

Veterans in Tech: Innovative Careers for All Generations of Veterans

House Committee on Veterans' Affairs
Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity (EO)
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*Testimony of Todd Bowers
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Chairman Wenstrup, Ranking Member Takano, and Members of the Committee. Thank you for inviting me to speak to you about the UberMILITARY program and our endeavors to support veterans and military families as they face the many transitions that military life offers. It has been many years since I last sat before this committee and I am honored to be invited back.

I would like to take a few moments to first share with you how I ended up becoming involved in the UberMILITARY program. I served as a Marine Reservist for more than 12 years here in our nation's capital. During my enlistment, I deployed multiple times finding myself crossing the bridges of Al Nasiriyah and in the streets of Fallujah, Iraq. I've climbed the mountains of northern Helmand province in Afghanistan and shook hands in small villages in South America. Not a day goes by that I am not thankful for these experiences and how it shaped me into who I am today.

It was during my second tour in Iraq that I was caught in a firefight that pinned me behind a HMMWV (Humvee) on the outskirts of Fallujah just prior to Operation Phantom Fury. Unexpectedly, the vehicle that I was taking cover behind drove off the roadway leaving me exposed to enemy fire. With my cover suddenly gone, I engaged a machine gun position and was struck in the face by a sniper's bullet as it skimmed through my rifle scope. Needless to say, the Marine that drove the HMMWV away did not get a 5 star rating for that trip.

A few months later, I found myself back in Washington D.C. waiting for classes to start. To make ends meet, and avoid depleting my hard earned deployment savings, I worked difficult hours at a local bar and took on a work study program. The inability to have a flexible work schedule negatively impacted my studies greatly. It was during this time, that I realized there had to be a better way for my fellow veterans to find some financial stability with opportunities that provide the flexibility and mobility that vets need to face the many rigors of reintegration into civilian life. This is what inevitably led me to UberMILITARY.

In September 2014, Uber announced that we were aiming to partner with 50,000 members of the military community including veterans and military family members. We created this target because we knew that the skills, work ethic, and integrity exemplified

by our nation's veterans is unmatched - frankly, we knew it would be good for business. Based on data tracking in cities with high veteran populations, like San Diego, our data showed that compared to their civilian peers, veteran partner drivers drove on the Uber platform longer and had higher customer ratings. Focusing on veterans and military families was a business decision but more importantly, it was a way to empower this community.

After just 18 months of engaging with the military community, Uber achieved its goal and ahead of schedule. Today, more than 55,000 self-identified veterans and military family members have signed up to drive with Uber and over 50% have taken a trip on the platform. All of that work has resulted in an astounding \$152,000,000 in earnings.

To mark this moment, Uber has donated \$1,000,000 on behalf of our uberMILITARY Advisory Board to organizations that support veterans and military families, including the USO, The Fisher House, Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS) and Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA).

So how did Uber do this? To start, we designated and engaged with more than 60 UberMILITARY program leaders from our city-based teams, many of which are veterans themselves. These individuals led the charge in their respective cities working with local and national organizations, base commanders and community leaders. We launched country-wide rider and driver UberMILITARY awareness campaigns, and hosted a Veterans Day in-app activation in support of the White House Joining Forces Initiative to help homeless veterans get to and from employment opportunities. We tightened up our military identification and verification process for those already on the platform to ensure we could continue to effectively engage with them. Then to take our program even further, we partnered with blue chip organizations that support the military community such as the Chamber of Commerce Hiring Our Heroes initiative, Blue Star Families and the American Military Families Association.

Finally, Uber created the UberMILITARY Board of Advisors, an impressive group of military leaders chaired by former Secretary of Defense Dr. Robert Gates, to provide guidance on this important project. General Stanley McChrystal, Admiral Michael Mullen, General James Mattis and Mrs. Sheila Casey are just a few of the others that signed on to lend their support and currently serve on our Board of Advisors.

We couldn't be more grateful for those who have advised and partnered with us to help make our goal become a reality.

