

# STRENGTHENING THE PILLARS OF STABILITY: ADDRESSING ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY, MENTAL AND PHYSICAL WELLNESS, AND COMMUNITY FOR MILITARY SERVICE MEMBERS AND FAMILIES

**Announcer 00:00**

Please welcome the panel on "Strengthening the Pillars of Stability," moderated by Executive Director of Milken Institute Finance Kevin Klowden.

**Kevin Klowden 00:10**

There we go—so I know you feel incredibly thrilled and all of this. So, to everybody: Thank you very much. This is a topic that we consider incredibly important, both at the Institute and more importantly, in society. The issue of ineffective military transition is incredibly important. I say this not simply because of the fact that the military, as we are very fond of saying, has been one of the greatest engines for economic advancement and opportunity for people in the United States for decades, especially since World War II. Ever since we've had the GI bill coming after the war. Ever since we created the opportunity for all of these activities—for numerous economic activities. I actually live in a neighborhood that most of the homes were largely built up during and after World War II directly are tied to the defense industry or to housing in terms of the reconstruction [inaudible]. A certain amount of it is luck. A certain amount is who you know. A certain amount is whether you have access to either the right skills training, the right job placements, the right companies, the right individuals. It can make a huge difference in terms of where your life goes, and it makes a huge difference for companies and employers and everyone else, which is why we have all these different perspectives, because there is no greater source of job training from numerou—

everything from technical and construction jobs to computer programming jobs to digital skills to managing people to dealing with all sorts of problem solving then military service and be able to take that and translate that and to give the benefit to families, to give the benefit in terms of how people are able to cope with that switch into the private sector, to give—you know, to take advantage of the incredible skill sets of military spouses, who are running at a 20 to 25 percent unemployment rate. All of that is something that we should be doing and can directly address key challenges in society and key challenges for current and former members of the military. So, with that, I would like to do a quick introduction with everybody. To my immediate left is John C. Buckridge, who is president and CEO of Integra-Cast. He's been a CEO of multiple different companies, as well as a Navy veteran and is fundamentally tied to numerous different key areas of experience that you will call on you for this panel. So, glad to have you. To John's left is Mona Dexter. Mona is vice president of Military and Veteran Affairs at Comcast. She also ran Hiring Our Heroes with the US Chamber, she is a former Army spouse and Army mother, and is—been essentially integrally tied to a number of different challenges and issues for veterans, as well as solutions for which we are really grateful for. On her left is a man who obviously has no connections whatsoever to the military. Joe Dunford, General Dunford, is, among other things, the former head of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the head of the Marine Corps and combat troops in Afghanistan. But none of that's really pertinent, because we're really going to be talking about him in terms of all the other things that he's done, which is overseeing and dealing with numerous soldiers and others going through military transitions. Military transition itself. All of the activities that he does, in terms of as a volunteer, as a private sector leader, and all the experience that he can draw on, we are thrilled to have you. To his left is my colleague Sylvie Raver, who is the senior director of the Science Philanthropy Accelerator for Research and Collaboration, which is easier to say as SPARC, with the Milken Institute Philanthropy team. She oversees our philanthropy programs in relation to veterans, and is an expert in mental health, is also decided that she so thoroughly wanted to live the tied-to-military experience with her extended family and in-laws that she lives in Annapolis, so she can see the Naval Academy without even thinking about it. And she has—she will talk a great deal about a number of the programs that we've been doing already and the activities. And to her left is Wendi Safstrom, who is the president of the SHRM Foundation, who is a society of human resource managers, and is—and can draw not only on all of the work that SHRM has been doing in terms of bridging the gap in transitions and working with veterans, but also on her own tie—in her own personal ties, having been born on an Army base and having grown up and lived a whole bunch of the experience and seen firsthand how employers can make a huge difference in terms of creating and setting up circumstances for effective transition. So, for all of that, would like to say that—oh, by the way, since I didn't mention any of that, is that, yes, I also note that, in addition to the ties to the Milken Institute Finance's program for Economic Mobility for Veterans, I'm also would note that in I am—between my side of the family, my wife's side of the family, I think I'm actually tied to all five branches of the military. So, but I won't go into all of those details, because I'd rather go into discussing issues and solutions. So, thank you everybody for that. So, what I'd like to actually do is start out, Sylvie, if you could go ahead and—you've been leading an initiative at the Institute in partnership with two philanthropic families to identify priorities for holistically improving the military to civilian transition. From your perspective, what role can philanthropy play in strengthening this critical stage in military journey?

#### **Sylvie Raver 07:18**

Thank you for having me. I'm really excited to be part of this conversation and with such experts. Sitting next to the General is really exciting. So, Kevin said that I lead the brain and mental health portfolio within SPARC, and I came to that role as a neuroscientist researcher by training, but I really wanted to work in a way that I could bring medical advances in health and biomedicine closer to the people that really need to benefit from them. So, that's what I do within SPARC and in general, within Strategic Philanthropy, we work with families, foundations, and

