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No Veteran Left Behind

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MICHIGAN STATE
UNIVERSITY

University Outreach
and Engagement

No Veteran Left Behind

A Review of the Assets Offered by Military Veterans, Obstacles to their Employment, Their Business Prospects and a Plan for Future Coordination through Regional Veterans Centers

Michigan State University

Center for Community and Economic Development

EDA University Center for Regional Economic Innovation

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INTRODUCTION

In his second inaugural address, President Abraham Lincoln articulated the nation's responsibility to war veterans as "to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan (Lincoln, 1865)." His remarks, embodied by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), provide inspiration for the multi-generational mission of caring for America's military veterans. However, the needs of the veterans and their families are experiencing major setbacks including the inability to find housing, skilled employment, or adequate civilian transitional programs, along with difficulties in taking advantage of comprehensive health care programs. This report seeks to define and evaluate US veterans' current circumstances, discuss existing solutions, and provide recommendations for improving resources with respect to assisting veterans in finding a career or starting a business.

The extensive technological knowledge, strong leadership experience, and critical thinking skills that service members receive during duty are often applicable to highly-skilled positions needing innovative problem solvers. Despite this, employers often have concerns with employing veterans; hiring managers worry about the psychological effects of service, fail to correctly translate military experience into applicable skills, and misperceive the ability of a veteran to smoothly transition from military service to workplace culture (Faberman & Foster, 2013). The potential for success in civilian occupations, whether in the public or private sector, is massive for returning military veterans. In addition to the personal obstacles that veterans must overcome, the current system of transition fails to aid veterans in finding well-paying jobs that fully utilize their unique experience and training.

This study begins with a brief description of the demographics of veterans, and then focuses on the numerous difficulties of the transition to civilian life. Primary concerns include mental health, the current multiple deployment policy, homelessness, and unemployment. Secondly, a number of solutions including state programs and private initiatives are examined for their effectiveness in helping veterans. Thirdly, to illustrate the potential of veterans to contribute to their surrounding communities and fellow Americans, this report shares a number of stories about veterans in Michigan who were able to find success after their service period ended. Based on existing solutions and these success stories, multiple recommendations are provided to further ease the transition into civilian life and ensure that veterans are well-treated after their honorable service.

DEMOGRAPHICS OF RETURNING VETERANS

As of 2013, there were 22.3 million veterans (Office of Policy and Planning, 2013). According to the National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics (NCVAS), 21% consisted of minority groups: Black, 11.1%; those of Hispanic origin, 6.3%; Asian, 1.6%; and 2.1% were classified as either American Indian and Alaska Native (AIAN), two or more races, or some other race. Women made up about 8% of the total population. Additionally, 20% of these women were black, with 8% being of Hispanic origin, and other minorities accounting for another 6% of women veterans (Office of Policy and Planning, 2015). The age distribution of men is greatly skewed towards older veterans, with 70.2% being older than 55, which to some extent, can be attributed to younger men still being on active duty. Women are generally younger than men, with 61.7% being under 55 years of age (Office of Policy and Planning, 2013).

The most recent projections, in a 2014 NCVAS study, show that the overall veteran population from 2013 to 2043 is expected to decline from 22.3 million to slightly under 15 million. World War II and Korean veterans will drop less than 5% of the population by 2043; Vietnam veterans, now over 30 percent, will drop below 10 percent of the total veteran population. Gulf War era veterans, meanwhile, will account for more than 50%. However, the presence of minority veterans continues to grow over the same period. Female veterans will increase nearly 18 percent; black veterans will rise to more than 16 percent; those of Hispanic origin are projected to rise to nearly 12 percent; and all other races will rise to about 6 percent (Office of Policy and Planning, 2014).

THE PROBLEMS

Today's veterans returning from active service to civilian life in the United States face a range of barriers not previously experienced by returning veterans in any era of conflict in the nation's history. This section will provide information about problems faced by veterans not only due to their service, but also as a result of issues on the home front.

MENTAL HEALTH

Veterans involved in operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, Operation Iraqi Freedom/Operation New Dawn (OIF/OND) and Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) face significant mental health challenges, according to a landmark study performed by the RAND Corporation. RAND estimated that 300,000 U.S. soldiers that have been deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan currently suffer from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and/or severe depression (Brown, 2015).

For some veterans, emotional issues are heightened by their experiences during military service and their inability to re-adjust to civilian life after multiple deployments. One obstacle to addressing emotional problems of veterans is the failure of the VA Call Center to help in all cases (Lipowicz, 2010). The VA Call Center was established in Canandaigua, New York, in 2012 to deal with veteran health. However, callers seeking help in 2010 had only a 49 percent chance of reaching an agent and getting accurate information. The VA's Office of Inspector General (IG) found that the call center was failing since it relied on answering machines; also, the counselors on staff spent 61 percent of their time on other pursuits and were unavailable to answer during peak call periods.

A RAND Corporation study shows that living in an area remote from behavioral health care creates other risk factors for veterans. "There are roughly 1.3 million individuals—some 300,000 service members and an additional 1 million dependents—who live 30 minutes or more from behavioral health care services. A 30-minute drive or longer substantially reduces how often people seek and use these services" (Brown, 2015).

Suicides by veterans are another major issue which veterans support groups are addressing. Veterans are twice as likely to die as civilians by suicide, regardless of whether or not they were receiving health care from the VA (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2008). An estimated 22 veterans are committing suicide every day in the U.S., according to a report by Michelle Ye Hee Lee of the Washington Post. She cites as sources Sen. Richard Blumenthal, D-CT, and Sen. Johnny Isackson, R-GA, who issued news releases about the problem. Although this statistic from the VA Office of Public Health epidemiology program has been challenged, with some arguing that it is too high, and others asserting it is too low, the reports indicate evidence of a massive dysfunction in end-of-service veteran support programs (Office Of Public Health, 2015).