After engaging with active UberMILITARY partners, we found that veterans and military families are particularly drawn to driving on the Uber platform because of the flexibility it offers. In fact, in a March 2016 UberMILITARY driver's survey, 77% of those surveyed stated that they decide when to drive with Uber, and schedule it around their other commitments. For most veterans, that flexibility provides an opportunity to readjust to

working and interacting with civilians. But for some veterans, specifically those who have disabilities that require more care, it allows them to earn income while still being able to easily make time for medical appointments and other therapies that are essential to their recovery. We believe we offer veterans a new type of transitional experience that will set them up for the success they deserve.

Being an Uber partner gives our nation's veterans economic freedom, a chance to be their own boss and even allows them to leverage one of their largest assets, their cars. Our survey of UberMILITARY partners informed us that the number one reason veterans sign up to drive is to earn money as a secondary source of income. This feedback came as no surprise given the results of the most recent Veteran Affairs Economic Study, which found that 53% of separating Post-9/11 veterans will face a period of unemployment. Driving with Uber helps to conveniently and easily fill these gaps for veterans as well as their families.

Many veterans find themselves in a rush to find work as they begin to transition back to civilian life. As I experienced in my own transition, when there is not an immediate income opportunity available it is very easy to get into a spiral that leads to burning through savings, incurring debt and mounting bills creating a financial urgency that forces too many to take the first job offer that comes their way. The Institute of Veterans and Military Families recently concluded that *"nearly half of those surveyed stayed in their first post-separation position 12 months or less. Further, there is an association between job tenure and job alignment with the respondent's preferred career field."* If veterans feel pressure to find employment immediately they tend to accept employment that may not effectively leverage their skill set resulting in low retention rates. Uber provides an alternative path for veterans - one where they can take their time finding a job without the burden of financial stressors.

UberMILITARY allows our transitioning veterans the flexibility they need to successfully adjust to civilian life, provides economic opportunity, fills the gaps of unemployment that too many experience, and gives them the time to figure out what they really want to do without the burden of financial stressors. But UberMILITARY is not just providing opportunities for veterans, we are also actively recruiting military family members. Blue Star Families' most recent Military Lifestyle survey highlighted that 58% of non-employed military spouses would like to be employed or have some source of income. Finding consistent employment that allows flexibility and is transferable to other locations around the world has never been so readily available, and now military spouses and family members are being empowered by driving on the platform. We are so proud to be able to provide opportunities for military families that, at times, felt left behind by an employment marketplace that didn't fit their lifestyles.

Admiral Michael Mullen, former Chairman of the Joints Chiefs of Staff, once said that driving with Uber *"...provides flexibility and allows veterans to pursue the American dream, be it furthering education, pursuing certification or starting a small business. It's a*

tremendous platform for those transitioning from the military.” And that is exactly what I hope UberMILITARY can do, help our veterans pursue their American dream.

As we look at the future for UberMILITARY, we are setting new goals that will continue to have an impact that this community has earned and deserves. Our new mission is as follows:

- **\$500M in earnings to driver partners who have served in the military and their families by 2020:** We want our UberMILITARY veterans and families to take home half a billion dollars by 2020 throughout their work as driver partners.
- **Increase access to reliable transportation in military communities and reduce alcohol-related incidents on and around military installations.** UberMILITARY is going to focus on making transportation more accessible around military installations by reaching out and working with base commanders and community leaders to ensure that everyone has a safe ride. By expanding access to reliable rides at the push of a button, we hope to see a reduction in alcohol-related incidents in military communities. We look forward to expanding our partnership with Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) to provide safety education programs on and around military installations.
- **Make Uber even more rewarding for drivers from military backgrounds.** We are currently expanding existing programs to offer unique rewards specifically for members of the UberMILITARY family.

I would like to conclude my testimony today on a personal note. After leaving service, I knew I wanted to do something that would truly make a difference in the lives of my fellow service members and I can tell you that I am fulfilling my dream by being a part of UberMILITARY. The flexibility and earning opportunity that driving with Uber provides allows veterans and military families to support their many transitions, generate additional income and support their families and communities in ways never before possible. I am proud to say that a technology platform has never economically empowered this community in such a manner before, and this is just the beginning. As we continue our mission, I am enthusiastic to go to work every day and help provide the opportunities that our veterans and military families deserve.

Thank you for your time and I look forward to answering any question you may have.