nonprofits to understand scientific and medical ecosystems, understand the barriers and then develop and implement funding strategies to drive progress forward for these for these priorities. And what does that have to do with veterans? It's pretty obvious, because of the mental and brain challenges that some of them experience, but I'll talk about those a little bit later. What I'd like to highlight here is the role of philanthropy, and what we've seen philanthropy can do within this ecosystem. So, last year, in partnership with two philanthropic families, we started a project to understand how we could direct support more effectively and efficiently across the veterans support ecosystem to really improve this military to civilian transition. And I see a lot of faces here who we got to know along the process. And so the conclusions I'll come to in just a second, but at a high level, philanthropy, and Wendi will talk about this, is really such a powerful tool to deploy within this space. General Dunford, I know, has a lot of experience on this as well. So, you know, unlike government, which is really bound by restrictions, with appropriations and regulations, or nonprofits, that have to be focused on specific missions, philanthropy can work in a really nimble way. It can work in a long term strategy, and it can identify and fill gaps that other sectors can't. It can also, you know, catalyze new models of solutioning and convene diverse stakeholders. I think we're all reflective of that. So, these features really show up in the conclusions that we've drawn from our analysis of the ecosystem that we approach through a framework of health and well-being, economic opportunity, community building, and then really looking across the whole ecosystem to understand how it can work better to serve veterans. So, within those four, we really have four priorities, advancing brain and mental health research. So, my bailiwick right, such as around mild traumatic brain injury, developing better predictive models of suicide risk, leveraging tools like AI. Supporting economic stability, which is a big focus here. So, everything from basic needs like housing and food security to scaling resource platforms so that people can find the right tools and the right resources at the right time of their transition and reduce the human burden on finding those—it's tremendously time-consuming, and like Kevin said, it's a lot about luck. Strengthening communities and really advancing and developing a more inclusive and accurate depiction of military service, so that all of us, who aren't just connected to the military, see a role for us to play in finding solutions for this community that are us and are of us. And then really improving the efficiency of the ecosystem to better serve folks. So, our final report is coming out this summer, and we hope that it serves as an orienting framework for people who are already in this space, but also an invitation for those who don't see a role yet for them to support the veterans ecosystem. Because there really is a role for everybody to play to create a more comprehensive and coordinated response to people who serve.

**Kevin Klowden 10:44**

Thank you. And as you said, we're all looking forward to the final report.

**Sylvie Raver 10:47**

Yeah, us too.

**Kevin Klowden 10:48**

So, Joe, say—as I alluded to is that—in addition, which I did not get into, in terms of your role as a senior managing director at Liberty Strategic Capital is that you have a number of different perspectives on the veteran transition, not only from your own career as a Marine and General, but also for those under your command and those you've

worked with in philanthropy and the private sector, which is—so what are the key considerations for successful veteran transitions and long-term success in the private sector?

**Joe Dunford 11:19**

Kevin, first, let me just thank the Milken Conference for raising awareness on the issue and for advocacy and for what you do. And to be honest, thanks for those who have taken the time to be here as well. Just before answering the question about what challenges, maybe just a little bit of context. There's about 200,000 veterans that transition every year, so a significant number. Fifty percent of them are in a different job after the first year, and about two-thirds of that 200,000 believe that they're underemployed in the positions that they transition to. So, that's one data point. Another point that I'd want to make is sometimes we think about veterans issues, we think of it as charity. And it's important for me to say up front that I think it's enlightened self-interest when we talk about what veterans can bring to an organization. And there are absolutely within that 200,000 and particularly during the 20 years of war, a significant number that need help, either because of the visible or invisible wounds of war, and I chair a nonprofit that takes care of that population. But I like to say there are two kind of veterans. There are those veterans that need our help. They've been profoundly impacted by their service, and to be honest with you, I think we owe them support for as long as it takes to get them as high a quality life as they can possibly have in the context of their injuries. But there's the larger percentage of that population. I talk about those as the ones that can help us, in our communities and also in the private sector. So a couple of challenges that I think we'll probably dig more into over the next hour. You know, number one is just translating somebody's military experience into something that the private sector can understand. That's a challenge. Preparing somebody for the transition to enter into what is a very unique culture in the private sector compared to where they came from. That's a challenge. Having the kind of mentorship that can help somebody to move through that is a challenge. And then I—you know, from my perspective, in light of the statistics I mentioned earlier, is identifying somebody's raw talent and thinking about that as an investment, as opposed to somebody who is immediately prepared based on their experience and their resume to contribute at a certain level. And that requires a little bit of nuance to actually get to know the person and translate that experience that they have. But more importantly, look at that individual as talent that you're going to invest in, and try to envision where will they be five, seven, or 10 years from now inside your organization, as opposed to necessarily where they are in the first 30 or 60 days. That would be, you know, among the issues that I hope we can dig more into this morning.

**Kevin Klowden 14:04**

Absolutely. And one of the things you mentioned, specifically, is talking about the issue of underemployment and being able to—and building off that, the recognition of exactly how to utilize those skill sets. Mona, that's been a key thing, specifically for you—your prior role, your current role, and particularly in Comcast. And Comcast has been especially a company that's been very aware and addressing that. So, one of the greatest challenges facing any employer is how to bridge that gap understanding a service member's skill set and how to make it a benefit to the employer. And so how is Comcast addressed the challenge of translating those skills to corporate roles?