MULTIPLE DEPLOYMENTS

Many returning veterans and their families are suffering from the current policy of supplementing the volunteer force with periodic call-ups of reserve units made up of ordinary civilians, thereby disrupting the pace of normal family life and interrupting the individual's pursuit of careers in work or private business. This government policy of calling up the same reserve or National Guard units periodically, sending them into war zones and/or battle for a year or more and then returning them to civilian life is unprecedented in American history. This policy, which accelerated with operation Desert Storm in Kuwait

(1990-1991), affecting reserve and National Guard units, is a contradiction to the claim that the U.S. has an “all-volunteer” military. Technically, members of Guard and reserve units are volunteers, but traditionally these personnel served mainly on the home front, subject to call-ups only for weather emergencies or civil disturbances. This anomaly needs critical examination by policy makers and Congressional committees. Perhaps corrective administrative action or legislation is called for to change policies that are destructive to individuals and families even while serving the interest of national defense.

Many veterans have served multiple periodic deployments as a result of current government policy involving use of volunteers bolstered by the call-up of reserve units. This periodic call-up policy is detrimental to both the military personnel and their families; no sooner are the reservists or National Guardsmen settled back into home life than they often are ripped away and sent into extremely hazardous foreign stations. “Many of America’s warriors have experienced four or five combat deployments in the last decade. This new way of war has led to a flurry of increased interest in the psychological effect of deployments on our troops” (Wong & Gerras, 2010).

Maladjustment and employment difficulties on return after each of these deployments and after their service is completed are only part of the universe of problems. Brian Harvey of Liberty University has postulated that multiple deployments of military personnel are “significantly linked to the propensity of combat veterans screening positive for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). PTSD is an anxiety disorder diagnosis based on a history of exposure to a traumatic event”. Studies blamed heavy combat as the leading cause of PTSD (Harvey, 2015).

HOMELESSNESS

“Those who have served this nation as veterans should never find themselves on the streets, living without care and without hope.” –Eric Shinseki, VA Secretary

According to Patrick Rodenbush of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, and Victoria Dillon of the VA, “Data collected during the annual Point-in-Time Count conducted in January 2014 shows there were 49,933 homeless veterans in America, a decline of 33 percent (or 24,837 people) since 2010 but the problem still continues. This includes a nearly 40 percent drop in the number of veterans sleeping on the street” (Department of Veterans Affairs, 2015). The National Coalition for Homeless Veterans (NCHV) reports that approximately 12,700 veterans of recent overseas actions, Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and Operation New Dawn (OND) were homeless on any given night in 2010. According to VA statistics cited by NCHV in its online newsletter, “about 1.4 million other veterans are considered at risk of homelessness due to poverty, lack of support networks, and living in overcrowded or substandard housing” (National Coalition for Homeless Veterans, 2015).

UNEMPLOYMENT

A study of the employment problems of veterans was conducted by the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago, titled *Unemployment among Recent Veterans during the Great Recession*. The authors, Jason Faberman and Taft Foster concluded: “Veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars have trouble getting jobs because of employer concerns over the effects of the trauma of war on the individual veterans and whether the veterans' skills will translate to the civilian workforce.” As a result, the study concluded, “vets often wind up in slow-growth industries -- manufacturing, construction, transportation, utilities and government -- where they are paid low wages. This problem is not going away by itself. More than 1 million service members are expected to leave the military by 2016” (Faberman & Foster, 2013). According to a new

report from U.S. Senator Kirsten Gillibrand, of New York, “unemployment among veterans recently home from Iraq and Afghanistan reached 14.6 percent. Unemployment among all New York veterans tops 7 percent.” Nationally, unemployment among Gulf War II veterans, at 7.2 percent, is more than one third (37.5 percent) higher than among the entire veteran population, 4.5 percent (Gillibrand, 2015).

The capability of the military system creates a mismatch that requires rethinking: the U.S. is not taking advantage of the highly trained veterans because the military’s achievement reports are widely misunderstood. Thus, veterans with high skills often wind up in low paying dead end jobs. A study published by the Chicago Federal Reserve shows that unemployment rates rose during the Great Recession for veterans who were deployed overseas for prolonged periods. “Wartime deployments may affect the physical or psychological abilities of new veterans or restrict the amount of training they receive that would be transferable to the civilian labor market,” observed R. Jason Faberman and Taft Foster of the Chicago Federal Reserve Bank (Faberman & Foster, 2013).

“More than a decade after 9/11 and the two wars that followed it, U.S. military veterans of those conflicts continue to face employment challenges that are likely to persist for years,” wrote Katharine Peralta in U.S. News & World Report (Peralta, 2014). A report commissioned by RAND and JPMorgan Chase noted that one alliance to boost veteran employment exceeded its own goal of hiring at least 200,000 military veterans. This initiative is the 100,000 Jobs Mission, a project of 179 private sector companies organized in 2011 to advance veteran hiring. The goal of hiring 100,000 veterans by 2020 was exceeded in 2014 when the total reached 190,046. Despite the success of such programs, Meg Harrell, the director of the Army Health Program at RAND and a co-author of the report, calls veteran unemployment in the U.S. an “unconscionable situation.”

One outstanding problem affecting adjustment is translating military experience to civilian jobs. The challenge of hiring veterans was highlighted by instructors of a workforce transition course at the U.S. Air Force Academy in Colorado. On one hand, the military’s job is to train their members for combat. On their return, veterans must assume the role of citizens and work in a corporate culture that is foreign to them. And managers evaluating the returned veteran for job capability often don’t understand military values or even how to interpret the candidate’s skills as stated on a military service record.

