairs
and*

Adam Schmit, Vice President, Talent Acquisition

At Fiserv, we believe military talent brings unmatched discipline, adaptability, and leadership to the workplace. Our talent strategy focuses on creating nontraditional pathways into high-impact roles, particularly in Technology and Project Management. Through targeted programs, apprenticeships, and partnerships, we equip transitioning service members with the skills needed to thrive in the private sector.

By investing in veterans through training, tech apprenticeships, and direct employment, we're not only strengthening our workforce — we're helping shape the future of financial services.

One of the key challenges we face is the perception that veteran employment is only addressed as service members approach their transition—typically within the last year of service or after they have already transitioned. It is imperative that we foster greater collaboration between corporations, Veteran Service Organizations, and the Department of Defense to provide guidance and options from the moment an individual enters military service.

Every servicemember will eventually transition, whether after four years or thirty. Therefore, ensuring they have access to comprehensive information throughout their service is critical.

Appendix: Statement Provided by Oracle

as shared by

Melinda Jaffar, U.S. Military Talent Lead

At Oracle, we are deeply committed to “veteran employment.” One of the most significant areas we’re seeing alignment is within our data centers - with Abilene, TX now actively hiring and several new locations recently announced. These roles don’t require a degree. Instead, they rely on the technical and transferable skills that so many service members and military spouses already have.

We are projecting to hire nearly 1000 vets over the next two years for our data center technician and operations roles. This demand will continue so we will need a steady pipeline that is always on.

Which leads me to, the challenge isn’t a lack of ability - it’s awareness. Too often, service members transitioning out of the military don’t know what to look for or how to align their experience to in-demand civilian careers. So, not only do we need broad awareness, we need workforce-driven training pathways.

We’ve built two approaches to meet talent where they are:

1. Direct Hire: An internal onboarding program for those with IT or data center experience ready to step into a role with minimal upskilling.
2. Train-to-Hire Program: We’ve partnered with Washington Vets2Tec at St. Martins University for those whose backgrounds don’t yet align, providing structured training and mentorship to bridge the gap.

Appendix: Statement Provided by **Verizon**

as shared by

Michael McCoy, Head of Military and Veteran Recruitment Programs

On behalf of Verizon, we express our gratitude for the opportunity to support the impactful and meaningful work of this Committee. Verizon proudly champions members of the Armed Forces, Veterans, and military families through dedicated hiring initiatives, strategic workforce development partnerships, and direct technology solutions provided to the Department of Defense and veteran entrepreneurs.

Currently, over 6,000 veterans, reservists, and military spouses are employed by Verizon. These individuals have been onboarded through robust military recruiting programs such as Skillbridge, our proprietary apprenticeship programs, and our everyday recruitment efforts, recognizing their exceptional skills and experience. We firmly believe that structured talent pipelines for critical talent segments create opportunities to highlight the unique expertise and experience our service members contribute to the workforce.

The establishment of upskilling and credentialing programs ensures that access to today's digital economy is attainable for service members and veterans across all generations. We are proud to have collaborated with organizations such as the Wounded Warrior Project, Hiring Our Heroes and 50strong to extend these programs to a significant number of veterans within your districts, communities, and nationwide.

Further investment in upskilling programs, apprenticeship pathways, and transition initiatives will enable Verizon to continue leveraging this tremendously talented community and foster meaningful careers. Concurrently, it will allow us to persist in developing the essential tools and technology required by our service members, the Department of Veterans Affairs, and the entire military-connected community.

Thank you for your consideration of this statement, and for your continued support of this committee's endeavors.

Appendix: Statement Provided by **Amazon**

as shared by

Ian McDuffie, Sr. Manager, Global Military Affairs

Amazon is launching a **Skills-Based Military Hiring Pilot** in the Fall of 2025 where we will open 50 Area Manager roles in their operations network for Skillbridge and direct hire veterans with 6+ years of military experience. After these veterans are hired, they will be enrolled in Amazon's military mentorship programs, encouraged to join their local Employee Resource Group chapters, and provided other veteran retention resources. Amazon will determine long-term program effectiveness by comparing retention rates and promotion velocity of skills-based hires compared to veterans with college degrees and non-veterans. Amazon believes this pilot will not only drastically expand its pool of military talent, but will onboard talent better positioned to thrive at Amazon.

Further, Amazon has also recently launched a **Data Center Engineering Operations (DCEO) Pilot** within its Virginia Data Center Network. Partnering with Northern Virginia Community College, Compass Tech International, Hiring our Heroes, and the Veterans Administration, Amazon has developed a 6-month training curriculum to train cohorts of 25 veterans and military spouses to become data center engineers. This program only requires a high school diploma; AWS and Virginia grants cover all academic costs; the students are paid their full salary during the entire program; and once students graduate and convert to data center engineers, they can partake in Amazon Career Choice, where they can continue their education accruing more data center technical training or pursuing a college degree. Amazon is launching the second cohort in January 2026 while developing a strategy to scale the program to other states.

Appendix: Statement Provided by North San Diego Business Chamber

as shared by

Christopher Thorne, MCPO/USN(Ret), Chief Executive Officer

San Diego is home to one of the largest and most skilled military communities in the United States, yet it is also one of the nation's least affordable housing markets. In this environment, non-degree career pathways are essential to ensuring that transitioning servicemembers, veterans, Guard and Reserve members, and military families can remain in the region they served. High quality, employer led pathways, such as registered apprenticeships and structured pre apprenticeship programs, provide paid, competency-based training that leads to high skill, high wage careers without requiring a four-year degree or the immediate use of GI Bill benefits. These pathways not only align with the lived experience of servicemembers, they offer the level of economic mobility necessary for families to thrive in a high cost region.

Two San Diego partners in particular demonstrate the strength of these models. The National Electrical Contractors Association (NECA) San Diego Chapter, in partnership with the electrical trades, delivers tuition free, earn while you learn apprenticeships that combine rigorous classroom instruction with thousands of hours of supervised on the job training. Veterans excel in these pathways due to their operational discipline, safety mindset, and technical aptitude. The Patriot Group, a veteran founded utility contractor, provides another strong example through its Transition to Trades programs, which help servicemembers translate military skills into high demand careers across the utility, logistics, and emergency response sectors. Both organizations show how employer led, regionally grounded non degree pathways can deliver thriving wage careers that match the realities of the San Diego labor market.

For regions like ours, the question is not whether non degree pathways are a viable alternative to traditional higher education; they are a critical workforce necessity. Expanding, supporting, and elevating these pathways ensures that the military talent trained in San Diego can remain in San Diego, strengthening our local economy, our infrastructure, and our national workforce readiness. Non degree career pathways are among the most effective tools we have to help veterans build stable, prosperous futures in the communities they defended.