**Mona Dexter 14:41**

Sure. Well, thanks for that question. Again, thank you all for being here, and thanks for hosting this conversation and again, bringing it forward. So, one thing—I'll share a little bit of my own story, and that was, I joined Comcast a little over two years ago. I had been in higher education, federal government, nonprofit, working for the military community for about a decade, and when I was going through the search process at Comcast, I thought, "Wow, the people that I'm meeting have been here for a really long time." The youngest Comcaster I met said they had only been there for 12 years. Like, people stay here. So there's something really good happening here. People are staying here. So what Comcast has been—what Comcast and NBC Universal have been doing over the past decade-plus is really thinking about what are the attributes that are needed for talent, not just specific skills. There are some roles that are very technical and require specific hard skills, but what are the attributes that drive—that allow somebody to be successful and continue to grow, and how do we invest in developing those attributes further? And let's face it, right? We're in a very dynamic time right now where number one: Digital skills are a necessity. And so we're very focused on economic mobility as it relates to digital opportunity and access to digital skills training. So, with service members, it's—okay, a lot of folks getting out of the military now are younger, and they're digital natives, but they're not necessarily workplace ready, from a digital skills standpoint. So, how do we invest in organizations that are helping to level them up for the workplace. Starting there. Foundation. But again, it's thinking about attributes. It's getting away from "the military personnel can only do well in security jobs or operations." We know, about five years ago, LinkedIn published a veterans opportunity report that spoke to the underemployment, and a lot of that was because it was assumed that veterans would succeed best in maybe two job families, and again, it was primarily security and operations. We've been taking a look at the journey of our military connected talent, and we're proud to say that we've hired over 22,000 since—military community members since 2015. And the churn rate of those employees is lower in a lot of the job families. And where they're succeeding are in areas where there are common attributes of strong communication skills, problem solving, again, adaptability, because we're a very matrixed organization, again, very dynamic organization, a place that promotes innovation and creativity and bring things to the table. Roles where they're willing to take risks, but they can also have measurable goals and understand the "why" of what they're doing. But so much of that relates to having an inclusive workplace where they feel like they belong. Same thing: providing what you mentioned, Joe, was having a mentor, right? Somebody where you can ask questions and not feel like somebody's judging you for a question, right? And we had—so, a couple things that we do is we have—again, we work with the SHRM Foundation on open source curriculum to train HR professionals and recruiters and talent acquisition folks on best practices for attracting, onboarding, and growing military connected talent. So, again, not only is that an internal resource for us, but that's external to help, again, any industry learn best practices there. But again, it's just making sure that we are working on a regular basis with our nonprofit partners as well for talent sourcing. And again, seeing that as a partnership for our talent teams to say "these are the attributes we're looking for," and letting those organizations know, you know, who are kind of the candidates that would be the best fit for these types of profiles based on attributes, and worrying less about specific skill. Because we are—I don't think, I mean, maybe I don't know the entire enterprise, but I don't think we have sniper job descriptions anywhere in Comcast. But again, when you think about the attention to detail, the discipline, you know, the just—the calm under pressure, those attributes, that's where the translation comes in.

**Kevin Klowden 19:03**

Absolutely. Well, thank you. And, so, Wendi, since I think you're—you got queued up, you get to be next.

**Wendi Safstrom 19:09**

That was perfect. We could not have planned that better.

**Kevin Klowden 19:12**

Alright, so my question for you is that we know the SHRM Foundation is deeply committed to creating opportunities for all, particularly members of military community, as part of your Widening Pathways to Work program. So can you tell us a bit about the employers and industries you represent and some of the tenants—the key tenants of your programming? And what's your "why" when it comes to being an advocate for recruiting employee advancing members of military community?

**Wendi Safstrom 19:35**

Thanks again for having me, and it's so nice to see some familiar faces in the room from events that I've been out to throughout—through over the last couple of years. So, I am the president of the SHRM Foundation. And SHRM, as you mentioned, is the Society for Human Resource Management. And SHRM is a membership organization. We've got about 340,000 members, typically HR professionals and about 60,000 different kinds of professions and occupations, multiple hundreds of industry sectors, and the infrastructure that we work with and our membership base is what allows us to really work at the grassroots level. And I love what you said, Joe, about charity. That the work we do as a philanthropic organization is not about charity. It's a tax status. The work we do makes good sense morally and the work we do makes good sense for businesses. The individuals that we support at the grassroots level typically are HR professionals, as I mentioned, but SHRM itself really focuses on a number of different audiences. There's a commercial, I don't know if anybody has seen it. My CEO, Johnny C. Taylor Jr, is on it. The latest is—the latest jingle is, if it's a work thing, it's a SHRM thing. That's very true. One of the things that keeps CEOs, CHROs, and politicians, and HR professionals, talent recruiters, and individuals looking for jobs is talent. Where are we going to find talent? How are we going to maintain and develop and retain talent? Especially as retention practices are falling. We've got 7.6 million open jobs every day in this country, again, across multiple hundreds of industry sectors, of which all of our HR professionals represent. So we work with folks at Comcast and other organizations to really help HR professionals understand throughout the entirety of an employment life cycle, how important it is and how important this particular talent pool is, if you will, to recruit and retain. We started off initially working focused primarily on veterans, and over the last couple of years, have broadened into the military community. And again, found tremendous ways, I think, to make a difference by working locally, by kind of operating nationally and working locally. I think some of the very best work happens at the grassroots level, and again, through our membership structure, it allows us to do that. I think some of the best—why it's for me, why this is important to me. Both of my grandparents were in World War II. They were both Army vets, and both of them had a job to go to. One of my grandfathers actually was a soldier on skis. He was from Colorado. He went over to fight in the Alps. He broke his leg his second week in, and they had to find something else for him to do, and he became mechanic. And when he came back to the States after service, he became a mechanic for life. And he never forgot that the Army is actually where he began his job and his profession and his career. My other grandfather was a professional musician. He played for the Denver Symphony Orchestra for 40 years. He was also director of personnel. So, there's a little bit of a connection between the HR profession of which I have a deep affinity and recognition for. And he was—he went to the Phillips School of Music, Curtis School of Music, excuse

me, got a degree in music and did a service. Was in Philadelphia, got a call from the Denver Symphony Orchestra, which is way across the country, on a train trip, and they said, "We have a job opening for you, are you in?" And he said, "Where's Denver?" So, took the train, left my grandmother and my dad in Philadelphia. Because he had a job and he was going and he was committed to it. So, I saw, truly, what employment opportunities meant to both my grandparents and to my dad. My dad is also an Army veteran in Vietnam, and he was interviewing—he went to University of Denver, another Colorado connection. He interviewed with a large chemical company, and he was indicated he was going into service, and they said, "If you come back, you call us, we have a job for you." And he did, and he went into HR, working for that chemical company for almost 40 years. So, again, I've seen the power of employment and the abilities that having a job and a career—what it can do for individuals and for folks within the sphere of their care. So, the "why" is very professionally important and very personally important to me as well.

#### **Kevin Klowden 23:45**

Great. And so that transitions perfectly to you, John, because you are the hands-on employer, and you can talk specifically your perspective, having run different companies, as well as your own service experience and transition to draw on. What type of opportunities have you seen, particularly, that have been part of or led to a successful transition?