Derek Bennett, chief of staff for the Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, (IAVA) states that his group’s membership suffers a 16 percent unemployment rate. He attributes the employment problem that vets face to a cultural divide between the military and civilian worlds “that is like having two tribes that can’t communicate with each other.” Because they often don’t understand military job classifications, employers often can’t translate a veteran’s experience into civilian job potential, he said. Writing in Huffington Post’s IMPACT website, Bennett suggests that employers post available jobs on IAVA’s Career Pathfinder, (<http://iava.org/career-pathfinder>) commenting: “We have the shared responsibility and opportunity to support new veterans in their transition out of the military and into the workforce. Let’s show America’s new Greatest Generation that we’ve got their backs” (Bennett, 2013). This website and similar ones offer career opportunities for veterans with companies specifically seeking to take advantage of veterans’ special skills.

The value of veterans as creative, highly trainable employees outweighs perceived drawbacks such as post-traumatic stress syndrome (PTSD). Strong leadership skills developed through decisions made under battlefield and other stress add to benefits of veterans as workforce leaders. Lida Citroen, workforce transition instructor at the U.S. Air Force Academy, observes: “The first five minutes of a mission, you’re executing on strategy. Then, you’re adapting and improvising. So veterans can be very creative, incredible

problem solvers and that's an interesting aspect to bring to a company that might need sort of a boost of enthusiasm and innovation.” (Peralta, 2014).

A common thread running through the observations of managers is the necessity to engage the veteran in positive employment within weeks, or even days, of their return. Without the proper employment resources in place within a short time, returning U.S. military veterans face a greater risk of joblessness, homelessness, alcoholism, and drug abuse.

THE SUPPORT

The largest source of aid for veterans is the Department of Veterans Affairs, which offers health care, education, and job training, among other benefits. Additionally, programs under state, local, and private control have been created to ease access regionally. This section discusses existing solutions to common issues with the transition from service to civilian life.

HEALTH CARE

VA health care now is more accessible to lower income veterans through elimination of net worth as a determining factor, aligning the process with the MyVA initiative which reorients VA around veterans' needs. "Changing the way we determine eligibility to make the process easier for veterans is part of our promise to veterans," said VA Secretary Bob McDonald. Instead of combining the veteran's assets and income, VA now considers only gross household income and deductible expenses to determine eligibility for medical care and co-payment obligations. McDonald said that more low-income, non-service connected veterans will have less out-of-pocket costs. The change could lower health care costs for nearly 190,000 low-income and non-service connected veterans in the next five years, according to VA spokespersons quoted in Military Times (Kame, 2015).

RURAL ACCESS

The VA Office of Rural Health (ORH) offers proactive, patient-driven care for rural veterans (Office of Rural Health, 2015). The Rural Assistance Center of the federal office of Rural Health Policy, Health Resources and Services Administration, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, states: "Many veterans living in rural areas fail to get the help they need and are entitled to because of barriers to healthcare, with the primary barrier being the geographic distance to the nearest Veterans Health Administration facility. In addition, veterans may be unaware of the benefits, services, and facilities available to them, which can result in those veterans receiving more costly healthcare at a non-VA facility or no care at all for a variety of chronic and acute mental, social, and physical conditions. Some rural veterans face poverty, homelessness, and substance abuse which further exacerbate their health issues" (RHI, 2015). The number of veterans enrolled in VA health care living in rural communities has increased by seven percent from 2006 to 2014 and continues to grow. According to the 2009-2013 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, cited by the VA Office of Rural Health, rural veterans are estimated to total 5,102,402 individuals or 24% of the entire veteran population. They face challenges to care such as lack of public transportation, distance from VA health care facilities and a shortage of care providers (U.S. Census Bureau's Population Estimates Program, 2013).

SUICIDE PREVENTION

The Veterans Crisis Line provides Suicide Prevention Coordinators who aim to calm the caller and convince them to go to a VA hospital and see a counselor. If efforts fail, the closest emergency personnel are summoned to go to the home of the veteran and provide appropriate assistance. Recently, a bill signed by President Obama in December 2014 requires all members of the U.S. military to have annual mental health assessments in an attempt to prevent suicides. The Jacob Sexton Military Suicide Prevention Act of 2014 is named for Army Specialist Jacob Sexton, an Afghanistan veteran who committed suicide while home on leave in 2009. "The specifics of the Sexton bill are designed in part to promote more communication among the friends and families of those who may have suicidal ideations," said Sen. Joe Donnelly, D-Indiana, interviewed by Dan Lamothe for the Washington Post online news report

Checkpoint. “At a memorial service, some of Sexton’s fellow soldiers told his father they were aware the young specialist had been struggling,” Donnelly said (Lamothe, 2014).

HOUSING

The VA is addressing homelessness and other issues through the HUD-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) program. Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) rental assistance for homeless veterans is combined with case management and clinical services provided by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).

As funding is available, the VA’s Grant and Per Diem (GPD) Program funds community-based agencies providing transitional housing or service centers for homeless veterans. “VA grants may fund up to 65 percent of the project for the construction, acquisition or renovation of facilities or for the purchase of vans to provide outreach and services to homeless veterans,” states the VA (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2015).

