Throughout my career, I have had the privilege of serving alongside these men and women as an enlisted airman in the Indiana Air National Guard and later as an officer in the Navy JAG Corps. As president of Hiring Our Heroes (HOH), I’m humbled to have the opportunity to give back to this community in ways that can have a measurable impact on their lives.

Since our launch in March 2011, the program has grown by leaps and bounds in ways that we certainly never thought possible. By the end of 2014, the program had held 837 hiring fairs, making meaningful connections for tens of thousands of service members, veterans, and military spouses to employers nationwide and around the world. In 2015, we’re making great strides at adding to these robust numbers.

Much of the success of our program is due to the strong relationships and partnerships that we have built and maintained with public, private, and nonprofit entities. Our Veteran Employment Advisory Council (VEAC) and our Military Spouse Employment Advisory Council (MSEAC) have led the way in their respective industries to reach new levels of achievement pertaining to veteran employment. In addition, the creation of the Wounded Veteran and Caregiver Employment Advisory Council (WVCEAC) will help address the unique challenges faced by the nation’s wounded veteran and military caregiver population.

Although it is important to look back as we document our success, our main focus is on what lies ahead for us and those we serve. We are moving forward with unparalleled fortitude to explore new possibilities on how to best serve the veteran and military spouse community.

We accomplished much in 2014, but the best is yet to come as we chart and execute another banner year in 2015.

While the overall veteran unemployment rate improved significantly, several key segments of the military population continued to struggle as they transitioned to the civilian sector. In particular, veterans under the age of 25 and post-9/11 veterans continued to face high unemployment.

Many of these challenges resulted from a lack of preparation—too many service members viewed transition as a point in time when they received a DD-214. Nearly 70% were staying put in their last duty station or were returning home with no clear pathway to economic success. Not surprisingly, 53% of them were unemployed within 15 months of transitioning from the military.

Hiring Our Heroes (HOH) worked aggressively to disrupt this pattern in 2014 by moving left of transition. Working with our public and private sector partners, we launched a series of economic summits to reach service members on military installations in the United States and overseas. We provided transitioning service members with resources and tools to make informed decisions and connected them with hundreds of employers from across the country. These important efforts are key to our plan in 2015.

We also continued our critical work for military spouses. Economic success for military families requires opportunities for both service members and their spouses—a feat that can be difficult given the ever-changing nature of military life and frequent moves. We work closely with companies—both nationwide and locally—to identify a range of portable and flexible career opportunities for military spouses.

More challenges loom in 2015 as we face a significant drawdown of our military. With our business partners, we stand ready to meet the needs of this tremendously talented workforce and deliver them into our 21st century economy.
TRANSITION IS NOT A POINT IN TIME WHEN SERVICE MEMBERS RECEIVE THEIR DD-214. MUCH LIKE THE MILITARY, IT IS A PROCESS THAT REQUIRES A CLEARLY DEFINED MISSION, PREPARATION, EXECUTION, AND THE ABILITY TO ADAPT AND OVERCOME. THE PROCESS REQUIRES A SIGNIFICANT AMOUNT OF TIME AND COMMITMENT FOR SERVICE MEMBERS AND THEIR FAMILIES.
2014 WAS A DYNAMIC AND EXCITING YEAR FOR OUR EVENTS TEAM. HOH HOSTED MORE THAN 125 EVENTS IN CITIES THROUGHOUT AMERICA, ATTRACTING 31,207 MILITARY JOB SEEKERS.
Overall, we have held more than 837 events in the last four years and connected more than 200,000 veterans with more than 30,000 employers across the country. HOH continues to maintain an industry-best 13% hiring rate at these events.

These numbers tell part of the story. Partnering with the departments of Defense, Veterans Affairs, and Labor, as well as state and local agencies, we launched a series of on-base military hiring summits to empower and motivate transitioning service members well before they leave the military. Not only did we provide them with best-in-class resources to search for and find meaningful employment, but we also connected them with hundreds of employers looking for incredible veteran talent.