#### **John C Buckridge 24:05**

I think the key, when you really look at veteran transition, is preparedness. Preparedness on the side of the employer. I think the real key is that our veterans are a very unique commodity that have limitless potential. And I think the key to that is having really the why. The "why" for veterans. A culture that's ready for that. And then, the ability to help them to progress. It's very difficult to go from a situation in the military where it is everything you do matters to the utmost. To the fact that you're literally signing that blank check that could include, up to including your life. Transitioning to the civilian side is a real challenge, and I think General Dunford touched on it, where there's not a high retention rate. And I think the best thing we can do, as employers is help to provide that purpose and the mentorship. One of my best friends is Captain Zac Lois. He was a Green Beret, and he started a foundation called Operation Socrates. And is very unique in the sense—his driver was, how do we create soldiers as educators? And if you think about the the Green Beret mission, the Special Forces mission, you're basically paratrooping in. You're gathering the lay of the land. You're recruiting a fighting force, then building a force to proceed. What Operation Socrates does is it basically hires—looks to build and connect veterans with at-risk schools. And that same mission really applies. And I sat on his board, and it was unbelievably helpful to me to see that transition. It's what I really work on in our world, right? So, sometimes veterans, myself included, and my team will tell you this, we require a bit of a different user manual, right? Because we're just known for improvised, adapt, overcome. We want to go 100 miles an hour. And sometimes the employer has to help decode that, but we have to do our part. And, so, when we can find a purpose, a mission, to put our teams into—and I'm very fortunate on the aerospace and defense side, it is a kind of a halfway transition, because everything we do does matter. And so you don't have that 100 mile an hour to dead stop, which is so hard to downshift in gear through. So, I think if we have an opportunity to mentor, to carry some of that military life over. In a lot of our companies, we still do a lot of military transition type things or tradition type things where it's not uncommon, where we can tie fitness in the workplace, which leads to good health, into some of our military transitions. So, with alot of my teams, we have community involvement. We'll go out and we'll do rucks, community rucks, with our team to say, "Look, yes, we're

different and unique, but it's also our home." You don't have to give up everything, right? The use of challenge coins, which is something completely foreign sometimes to civilians, is just a key reward or insight into how military works. So, I think that's the real piece of it. It takes a little bit of a different user manual, but you've got an opportunity to say, we've got this amazing resource. We owe it to ourselves and our veterans to help them transition in a way that is really a bridge, because what we can get back given purpose, given a challenge—you know, I wouldn't want to be in a room with anyone else. Because they know. And it really is the sky's the limit. So, I think that's one of the big drivers as employers that we have to push, to sow the field, if you will, and then ultimately provide mentors that have worked through that and made their way through the progress. So, I think that's one of the keys when—if you really want to maximize the capability and the output of veterans, not only give them a mission, give them a path, give them a purpose, but give them a mentor that's been there before, so that you don't have to reinvent the wheel. And I think that's the key to highly successful transitions in companies.

**Kevin Klowden 28:11**

Absolutely. Now that also prompts for me is that one good example in terms of that, in terms of community, Mona, is you've got VetNet specifically at Comcast. What does that do to help set up that kind of community, and to create some of those bridges?

**Mona Dexter 28:26**

So, VetNet is our employee resource group. It is—we have over 7,000 members nationwide. And it is not just veterans. It is military family members and military spouses, military children, and allies. So, it's not only direct military community members because that's how you further educate those in our company, is by having them connect with folks who are military connected. But that, again, that helps fuel that inclusive workplace. So, again, when you know, when Joe, you talked about the need for holistic health, you know, we're focused on three pillars of health for all of our employees. And that is physical, emotional, and financial. So, that is making sure that there are resources to mental health support, flexible scheduling, obviously the traditional health care, but then also financial planning support, and again, long-term planning, but that out of VetNet have come some pretty incredible programs that were started by members. So, again, we're a very innovative company that allows space for creativity, and that is one of the aspects that we like to tell those who enter our company is—our chairman will say, "It's okay if something you try fails, as long as you can explain what the lesson learned was and how we can turn that around into something—into something big." But, out of our VetNet organization, we have what we call our welcome salute. So twice a year we do a virtual welcome for all of our new military connected employees. And we just spend an hour with them—because we know whether you're onboarding in the military, you're onboarding in a private company or a nonprofit, whatever, it's a lot of information, right? It's a lot of information. You're not going to remember it all. So, again, twice a year, we invite them to come back to the table and just talk about a few key things. We have an employee resource group that is focused on this community. We have additional benefits called our—we have an HR service delivery team that is focused—that, again, it's essentially white glove service for our military community members, particularly those in the Guard in reserve, that are going in and out of the office and then on active duty and back in their families. The program that I was going to say that came out of VetNet, again, was we had a member who said, "I just want to share something that I did." It was a veteran who was a technician, and he was out in his community. Noticed there was a flag that was in disrepair, and it bothered him. So he knocked on the door of the business and said, can I replace that flag for you? And the business said, yes. So,



with his own pocket money, he replaced the flag, made sure it was properly retired, and then just wanted to share that with the employee resource group and said, you know, that just made me feel like I was able to teach somebody in the community about something that meant something to me. And last year we launched that as a national program. It's called Operational Glory. And we have what we call flag ambassadors throughout the country, who—we source flags from a veteran owned business in Florida, and they go—when they're out and about in the community, it has nothing to do with being a customer or affiliated with our company at all. If they see a flag that's in disrepair, they will ask permission to replace it, and we will teach them about proper flag retirement. [inaudible] Veteran that came into the program, and he just retired, and he was used to the way leave was calculated in the military, number of days. He saw that he had 80 hours of PTO, and he thought he had to charge 24 hours to that bill for taking one day off, and he just said, "I didn't know! I thought one day is one day and it's 24 hours." So those are just the little cultural nuances that we just don't think about. But if they have mentors, they have, you know, comradery, they have a place where they're comfortable asking these questions, that transition is going to be much easier.