The Detroit Veterans’ Center (DVC), a transitional housing facility and resource center in downtown Detroit, Michigan, is operated by the Michigan Veterans Foundation. The DVC states on its website: “It is a veteran-initiated project and is operated by veterans. The unique nature of the DVC with its back to basics, military approach (i.e., barracks-style quarters, squad leaders, moving up through the ranks etc.) addresses the special needs of homeless veterans. The program rebuilds the sense of belonging and pride that the veteran had during their service years. The DVC provides the skills and confidence needed for homeless veterans to break the cycle of homelessness and return to independent living. This includes the specific goals of residential stability, increased skill level, increased income and greater self-determination to obtain and maintain self-sufficiency.” Thus, the DVC establishes a pattern and program of action that could be replicated across the country, giving focus to veterans struggling to cope with civilian life after the turmoil and trauma of active duty (Michigan Veterans Foundation, n.d.).

EMPLOYMENT

The Bureau of Labor Statistics recently released a report showing veteran unemployment has hit a seven-year low at 5.3 percent (The Economics Daily, 2015). According to the Daily Iowan at the University of Iowa, which commented editorially: “Considering where that number once was, this is great news. Veterans returning to the country during the financial crisis had a particularly hard time finding jobs. In 2011, the general unemployment rate was 9 percent, and veterans faced 12.4 percent unemployment. That same year, President Obama signed an executive order directing federal agencies to focus on hiring veterans. This initiative, as well as the growing economy, appears to have eased veteran unemployment” (Board, 2015).

Service members separating under honorable conditions from active duty may qualify for unemployment compensation if they are unable to find a new job. The Unemployment Compensation for ex-service members (UCX) program is administered by the states for the federal government. Veterans should file for benefits in the week of their discharge date, as shown on the DD-214 discharge papers. Retirement pay and disability retirement pay reduces UCX benefits dollar-for-dollar. VA benefits do not affect UCX benefits (Military Advantage, n.d.).

If a veteran chooses to return to school to obtain a post-secondary or graduate degree, veteran-exclusive services exist outside of traditional college-specific programs. For example, Service to School (<http://service2school.org>) is a 501-c-3 non-profit that provides free mentorship and assistance to veterans returning to school. The main goal is to make sure that the Post 9/11 GI Bill is effective. The main service provided to veterans is free mentorship and assistance in college admissions. The veteran is linked to a Veteran Ambassador who has been successful in gaining admission. TRAIN methodology is used: Test prep; Resume review; Application and essay review; interview prep, and Networking assistance. S2S partners with The Warrior Scholar Project, the Pat Tillman Foundation and Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America as well as top colleges and universities to share best practices around veteran recruitment and admissions.

When leaving active duty, veterans are paid a government relocation allotment. The amount varies but can provide a savings to employers. Also, tax credits are available to employers who hire military veterans. Tax credits recovered range from \$1,500 to \$8,000 per hire and provide the employer a one-for-one credit against payable income taxes. According to the VA, with the Special Employer Incentive (SEI) Program, “you can hire a qualified trainee at an apprenticeship wage.” This program offers a salary reimbursement of up to 50% for a certain period to cover job training. The program also offers external support and equipment (Department of Veterans Affairs, 2012).

VETERANS INELIGIBLE FOR VA BENEFITS

Veterans who received OTH (other than honorable) discharges due to misconduct attributable to undiagnosed PTSD are now eligible for corrections and upgrades of military records. As a result of a lawsuit filed by the Veterans Legal Services Clinic at Yale Law School, former Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel ordered boards for correction of military records to give “liberal consideration” to such cases. The class action lawsuit, alleging such discharges led to homelessness, barriers to employment and denial of VA benefits, was dismissed by U.S. District Court. Claims were remanded to the boards and an expedited schedule was set for adjudication (Yale Law School, 2014).

THE SUCCESS STORIES

DANCING TO FAME

Noah Galloway, a retired Army sergeant, created the No Excuses Charitable Fund in 2005. Galloway recently appeared on “Dancing with the Stars,” with Sharna Burgess, dance professional from Australia. Galloway lost his left leg and left arm in an explosion just three months into a deployment to Iraq in 2005. Now a personal trainer and motivational speaker, he was featured in the November 2014 Men’s Health Magazine as “The Ultimate Guy.” He has appeared on many television shows, including as a guest on “Ellen” and “The Today Show.” His organization accepts and raises money for charities including Operation Enduring Warrior and the YMCA.

Additionally, J.R. Martinez, a fellow veteran from the 101st Marine Battalion veteran who was burned in Iraq in 2003, won the dance competition on “Dancing with the Stars.” Martinez is now an actor and best-selling author as well as motivational speaker (Anderson, 2015).

NEW APARTMENTS WELCOME VETERANS

Piquette Square is a \$23 million 150-unit apartment project in Detroit aimed at homeless veterans developed by Southwest Housing Solutions. Rather than just housing veterans, the apartment complex created an integrated environment that offers on-site job training, mental health counseling, and other services to help veteran residents become self-sufficient. An estimated 4,000 homeless veterans are located in the Detroit area (Piquette Square for Veterans, 2010).

MARINE BOOTSTRAPS INTO BOILERMAKERS

When Dale Rasmer, 32, of Standish, Michigan, got out of the Marines, he needed a job. Despite his military training as a diesel mechanic for amphibious vehicles and as a military policeman, (training not transferable to Michigan police work) he couldn’t find a job. His father could get him into Boilermaker’s Local 169 in Detroit, but he didn’t qualify because he couldn’t weld. There wasn’t time for a long college vocational training program, so Dale improvised. He went to a nearby high school welding program, where his dad knew the instructor, and convinced him to allow students to teach him to weld. He gained the new skill showing up at the school three times a week for a month. Now a member of the Boilermakers local, he has gone through apprenticeship and, as a journeyman, he gets assignments for jobs paying \$33 per hour. Depending on demand, he gets work up to 60 hours a week, time and a half for overtime which could range up to \$50 per hour and about \$300 a day. There is plenty of overtime, with many assignments calling for seven 10 to 12 hour days. Although the work pays well, (\$62,000 last year), it is sporadic. His working hours in 2014 totaled just 4.9 months on the job, so Dale is intent on becoming self-employed by starting his own welding shop. Currently, he is saving up for equipment and seeking start-up funding.