The importance of these events became immediately clear at our first transition summit. Held on February 3 and 4, 2014, at Fort Bliss, Texas, the summit connected more than 1,000 active duty Army soldiers with more than 100 employers from across the country. It also connected them with key government and private sector resources to land a meaningful career.

We built on the success of the Fort Bliss event and held five additional summits on military bases in the United States. We also held our first overseas hiring events in Germany, holding two back-to-back events in Ramstein and Bavaria. All told, these summits brought together 7,631 military transitioning service members with 708 employers.

In 2014, we also launched a series of hiring expos held in conjunction with professional sporting events or larger veteran-centric events. For example, we hosted hiring events with the Washington Wizards, the San Antonio Spurs, and the NASCAR Hall of Fame. All military job seekers received free admission to the hiring events and up to four free tickets to attend the games or museum. Similarly, we partnered with NBCUniversal to host veteran hiring events at health expos. Overall, these expos consisted of more than 1,700 veterans participating, with an average of more than 250 veterans attending each.

Finally, we created unique opportunities such as industry-specific events concentrating on logistics and manufacturing companies, as well as the rail transportation industry. Two such events in Philadelphia and Indianapolis brought in 27 rail transportation companies matching job skills with approximately 200 job seekers. Other events sponsored by Alcoa brought in a variety of employers with a special emphasis on employers from the manufacturing industry. We hosted four of these events in California, Ohio, Iowa and Tennessee, ultimately bringing together 775 job seekers with 402 employers.

As HOH moves full steam ahead in 2015, we continue to find innovative ways to connect veterans with employers looking for military talent. We look forward to making meaningful connections for veterans looking for great careers and employers seeking a talented workforce.
The Military Spouse Program continued to grow and reach new heights in 2014.
From on-base hiring events and receptions to new digital programs, HOH continues to provide military spouses with tools and resources to find meaningful careers.

A key part of our program continues to be our two-day hiring events designed specifically for military spouses. These events begin with a networking reception on the evening before the hiring fair, followed by employment workshops and the hiring fair the next day. In 2014, we hosted 29 receptions and hiring events throughout the United States, connecting 4,453 spouses with 561 employers.

Sixteen great companies sit on our Military Spouse Employment Advisory Council (MSEAC)—companies that have demonstrated a strong commitment to hiring military spouses. Our MSEAC partners participated in close to 20 hiring events and networking receptions.

We also enhanced our digital efforts by launching our military spouse resume tool, Career Spark, thanks to support from Toyota and our partnership with Blue Star Families. This tool was borne from a comprehensive survey of spouses to best create a tool that reflected their challenges and translated their skills into assets. With Career Spark, military spouses can build skills-based resumes that maximize their work and volunteer experience and draw attention away from gaps in their employment history. The tool also offers great tips for spouses, from interviewing and building a network to dressing for success and goal-setting.

Finally, since HOH cannot be everywhere at once, LinkedIn spouse employment networks have been a significant component of our core programming. Our national spouse and employer LinkedIn network has more than 2,500 members with 16 subgroups from San Diego, California, to New York’s Hudson Valley, with dozens of requests to join daily. These groups succeed not only because they serve one of the most mobile populations in the country, but because of the demand from employers that are moving to digital platforms to recruit from a pool of talented candidates.
EMPLOYMENT WORKSHOPS ARE CRITICAL TO HOH’S SUCCESS. SINCE 2011, OUR TRAINERS HAVE CONDUCTED MORE THAN 300 EMPLOYMENT WORKSHOPS FOR VETERANS, TRANSITIONING SERVICE MEMBERS AND MILITARY SPOUSES.
More than 16,000 military participants have attended employment workshops, and nearly 5,000 have sought one-on-one counseling. 2014 was our most successful year yet!

Owing in large part to our partners at the University of Phoenix and General Electric, we were able to host training workshops at every hiring event in 2014. We trained more than 3,129 attendees at 60 events.

We also expanded our network of corporate and nonprofit training partners. New partners included Aon, Goodwill Industries International, Corporate America Supports You (CASY), and the Military Officers Association of America (MOAA). The impact of these workshops cannot be overstated.