**Kevin Klowden 33:20**

Absolutely. Although I will note that you brought up a memory in my mind, mentioning the Boy Scouts and flag maintenance. Because when I was—learned that lesson years ago. I was terrified every time I was assigned to hold up the flag and carry it, because I did not want it to touch the ground ever. So Wendi, what I was going to say is that just sort of also building off that is that in terms of your experience with the Skills First initiatives and in Thriving Together. Is that—how does that tie in, in terms of engaging in creating those bridges?

**Wendi Safstrom 33:52**

People come ready to go to work differently. We have an opportunity, and I think given the 7.6 million jobs that are open every day in this country, variety of industry sectors and different kinds of positions, to help individuals and to recognize individuals for the skills, the talents—somebody else mentioned aptitudes and competencies rather than focus, perhaps—have the sole proxy of a college degree, be the certificate or the piece of paper that really demonstrates you're ready for employment. So, because we have this talent shortage, and because we have people whose jobs have gone away, we are doing a project in the coal mining communities in West Virginia, that industry is becoming obsolete, but those individuals want to stay in West Virginia, and other industries are moving in, and those industries are trying to figure out how to bring those folks up to speed as quickly as possible. So, we've got an entire initiative around Skills First Future. We worked with Opportunity@Work, the US Chamber of Commerce Foundation, the Business Roundtable, probably groups you've heard before. Jobs for the Future. Really to help take this kind of a strategy, which links to recruitment and retention in particular, into the hands of our HR professionals. Again, the majority of our members represent small to medium-sized businesses, and sometimes it's difficult to change a process or a plan or a system. You're going to recruit and look for the same kind of people the way you've always done. You're not going to necessarily change the job description. If you change a job description for one particular job, you need to change it across the board, and that can be scary. Changing systems and processes can be difficult, so the more we can instill that in HR professionals, for writ large, the public writ large, I think it's got a great applicability from members of the military community, and it's going to bring an awareness, I think, for HR professionals to understand this applies not just to civilians, but the tremendous skills

and competencies and talent and attributes that members of the military community bring, and that definitely applies in terms of the systems and strategies that we're going to be rolling out here in the next couple of weeks.

**Kevin Klowden 35:58**

Great. Joe, just going back to some prior comments and just building off of the issues of what Wendi was saying is that, how, you know, when you're dealing with the issue of philanthropy, again, in aiding the military transition, is that one of the key things is that building public private partnerships. How do you do that effectively? And what have you seen that's really been like best practices in creating those bridges? Because we need that.

**Joe Dunford 36:28**

Yeah, before I answer that question, Kevin, I just want to build on something that John and Mona spoke about. Earlier, I spoke about the diversity of population. I mean, 200,000 a year. They're all different individuals, but even in my own experience, I think there is one common denominator that I've found in 80-90 percent of the veterans that I spoke about, and you both spoke about, and I think it's worth stomping our foot on it. There's, you know, people have asked me, "Do you miss it?" And I quickly say "no." And they're a bit surprised, I said, "Look, I served 42 years in active duty, and if you're asking me if my spouse and my family wanted me to continue to do it, the answer is, "No, we were ready for transition." But the thing that then I quickly say, but there is one thing I missed. You miss the sense of purpose, and then you miss the sense of community, the sense of belonging, that is very unique to serving in uniform. So, to the extent that we can replicate that inside of our organizations, you have a much higher probability of taking care of people and leverage—and taking advantage of the talent of people who really do want to be a part of something bigger than themselves. That is a common denominator of transitioning veterans. On a public private piece, Kevin, I'm going to maybe just use one example. Cause you say, "Well, wait a minute, you got the Department of Labor, you got the Veterans Administration. Isn't the government supposed to do this?" So, let me move from employment for a minute and just talk about our catastrophically wounded, ill, and injured, and give you some idea why we need private partnerships. So, if you take 100 percent disabled veteran, 100 percent. They're going to get somewhere between \$45,000 a year and \$90,000 a year on a high end. So, if you're a triple amputee with traumatic brain injury, maybe \$90,000. So, think about you have a family of two or three, and your spouse, in many cases, in those families, needs to be a care provider, so he or she have had to give up their employment. And then, if you take a family that has a disabled member, whether they're a military family or any family, the average increased cost to that family is about \$20,000 a year. So, when you take all that for context, and you say, okay, isn't the government taking care of that? No, and when it comes to housing, when it comes to adaptive vehicles, when it comes to paying for the groceries during COVID and inflation and all those kind of things, I think the private sector needs to step in. And why should we do that? I always quote George Washington, who said, the manner in which we treat this generation of veterans, and he was talking about the Revolution, is going to determine the willingness of future generations to serve. And the way I think about it is: The contract, if you will, for someone who does do what John talked about a minute ago is not that the government is going to take care of you; it's that the American people are going to recognize and appreciate what you did. And if you are somebody who has really had a profound impact by your service; in my view, philanthropy needs to step in and do that. But I think the most successful public private partnerships are ones where there's a clear delineation of need. You know, what we see in the veteran space a lot of times is overlap, lack of coordination, balkanization, to be honest with you. And the best public private partnerships are those that really understand, okay, here is an