VET PROJECT HONORING SAILORS AND SHIPBUILDING TRADITION

Richard Janke, a Navy veteran, was inspired to honor his brother, John, a Navy man who died during World War II. To do this, he raised more than \$2 million for costs to have the USS Edson (DD 946, 418 foot destroyer) towed from Philadelphia and docked in Bay City. With the help of retired Chief Petty Officers Mike and Mary Kegley, who both served more than 28 years, and a host of community supporters, Janke’s group achieved success 7 May 2013. The ship arrived at its berth near the Independence Bridge on the Saginaw River 70 years to the day after 19-year-old John Janke died aboard the USS Sims at the Battle of Coral Sea in 1943. An estimated 8,000 visitors toured the Edson in 2014 and volunteers contributed more than 10,000 hours of work. Edson is the only ship named for a Marine, Maj. Gen. Merritt

Edson. After her service, the Edson was converted to a museum ship at the USS Intrepid Air, Sea, and Space Museum in New York City where it served 10 years (Burger, 2012).

DISABLED VETERAN OPENS DISTILLERY IN INDIANAPOLIS

Travis Barnes, 32, a disabled veteran who served in the Marines 1st Recon Battalion in Iraq, recently opened the Hotel Tango Distillery in downtown Indianapolis, Indiana. Barnes suffered multiple traumatic brain injuries in action in Iraq. He served three tours in Iraq beginning with the initial surge in 2003, and also in Fallujah, Ramadi and Nasiriyah. Barnes went through an adjustment period after his final tour ended in 2006. Besides graduating from law school, he found another way to continue assimilation into civilian life – that of “vetrepreneur.” Barnes and his wife Hilary and three friends in September 2014 opened what is believed to be the first distillery in the nation owned by a disabled combat veteran. The artisan distillery’s name comes from the military phonetic alphabet: Hotel (Hilary) and Tango (Travis) (Hecht, 2015).

SIX YEAR NAVY SEAL MAKES TRANSITION

David Balistreri served more than six years as a Navy SEAL, so making the transition to civilian life wasn’t easy. A native of Michigan, Balistreri graduated from high school in hometown of Rochester Hills, then served in the Navy from 2006 to 2012. Nothing in civilian life can match being on constant on alert for life-threatening dangers or surviving physical perils that would make Superman quail, he recalls. SEALs must pass one of the most physically-demanding courses ever devised in order to successfully conduct special operations, unconventional warfare and clandestine operations in marine and riverine environments. After being discharged, it took Balistreri months to get used to the pace of suburban life, the lack of need for incessant vigilance and the absence of physical stress. He briefly attended Oakland University near his home and he is now a consultant/test specialist for Teledyne Brown Engineering and InfoPro Corporation in Huntsville, Alabama. He is currently a full-time student at Arizona State University while working full-time.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

REGIONAL VETERANS' CENTERS

The plethora of programs aimed at helping returning military veterans make the transition to civilian life somewhat more difficult in that their multiplicity frustrates solutions. One positive response that could be facilitated through the information disseminated in this report is the encouragement and establishment of Regional Veterans' Centers throughout the state of Michigan and the nation. These centers would allow the veteran a place to access the consolidated information and counseling necessary for a successful future. The regional veterans' centers would work with veterans to address homelessness, mental health issues, provide employment and entrepreneurship assistance, and connect veterans to family counseling. The focus on a regional brick and mortar center that can be a physical focal point for veterans to gather and receive assistance is the strength of this initiative.

We recommend that counties (or coalitions of counties) across the country consider establishing veterans centers to disseminate the vast and often confusing amount of information about assistance programs. These centers would serve as central collection spots for hot button information about health, employment, education, housing, counseling, nursing care and other areas affecting many veterans. These centers would provide a focal point for veterans for life improvement not necessarily provided by the most prevalent veterans' organizations such as the American Legion, AMVETS, Veterans of Foreign Wars and such organizations. Although unemployment among veterans has dropped, Iraq and Afghanistan vets are still finding more difficulty than other veterans' groups in finding employment. The number and quality of programs to assist veterans varies widely depending on the state of their residence, although most programs are federal and thus available to all.

MULTIPLE DEPLOYMENTS

Current government policy of multiple deployments of military personnel appears to be the major problem causing difficulty for veterans and their families. We would respectfully recommend that Members of Congress who sit on military and veterans affairs committees review the multiple deployment policy especially with respect to reserve and guard units. A uniform policy controlling the number of deployments affecting service members with families and civilian careers should be a prime object of such review. Mental health issues related to post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) have been identified as relating mainly to heavy combat, exacerbated by multiple deployments that cause difficulty in readjustment to civilian life.

Veterans returning from overseas after their service have a wide variety of assistance available for their transition to civilian life. However, they must plan to access such programs immediately after their release from the service.

ENTREPRENEURSHIP

In terms of entrepreneurship, we have reviewed several successful initiatives. However, another that might be considered is starting a recycling program of electronic equipment. Donors, especially large corporations, might be more prone to make surplus equipment available to veterans in recognition of their service. Entrepreneurs in this field will need to research the methods of retrieving valuable components, processing them safely and finding markets. Another area of great need is in training and coaching welfare clients or other low income groups to become farm-workers. Many farm work jobs are going unfilled because of immigration problems, transportation, housing and other issues. In some areas of the country,

crops are rotting in the fields because there are no workers to conduct the harvest. It would seem that an enterprising veteran, or veterans, could organize a farm-worker training program in their region and make a contribution to the economy and society at the same time. Perhaps a national veteran's organization could adopt such a training program as a project. Federal, state and foundation funding could be accessed to organize and operate such programs, perhaps on a non-profit basis but offering employment to veterans and benefits to the agricultural community as well.