Between August and November 2014, HOH surveyed more than 450 attendees to determine what modules were most effective and why. Hands down, respondents found our resume-building session and elevator pitch training to be “most valuable,” receiving nearly 80% of the votes. As for their least favorite module, 75% said “none,” and 91% found the overall content to be “perfect.” Both are strong indicators of our effectiveness.

As we move forward, we will refine our program and look for volunteers to provide training at the workshops. We also plan to launch many of our programs online for 24/7 access.

Our training workshops provide a number of volunteer opportunities for organizations and businesses. From conducting training to providing one-on-one coaching to mock interviews, our program encourages HR and recruiting experts to share their knowledge.

In 2014, 535 volunteers provided more than 1,600 hours of service at our workshops. National companies have found this program useful for their respective community relations divisions. General Electric (GE) is a great example, hosting 79 workshops and coaching more than 4,500 veterans in transition skills. GE is proud to employ more than 10,000 veterans and considers this a great way to give back.

For more information about our training workshops or how to volunteer, email Marady Leary at mleary@uschamber.com.
WORKING WITH BUSINESSES ACROSS THE COUNTRY WAS A TOP PRIORITY IN 2014, AS WE LOOKED FOR NEW WAYS TO EMPOWER THOSE BUSINESSES TO RECRUIT AND HIRE VETERANS AND MILITARY SPOUSES.
Together with USAA, HOH launched Employer Roadmap (www.employerroadmap.org)—a first-of-its-kind digital tool that helps employers find tools and resources to recruit, hire, and retain veteran and military spouse talent. After employers answer a short questionnaire, the tool delivers customized content that enables them to identify best practices in building, growing, and improving their veteran hiring plans. All the content is provided from leaders in the veteran and military spouse employment space.

The success of Employer Roadmap cannot be overstated. Within four short months, more than 1,000 employers and recruiters signed up and began using its tools and resources.

In addition, to keep employers up to date on the latest trends and resources, HOH launched Employer Lunch & Learns in communities across the country as well as webinars, which virtually offer content on a variety of topics. These one-hour training sessions were hosted in conjunction with 14 local hiring events in select cities. In total, we trained more than 300 HR professionals and recruiters.

The Business and State Engagement team worked throughout the year to educate employers, state and local chambers, and business associations on the value of hiring veterans and military spouses and best practices in the space. In March 2014, the team met with the Council of State Chambers, consisting of representatives from 40 different state chambers of commerce, and engaged in a positive dialogue centering on recruiting and retaining veterans in the private sector.

Similarly, the team presented to members of the Associated General Contractors of America and the American Trucking Associations. Employer engagement continued through the Employer Lunch & Learns in 17 communities across the country. During the presentations, trainers shared resources and best practices with the more than 360 companies that attended.

In 2014, HOH introduced a series of educational webinars for both employers and job seekers. With the success of our USAA-sponsored Employer Best Practices Lunch & Learns at select hiring fairs, we began offering this presentation online to enable even more employers to access the session. Due to the overwhelming demand, five more employer webinars were created, and we also recorded our most popular presentation for veterans—the University of Phoenix Employment Workshop—as a prerecorded webinar that can be viewed 24 hours a day. Now, all webinars can be viewed 24/7 online and pre-registration is not required.

Throughout 2015, HOH will continue to offer best-in-class tools, programs, and resources for employers to help them connect with the talent they need.
In 2014, HOH told the stories of veterans and military spouses seeking employment to millions of Americans across the country through traditional and social media outlets.

Hiring Our Heroes was mentioned in 682 articles, television interviews and blogs. That included television features with NBC’s “TODAY” show, FOX News, Al-Jazeera America, and others. We were featured in print articles in USA TODAY, The Washington Post, Forbes, and Military Times.

The program has been fortunate to have been featured on NBC’s “TODAY” show every year since we launched. In 2014, “TODAY” show correspondent Kerry Sanders highlighted our partnership and product launch as he jumped out of a plane with the Army’s Golden Knights. The audience for that week was incredibly valuable to the overall reach of the event. The event was shown on MSNBC that day, “NBC Nightly News” that evening, and dozens of affiliates across the country throughout the following week.