individual. Here is their family. Here is their unique need. So, let's look at that. Here is what the public sector is providing. Here is the gap, and the most successful nonprofits, in my view, look at themselves as filling the gap in a particular case between what the public and the private sector provides. And I'll give you just one more example. So there's one organization which takes care of all service members that I chair, Semper Fi & America's Fund, we have currently 34,000 men and women under case management right now. These are the ones as I mentioned a minute ago, both physically and from the invisible wounds of war, those most impacted. The suicide rate in this population is 30 percent lower than the veteran population as a whole, and with similar statistics, with anxiety, relationships, housing, employment. Why is that? Because you have someone who is a case manager for each one of these individuals. They're at the center with the family, and they're able to then take advantage of all of the services and so forth that are out there in support of veterans. And if anybody here has ever navigated the medical system, you're dealing with two, three, or four different doctors, you know how hard that is. And if you're somebody who is a veteran who has, you know, some challenges, trying then to figure out what are all the services available and link up with them is a very difficult thing. So, I'll close here, because there's a lot to talk about here this morning. In my view, the most successful nonprofits, and the ones that I think are the most—make the greatest contribution, are those that can articulate a legitimate gap and those that can articulate specific outcomes as a result of what they are doing. If you can't measure what you're doing in terms of outcome, if you can—some of it is clearly subjective, but this, it should be a significant amount of quantitative data that you can deliver. And you say, we have a nonprofit, we pick up where the government leaves off in this particular area, and this is the outcome that we deliver. And we should be looking—we should be holding ourselves accountable. Any of us that are in this space should be holding ourselves accountable to quantifiable metrics, where we can tell people what's going to happen, and then we can most effectively use—look, I don't want to say there's sufficient resources out there. That'd be a—I mean, I don't know if there is or not, but I know one thing, there'd be more if we were more efficient in the resources that are currently available. If we're using them to the best possible means.

**Kevin Klowden 42:36**

Absolutely and a huge difference between doing something that's just performative, just saying, "Hey, we're doing something," versus actually looking at it and saying is it effective, and—

**Joe Dunford 42:54**

Is there a need?

**Kevin Klowden 42:54**

And is there a need, and is there effective, absolutely, and the other thing, also that we've alluded to a bit, and I think, is incredibly important, Sylvie, and I'm going to go back to you in just a moment on this, is that this issue in terms of collaboration, and this issue of that, you know, in being efficient, is doing this in collaboration with others. So, we're not, you know, you're not having 20 groups doing the exact same thing, and you're not trying to all try to hammer the same nail at the same time and sometimes hitting each other in the process. And it is—I mean, what you've been talking about in terms of just even the statistic in particular, about the dramatically lower suicide rate. That's a metric of real effectiveness, and incredibly important. And so, Sylvie, given some of that, and given the

issue that one of the things that Milken Institute Philanthropy has been particularly doing over the years is working with organizations in terms of that effectiveness in you know, some of the philanthropic priorities that have come from your work. You know you tie that in both in terms of veteran issues and your broader focus on brain health and disease outside the veteran space. What have you learned in terms of effective opportunities for philanthropy here and why should funders who don't traditionally focus on veterans, and why should they get involved?

**Sylvie Raver 44:24**

This connects a lot with what you were just saying. I think because—and right at the top as well, I work with a lot of funders, large and small, and over the last 10 months or so, I've had this specific conversation where I've learned that their priorities really overlap, one to one, with veterans needs, veterans issues, if they work on economic mobility, if they work on housing security, if they work on brain and health, mental health related topics, and I talk to them about whether they include veterans, and categorically, it's no, we don't focus on veterans. And it just feels like such a missed opportunity to me for so many reasons that clearly all of us feel very passionately about. But I would make the case for those who don't see themselves as having veterans-focused solutions, to think about it in kind of two different lanes. One, is that we can learn so much about how veterans can serve us and inform us. I would posit that a lot of what you're seeing too from those folks who are in such a very profound disability moment is resilience. And so what can the military context teach us about resilience and how we can all keep our brains healthier and—healthy and well as we age. So, obviously, military-connected families go through tremendous stress and uncertainty and changes throughout their service period, as well as the transition. So, what can that tell civilian populations about building community and adaptability and responses to adversity? There's so much learning there if we have a more productive dialog, kind of grounded in those shared struggles that look different in scale, right? But they really are fundamentally about challenges of being a person. And then going to sort of the innovation piece. There's been so much innovation that has come out of the veterans community as it relates to brain and mental health work that we all benefit from as civilians. And two specific examples would be post-traumatic stress disorder and the other being traumatic brain injury. So PTSD was first defined within the veterans community after Vietnam, and while there are no pharmaceutical treatments, FDA-approved, specifically for PTSD, it's a highly effective regimen of treatment if delivered in the right way. And the veterans community is really innovating in sort of how they're giving access to people, wrap around support to make treatment really fast and effective, in identifying folks who are not responding quickly. That we can all benefit from, and already are benefiting from for people that go through natural disasters. We're sitting in LA, this has been a profound site of a natural disaster recently, so without knowing it, you've benefited from veterans in this way. And the other being traumatic brain injury. There's an increasing understanding that even mild traumatic events to our brains have long lasting consequences, especially related to cognitive decline, dementia and neurodegenerative disease, which are things I care about a lot in my day to day work within the neuroscience portfolio. So, advances here, like in neuroimaging, that have already come out of the veterans population and kind of cognitive retraining therapies, we all benefit from them, whether we know it or not. So, there's a place for people to focus and have a broader impact, whether they realize it or not. So, I want more folks to lean in.

**Kevin Klowden 47:27**

Absolutely. Now, I'd like to just shift gears back onto the employer side as well, to complement the philanthropy side, and this is a key issue that we come back to a lot, both in terms of military service and afterwards this issue of purpose. And that in using this as a way of driving people forward, purpose in terms of philanthropy, purpose in terms of the veterans, purpose in terms of spouses, purpose in terms of the employers. Now, John, you're in a position where you very much have—you understand that and you can push that. And you also have two different sides of this. One, in terms of just you as an employer, but also one thing I just want to highlight is that, because we'd mentioned before in terms of underemployment and far too many veterans going into relatively narrow job areas, is that you've particularly been focused in working in aerospace and defense, but also even just in terms, as Mona talked about, towards innovation, what—how does that, in terms of that innovation, that cutting-edge idea, how does that, in terms of this opportunity to be engaged in that, make a difference?