One of the great untapped areas of potential for veterans is in applying military training to civilian programs. Bisk Education notes that "with the current focus on leadership in the private sector, veterans may be the panacea that the American workforce has needed. When veterans are employed in the private sector, they have the opportunity to capitalize on the specialized training they received during their service, bringing valuable intangible assets to private companies who have a need for effective leadership in the private sector" (Alliance, 2016).

Overall, adjustment to civilian life is difficult for veterans. Services in place are not adequate and an increase in spending on resources, at the local, state, and federal level, must be seriously considered to ease the transition. Additionally, services in place should be monitored for their effectiveness and simplicity of access. Veterans should have well-defined contact points for services including health care, job training, and other relevant services. Lastly, policies regarding multiple deployments should be reconsidered to ensure the least amount of interruption to traditional life, and veterans should be better informed about taking advantages of services prior to discharge. Through continued community involvement, the United States will provide a path for veterans to assimilate into civilian society and contribute to the economy.

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APPENDIX A

STATE-BY-STATE INITIATIVES

ALABAMA:

The Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs (ADVA) has been honored nationally for its leadership and innovation in the state's Veterans Treatment Court (VTC) program for veterans involved in the justice system. See: <http://www.va.alabama.gov/>

ALASKA:

Alaska veterans may qualify for the veteran's exemption under the Tax Exempt First-Time Homebuyer Program. Qualified veterans can receive a one percent interest rate reduction on the first \$50,000 of the loan amount. Veterans must meet "State Vet" income limits. See more at <https://www.ahfc.us/buy/loan-programs/vets/>

ARIZONA:

Intel, the world's largest computer chip maker, in cooperation with the Arizona Department of Veteran Services, advertises for veterans to fill jobs: "Your service prepared you as one of the best-trained, most value-driven performers in the world." See: <https://dema.az.gov/>

ARKANSAS:

The Arkansas Veterans Education and Training Partnership aims to provide veterans with increased opportunities for assessment, training, supportive services, employment, and retained employment in Arkansas. See <http://arvets.org/avetp/>

CALIFORNIA:

California's 1.8 million veterans represent eight percent of the total U.S. veteran population. California expects an additional 30,000 discharged members of the armed services each year for the next several years – more than any state. See <https://www.calvet.ca.gov/>

COLORADO:

Colorado has a number of state benefits for veterans and current members of the military, including a Colorado Property Tax Exemption for 100% service-connected disabled veterans. Information available at <https://www.colorado.gov/dmva>

CONNECTICUT:

In January 2014, the Connecticut Department of Social Services (DSS) and Department of Labor (DOL) launched the program, "Supporting Military Members/Veterans and Their Families in Accessing

Community Services,” to improve outreach and access to job-related services, health coverage, food assistance and other support. Information at <http://www.ct.gov/ctva/>

DELAWARE:

Delaware Joining Forces is a state-wide public and private organizational network that guides policy and provides services through its partners through the state’s military and veteran communities. <http://veteransaffairs.delaware.gov/>

FLORIDA:

The Florida Department of Veterans Affairs was awarded the Improving Veterans Access to VA Benefits and Services Pillars of Excellence award for its outreach and branding campaign, “Honoring Those Who Serve U.S.” See <http://floridavets.org/>

GEORGIA:

Georgia is home to the fifth highest women’s veterans’ population in the nation – approximately 106,000 of the state’s 752,000 veterans are women, according to estimates from the VA Office of the Actuary. By percentage, women comprise 14 percent of Georgia’s veterans’ population, while the national rates of ten percent of veterans are women. VA projects the national percentage of women veterans to continue increasing. See <https://veterans.georgia.gov/>

HAWAII:

Hawaii gives employment and re-employment preference to veterans and service-connected disabled veterans and their widow(er) s for civil service positions, training program, job counseling and referrals to civilian jobs by the Workforce Development Division, Department of Labor & Industrial Relations. Information at <http://dod.hawaii.gov/ovs/>

IDAHO:

The Idaho Division of Veteran Services provides an all-expenses-paid deer or elk hunt for two disabled veterans annually. See <http://www.veterans.idaho.gov/>

ILLINOIS:

U.S. Rep. Tammy Duckworth, D-IL, the first female double amputee from the Iraq War, was honored with the Abraham Lincoln Veteran Champion Award, presented by Harry Sawyer, Illinois Department of Veterans’ Affairs (IDVA) Interim Director, at an event in 2015 in Wood Dale, Illinois. She is the first Asian-American woman elected to Congress from Illinois, the first disabled woman to be elected to the U.S. House of Representatives, and the first member of Congress born in Thailand. She is a former IDVA Director, former Assistant Secretary of Veterans Affairs, and currently represents the Illinois 8th District in Congress. See <https://www.illinois.gov/veterans/>

INDIANA:

The Indiana Department of Veteran Affairs created a new center for veteran assistance within their office in the state government building in downtown Indianapolis. The Veterans Service Center (VSC) is made of multiple offices and cubicles where veterans can meet with representatives and get assistance with job searches, resumes and jobs applications. Information available at <http://www.in.gov/dva/>

IOWA:

The Iowa Aviation Museum in Greenfield, Iowa, last year recognized three Iowa airmen who participated in the Doolittle Tokyo Raiders' secret mission on April 18, 1942. Robert King, executive director of the Iowa Department of Veteran Affairs, said: "The Doolittle Raid was in retaliation for the devastating Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor just four months earlier. After this and the Bataan Death March, the American people sorely needed a morale boost. The daring bombing of Tokyo provided that boost. See <https://va.iowa.gov/>

KANSAS:

The Kansas Veteran' Home recently had a ribbon cutting ceremony for the grand opening of Triplett Hall, an expansion of the home. This expansion of resident services will allow the home to care for a total of 142 residents in nursing care and 48 in assisted living care. See <https://kcva.ks.gov/>

KENTUCKY:

The Kentucky Department of Veterans Affairs (KDVA) is spotlighting Kentucky's 33,000 women veterans throughout 2015, which Governor Steve Beshear has proclaimed the Year of the Woman Veteran in Kentucky. Information at <http://veterans.ky.gov/>

LOUISIANA:

Gov. Bobby Jindal has supported two pieces of legislation designed to help veterans and military students complete college educations in Louisiana, thus preparing them for high wage, high demand jobs.. The proposed legislation requires state schools to seek arrangements with Department of Defense contract schools so that academic credit can be awarded and transferred more easily in Louisiana. Other legislation would encourage higher education institutions to make their campuses more military friendly. See <http://www.vetaffairs.la.gov/>

MAINE:

The University of Maine's VETS Office connects student veterans with the resources they need to successfully transition from combat to classroom to career.. Information at <http://www.maine.gov/dvem/bvs/>

MARYLAND:

Project Jumpstart, a new development at University of Maryland, is a one credit online course designed to help veterans and other non-traditional students learn how to improve their chances for success in college. See <http://veterans.maryland.gov/>

MASSACHUSETTS:

At Soldier On, a non-profit in Pittsfield, Massachusetts, a new call center dedicated to better transportation for veterans recently was opened, thanks to a \$2 million grant from the U.S. Department of Transportation.. Information at <http://www.mass.gov/veterans/>

MICHIGAN:

Gov. Rick Snyder and the Detroit Regional Chamber of Commerce urge companies to hire veterans, adding tangible and intangible benefits. In addition to adding well-prepared and highly determined members to the staff, additional benefits include moving expenses, five years of health care services, education through the GI Bill, and possible additional tax credits. See www.michiganveterans.com

MINNESOTA:

The Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs runs Minnesota's five state veterans homes and assists Minnesota's 370,000 veterans and their dependents to obtain the benefits and services provided by the VA. The primary contact for all county benefits and services are County Veterans Service Officers (CVSO). CVSOs are located in each of Minnesota's counties and can be contacted through www.macyso.org or by calling 1888-LinkVet (546-5838).

MISSISSIPPI:

The G.V. "Sonny" Montgomery Center for America's Veterans located on the campus of Mississippi State University is a national leader in providing comprehensive support through a university-based Veteran Resource Center. The Center for America's Veterans honors the legacy of G.V. (Sonny) Montgomery, the 1943 Mississippi State alumnus and 15-term U.S. Congressman who authored the Montgomery G.I. Bill. Information available at <http://www.vab.ms.gov/>

MISSOURI:

The Missouri Veterans Commission and the Department of Corrections have agreed to provide direct services to incarcerated veterans. Re-entry initiatives have been developed with the goal of transitioning veteran offenders to productive life. The program is specifically designed for veterans who are in the transitional phase, 3-6 months after release from incarceration. See <http://mvc.dps.mo.gov/>

MONTANA:

The Montana Veterans Foundation, a non-profit organization, is designed to assist homeless veterans (or veterans at risk of homelessness) by improving their quality of life and providing comprehensive support which enables veterans to achieve greater self sufficiency. Information at www.mtvf.org

NEBRASKA:

The VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System, is an agency that cares for more than 55,000 veterans in 101 counties in Nebraska, western Iowa, and parts of Missouri and Kansas. The Nebraska Veterans Aid Fund (NVA) Fund was established in 1921. This temporary emergency aid fund assists veterans, their spouses, and dependents when an unforeseen emergency occurs disrupting their normal method of living and when other resources are not immediately available. See <https://veterans.nebraska.gov/>

NEVADA:

Veterans from across Nevada attended the Nevada Public Works budget presentation to the Nevada Legislature Ways and Means Committee on 10 March 2015 to show support for a Northern Nevada Veterans Nursing Home. See <http://www.veterans.nv.gov/>

NEW HAMPSHIRE:

Prof. Daniel Seichepine, University of New Hampshire-Manchester lecturer and clinical neuropsychologist recently presented a paper on the frequency of traumatic brain injuries in a cohort of 1990-1991 Gulf War veterans at the 43rd Annual Meeting of the International Neuropsychological Society in Denver, Colorado.. This study is believed to be the first to determine that traumatic brain injuries were more common in this war than originally considered and suggests future research on the potential impact of these injuries. See <http://www.nh.gov/nhveterans/>

NEW JERSEY:

The ‘One Mall a Month’ schedule for the Veterans Outreach Program is an effort by the New Jersey Department of Military and Veterans Affairs to talk one-on-one with veterans or their family members about the wide variety of state and federal veterans benefits. See <http://www.nj.gov/military/veterans/>

NEW MEXICO:

The New Mexico Department of Veterans Services (NMDVS) has been selected as one of five recipients of a \$2 million VA grant for a new pilot program to assist veterans and their families who are transitioning from military service to civilian life in rural or underserved communities. See more information at <http://www.dvs.state.nm.us/>

NEW YORK:

The New York Constitution has been amended to entitle VA certified disabled veterans to receive additional credits toward a civil service appointment or promotion within the state or local government. Candidates will be entitled to 10 additional credits on civil service examinations, minus the number of credits already used for the prior appointment. For additional eligibility and application information please visit the following link: <http://www.cs.ny.gov/vetcredits/>

NORTH CAROLINA:

In appreciation for the service and sacrifices of North Carolina's war veterans, a four-year scholarship program at approved schools in North Carolina has been established for the qualifying natural or adopted (before age 15) children of certain class categories of deceased, disabled, combat or POW/MIA veterans. See information at <http://www.doa.nc.gov/vets/>

NORTH DAKOTA:

North Dakota Veterans suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) may now apply for a grant which may provide them with a specially trained service dog. These service dogs provide the special needs of the veteran they are to serve whether it is calming anxiety attacks, providing comfort and assurance in public settings or waking a veteran from a nightmare. See <http://www.nd.gov/veterans/>

OHIO:

Veterans who are residents of Ohio are eligible for a state bonus of \$100 for each month served in Afghanistan and \$50 for each month served elsewhere in the world. Information at <http://dvs.ohio.gov/>

OKLAHOMA:

The state veterans program administered by the Oklahoma Department of Veterans Affairs, under the direction of the Oklahoma Veterans Commission, provides complete services to the state's veterans. These services include nursing care, financial assistance in emergencies, and field service counseling in the filing of claims for U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and state benefits. See <http://www.ok.gov/odva/>

OREGON:

A Governor's task force on Veterans' Services in Oregon in 2008 reviewed veteran benefits, health care, employment, education, housing/homelessness, transportation, families, women veterans and retirement. The task force made 39 recommendations, many of which have either become law or are under consideration in Congress and by the Oregon Legislature. Information at <http://www.oregon.gov/ODVA>

PENNSYLVANIA:

The Pennsylvania Department of Military and Veterans' Affairs (DMVA)'s goal to make benefits more accessible to state veterans and their eligible family members. A mobile "office" is available to be set up at convenient locations such as shopping centers, veteran service organizations, sporting events, county fairs, parades, festivals and other events in communities throughout the commonwealth. Information at <http://www.dmva.state.pa.us/>

RHODE ISLAND:

The Rhode Island Division of Veterans Affairs maintains a dignified and solemn military cemetery on 265 acres at 301 South Country Trail in Exeter, Rhode Island. The grounds of the cemetery include 31 monuments dedicated to veterans of specific wars and conflicts. See <http://www.vets.ri.gov/>

SOUTH CAROLINA:

The South Carolina Code provides that the Office of Veterans' Affairs shall assist all ex-service personnel, regardless of wars in which their service may have been rendered, in filing, presenting and prosecuting to final determination all claims which they have for money compensation, hospitalization, training and insurance benefits under the terms of federal legislation. These services are extended to eligible dependents, including parents, widows, children and orphans of ex-service personnel See <http://va.sc.gov/>

SOUTH DAKOTA:

South Dakota Gov. Dennis Daugaard proclaimed Monday, March 30, 2015, as “Welcome Home Vietnam Veterans Recognition Day,” calling on all South Dakotans to recognize the courage, service and sacrifice of the men and women who served during the Vietnam War. See vetaffairs.sd.gov

TENNESSEE:

Tennessee Gov. Bill Haslam and Department of Veterans Affairs Commissioner Many-Bears Grinder recently recognized the service and sacrifice of Private First Class Lotchie John Ray Jones of Jasper. Jones went missing on or about November 2, 1950 in the vicinity of Unsan, North Korea and is believed to have died while in enemy captivity at the Pyoktong Prisoner of War Camp 5 on February 28, 1951 See tn.gov/veteran

TEXAS:

The Hazlewood Act is a State of Texas benefit that provides qualified veterans, spouses, and dependent children with an education benefit of up to 150 hours of tuition exemption, including most fee charges, at public institutions of higher education in Texas. See [www.tvc.state.tx/us](http://www.tvc.state.tx.us)

UTAH:

The State of Utah, has a veteran-friendly employer program called The Utah Patriot Partnership Program to recognize the efforts of certain organizations that hire and retain veterans.. The program, created in 2011, is administered by the Department of Workforce Services. Information at veterans.utah.gov

VERMONT:

Vermont veterans may call 2-1-1 to find out about community resources like emergency food and shelter, disability services, counseling, senior services, healthcare, child care, drug and alcohol programs, legal assistance, transportation availability, educational and volunteer opportunities and more. See veterans.vermont.gov/dva

VIRGINIA:

A Women Veterans Call Center was recently started by the State of Virginia. See www.dvs.virginia.gov

WASHINGTON:

The Washington state Department of Veterans Affairs (WDVA) is promoting the hiring of veterans through a program demonstrating support for hiring Guard and Reserve members. Employers are asked to sign pledges to honor and enforce the Uniformed Services Employment and Re-Employment Rights Act (USERRA). Information at www.dva.wa.gov

WEST VIRGINIA:

The West Virginia Veterans' Home transitional unit, a collaborative housing initiative known as Project 214, provides immediate shelter to veterans with urgent housing needs. See www/veterans.wv.gov

WISCONSIN:

Vets Work Wisconsin (VWW) promotes veteran employment in law enforcement, transportation and nursing. Information at <http://dva.state.wi.us/>

WYOMING

Women veterans are encouraged to participate in the Wyoming Women's Antelope Hunt, founded in 2013 as a platform for mentoring and developing camaraderie between women. Teaching women to hunt is part of the Wyoming Women's Foundation mission of investing in economic self-sufficiency of women. Scholarships and education are offered to new hunters. See <http://wvc.wyo.gov/>