We also generated significant media attention with our partnership with USAA and the release of the “Best Places for Veterans” list for 2014—a list of cities across America providing service members and their families with objective data on the best places to begin their civilian careers.

Finally, HOH continued expanding its social media reach in 2014. Our social media following grew from 265,687 at the end of 2013 to 395,528 followers on Facebook and Twitter. The HOH home page had more than 350,000 unique visitors in 2014, resulting in more than 1.2 million page views.
CAREER SPARK

MORE THAN 71,000 UNIQUE VISITORS IN 2014

NEARLY 3,000 MILITARY SPOUSES CREATED PROFILES AND STARTED BUILDING THEIR RESUMES.

EMPLOYER ROADMAP

MORE THAN 1,000 UNIQUE AND ACTIVE PROFILES CREATED IN 2014

VETERAN HIRING EXPERTISE (Employer Roadmap Users)

COMPANY SIZE (Employer Roadmap Users)

VIRTUAL JOB SCOUT (August – December 2014)

7 ONLINE HIRING FAIRS

8,200 JOB SEEKERS

1,100+ ONLINE EMPLOYERS
Since the Hiring 500,000 Heroes initiative was launched in March 2012, more than 1,700 businesses large and small from across a wide range of industries and sectors have joined the effort and committed to hire not just 500,000 but more than 585,000 veterans, transitioning service members, and military spouses. By the end of 2014, we confirmed more than 369,000 hires as part of the campaign.

Notwithstanding these successes, more work lies ahead. We have set an ambitious goal of ensuring 500,000 hires by mid-2015. It’s a worthy goal that we know we can achieve.

The keynote speaker at the awards dinner was Deputy Secretary of Veterans Affairs (VA) Sloan Gibson, who commended the work of the Chamber and HOH for their efforts on behalf of veterans and military spouses. He highlighted the importance of private- and public-sector partnerships and the important partnership between the VA and HOH.

We also were pleased to have Lieutenant General David Halverson, commander of the U.S. Army Installation Management Command, as a speaker. Following on the success of our transition summits, Halverson announced a major expansion of that program. He said that the Army planned to co-host 20 summits with HOH in 2015.

Yet major announcements were only part of the gala event. We recognized six companies or individuals making significant contributions on behalf of veterans and military spouses. Eric Eversole, HOH President, said, “These six winners have set the standard this year, and as a result, we have seen real progress and momentum in the effort to create incredible economic opportunities for veterans and military spouses. Connecting the men and women who have served to such opportunities is not only good for their business but good for our country.”

On a more somber note, we remembered our good friend Steve Robinson of Prudential, who was a tireless supporter of the veteran and military spouse community. We were honored that his wife, Patti Robinson, presented the first-ever “Steve Robinson Post-9/11 Veteran Employment Award” to USAA. Steve is deeply missed.
After a substantial realignment of our processes and initiatives in 2014, we are now looking ahead. HOH will be conducting transition events across the United States and around the world.

Building on our success and constantly making updates to our programs, HOH, working with our strategic partners, has held or will hold events in Japan, Italy, and other countries in 2015. This, along with an ever-increasing digital presence, will continue to bring our resources and tools directly to where transitioning service members and military spouses are when they need assistance the most.

HOH expects to continue to see businesses stepping up to the plate when it comes to bringing qualified veterans and military spouses on board. And we will ensure that we maintain our focus on determining the best ways to help companies do just that.

HOH made a real effort in 2014 to move left of transition, as well as provide veterans and military spouses not only with a definition of what real economic opportunity is, but also with hands-on access to what that actually looks and feels like.

Building on our successes and never resting on our laurels, HOH will continue to engage on all fronts in the public, private, and nonprofit sectors to make our goal of empowering every capable veteran and military spouse to find meaningful employment.
MILITARY SPOUSE EMPLOYMENT ADVISORY COUNCIL

CHAIRMAN’S CIRCLE

WOUNDED VETERAN AND CAREGIVER EMPLOYMENT ADVISORY COUNCIL

*Advisory councils as of May 2015