**John C Buckridge 48:36**

I just think veterans are either by whether you want to call it nature or nurture, naturally innovative, right? I think anyone who's been downrange, who's been overseas, nothing ever comes that you need, when you need it, where you need it, to do the job you need to have it done, right? And so it veterans typically develop a very unique toolbox that is, I'll find a way, right? And I think that translates very well into the private and public sector when it's almost a never say no, never quit, like we'll figure it out. And I think it is a natural precursor to being innovative, given resources and challenging the status quo. Whereas a lot of people will kind of hit that first roadblock, hit that first wall, and say, "Alright, I'm done." It's just not—it's not the way it works with veterans. It is, "Hey, this is the mission. I'm going to get it done no matter what." And I think one of the panelists had talked earlier about, when you look at that, just finding a way and the approach, it's naturally ingrained in veterans to do that and taking risks is also—veterans are typically, in one way or another, naturally—risk does not bother them. They're not risk-averse in their approach to things, and that's a unique skill set. As we look at whether you want to talk about Millennials, or Gen X or Gen Z, or whatever the case may be, the military creates a person that I think traverses that and so there's a lot less fear around "Hey, let's try something new. Let's try something different." And I think the military culture in general will say, hey, it doesn't have to be successful. But the fact is, you're innovative in your approach, as long as you can explain your can explain your why, right? It builds a culture. It nurtures an ability to take risks, in some cases, because you have to. There's no way you can accomplish a mission without it. I think when you look at the civilian sector, we as business leaders, we need to continue to cultivate that, and we need to help drive—widen the guardrails. Don't tighten them. Take people that have that, that skill set, that capability, who have a demonstrated history, and give them more breadth, give them the opportunity to be successful. And I think that's one of the keys that we face on the innovative front, where, you know, it's very simple solutions, and people, often, I just had this conversation, we're talking earlier. Often times, people confuse simple with easy, right? And they're 100 percent not the same thing. No, the simplest solutions can be best, but they're never easy, just like doing the right thing. It's often known. It's not easy, right? And I think veterans have a have a unique capability to see things as they break them down into their simplest components and progress. Because sometimes that's all you can do in the moment. You know how many times you've been in a point where things get really tough and you take a tactical pause and you just calm yourself, I'm going to go again. You know? And I think that's something we need to do in the corporate world, to say, how do we simplify this? How do we take what is simple, build it into its easy steps and progress from there? I think that's, that's the basis for innovation.

**Kevin Klowden 51:57**

Absolutely. And in also that just, I mean, just, I'm gonna keep the circle going around on this is that, in terms of innovation, is that the one group that we haven't talked as much about in all of this, well, a couple. Is that, Mona, I know you've got programs that tie into with military spouses and National Guard and Reserve members. And the reason that this is important is that you're dealing with individuals who have more complex issues in terms of relocations, service and service obligations, but are also people who are very skilled, very well tied in. How do you deal with that, and how do you adapt for individuals who can provide these tremendous skill sets—as well as looking for motivation community?

#### **Mona Dexter 52:40**

Sure. Well, I mentioned it earlier. It's called our Military Concierge Service. It's an HR benefits delivery service where—it's essentially a white glove team who, when a National Guard or Reserve member indicates that they are going on active duty, somebody from the Concierge Team will reach out to them and say, "Do you know that if your active duty pay is lower than your pay in the company, we're going to make your paycheck whole, because you should not earn less money just because you're going out on active duty for a period of time. Do you know that you have extended military paid time off? You do not have to use your regular bank of paid time off for your military service, because why should we ask you to do that? Is your family set? Do we need to help you? Do we need to help your family with backup childcare? Do you know how to extend your health care benefits, and again, making sure that not only are they aware that we're going to continue to take care of them, but also that we have supplemental benefits?" Same thing before they come back in, we talk about the three pillars of physical, financial, emotional wellness. After your time on active duty, are you mentally prepared to come back to the office? If not, what are the resources we need to connect you to? Do we need to think about additional time? How can we make sure that you are whole coming back to your—I don't want to say desk job, it's not necessarily a desk job, you know, off of your military duty, back into active duty service? For military spouses, we're such a massive company, you know, but if you're in one business unit, it doesn't necessarily mean that there's a role wherever you're going in the country, but there's a chance that with one of our other brands—which I will tell you, I've been with the company for over two years, and I still don't know what the 200+ brands are. You can name a dozen of them. But there is a chance that there is another role for you somewhere in the enterprise. So, let's find out where you're going. Let's look at what's available in that region under some brand somewhere and see if we can keep you at least in our enterprise, right? We want to retain this talent. Doesn't have to be in the same business unit. But guess what? That's how most of the people have grown up in the company, is by moving around and working in different areas of the company under different brands, in different parts of the country, in different parts of the world, even. So, again, it's really thinking—it's really, as we're talking about here, the economic mobility of the military family writ large. And that is not having to take steps back in employment, not having to take gaps in employment, not having to take a lesser paycheck because you're volunteering to continue on active duty through your service in the Guard or reserve. And, you know, put your family—inconvenience your family situation there, too. So I'd say that's—you know, one of our best practices that we're very proud of, that we have other companies that are working to model that. But I'd say, you know, how many of you are employers or organizations working to help with employment of veterans, military spouses, good portion of the company. So, I'd say for employers, a lot of what you already have is relevant to the military community. I will say that was something that came to us—we were asked, "Do you have a specific XYZ for military spouses?" Well, no, it's not written that this is specific for military spouses, but there's a reason why we're a best workplace for parents and, you know, folks with families. Guess what? A lot of that are the things that military spouses need, and that's flexible work schedules, back up childcare, extended health benefits. So, it's look at what you already have, and think about the needs of the community that we're talking about, what you already offer, and how that comes together. Because you don't have

to create something new. You really don't. I can promise you that you probably have the support structures. It's just called something else.

**Kevin Klowden 56:27**

And I would note further that if you don't have the support structures, well this is a good opportunity to think about why you should.

**Joe Dunford 56:34**

Kevin, if I could just talk on the spousal piece just for a minute, because it beyond just the private sector and what we can do for spouses. I mean, there's a—anyone here who's been in the military knows, you know, we have an expression that you, you know, recruit an individual and you, you re-enlist an entire family, right? And so I know from personal experience that things like moving to a place where maybe a spouse's profession, there's not an opportunity, maybe there's not reciprocity with licensing. You know, maybe there's a bias to hiring somebody, and you're not sure if they're going to be there more than two or three years. And these are some of the issues that we have to get through. And sometimes as easy solutions. My spouse was a physical therapist, and I think we moved, she would know the exact number, but something like 22 or 23 times in our life. And she is licensed in multiple states. And there was a time when, each time you went someplace, you know, you couldn't practice. She couldn't practice until she got there and received a license. Now there's reciprocity, and so that can be fixed. So, there are, I guess, my point about it is, there are policy changes that can be made that can increase the probability of spouses being fully employed, not just have a job, but actually be productively engaged. In addition to, again, taking talent—taking care of the talent from National Guard and Reservists and the unique challenges of that. If we want a strong military, then we've got to—we have to have opportunities, because the vast majority of our service members, the vast majority of our service members are married, and whole family's got to be happy. And I think it's no surprise to the people in this room that working on one income is pretty hard, and most families need two incomes to get by. And so just this spousal employment issue. Overcoming those three particular challenges, the licensing, the availability of a particular job in a certain area, and being more flexible to get there, and then overcoming that bias towards hiring somebody who's only going to be there for a short period of time, would be three of the things I just raise awareness of.

**Kevin Klowden 58:53**

Those are incredibly important. And I'd say even further than that, that effectively, economically empowering military spouses helps, not only in terms of retention, but also even in terms of especially the transition. And is a vital issue. Alright, well, I know we're hitting at time. Are there any last thoughts that anybody wants to make sure that they share?

**Wendi Safstrom 59:11**

So, one of the things I love about my job, probably the most of our team does, is the sense of purpose that we have. We're there to mobilize HR professionals and lead change in the workplace, and SHRM has an HR department, and how do you like to be the CHRO of the world's largest professional society for HR? No pressure, right? And the HR team came to me and said, we love—we have—we hire veterans and but we love what you do in terms of the mission at the Foundation, and we love to experience it in the community. And I'm going to mispronounce the name of Fort Belvoir. Correct me. All right. And we had an opportunity to connect with the USO, who got together probably 30 mil spouses who were looking for work. And so we took the HR team on base and spent a day with them. We went and built LinkedIn profiles. We did resumes. We did mock interviews. And everybody on that HR team walked away with a new source of talent, which was great because we met a business need, but they walked away with a sense of purpose. And I think one of the other big "ahas" was there were men there. And I said, yes, those spouses are men and women. So, just like some of the really bare bones misconceptions or understandings, until you actually get out and experience it, and how much we learned from the mil spouses were there, and hopefully they learned from us, really cemented that source of purpose and pride, being part of an organization that's giving back into communities ultimately, develop talent for organizations. So, great example.

**Sylvie Raver 1:00:39**

I would just say, cutting a little bit of this together, that there is something here for everybody and giving—supporting military families and veterans, is not about giving back. It should be really about leaning forward and thinking about what we can all do together to learn from each other and also raise the collective, just well-being of ourselves and our communities.

**Joe Dunford 1:01:02**

So, I'll just talk from a Milken Institute perspective, and Kevin maybe outline where I think we can help. Yep, so there's a lot of veteran service organizations out there, needless to say, and many of them are failing right now or will fail over the next couple of years. And one of the topics that we spoke about here today is kind of rationalizing what veteran service organizations are doing and making sure that each organization is filling a legitimate gap and being able to deliver outcomes. And there are a couple of organizations that are trying to get better, and I think integration is not too strong a word, but better integration across both the public and private sector, and particularly with regard to veteran service organizations and other philanthropic organizations that affect military families and veterans. And if there was someone that had convening authority who could bring these organizations together and deliver an ecosystem that was more efficient than the one that we have right now, and more effective than we have right now, well, that would be a welcome—that would be a welcome contribution that someone like that could make.

**Kevin Klowden 1:02:12**

Well, strangely enough, that is a conversation we want to have.



**Mona Dexter 1:02:23**

[inaudible] The pathway of economic opportunity that started this service. That was a— "I didn't know what to do, but guess where I am now, and I owe it all to my time in the military." Again, I think we have the ability to influence that narrative and really shape a more positive perspective of service.

**Kevin Klowden 1:03:37**

Absolutely. John?

**John C Buckridge 1:03:38**

I think for me, I would say, as we look at this, embrace the simple. Right? If nothing else, from veterans, if you want to know how to be better, how you can serve them better, what you can do, ask. Very few veterans are short on opinions, right? They'll tell you. Be bold, ask the question, right? And if everyone in this room, or everyone we talked to, from a hiring standpoint, we could fix this. 200,000 veterans every year coming free seems like a large number, it's not. It's not. If we could just hire a handful. Just get it started, get the ball rolling and provide the veterans with leadership intent. How do you intend to let them serve and they'll take care of the rest. Right? So, I mean, I would end with a portion of paraphrase famous quote, "If you not you, then who? If not now, then when?" And I think that's really fitting for what we're trying to do.

**Kevin Klowden 1:03:57**

Absolutely. And I would add even further that if we can fundamentally address these issues for veterans, for transitioning service members, for military spouses, we're fundamentally figuring out that structure and addressing it for underemployed people in society as a whole, and that's something we really want to be able to do. So, thank you to everyone. Thank you to a great panel. I really appreciate you for being here. For those of you who are interested or engaged, we have a working private roundtable that we're doing this afternoon at 2:15 if any of you have signed up or interested in that, it's over in the Waldorf Astoria, in the Waldorf room, so allow time to get over there, because that takes a little bit of effort. But thank you everyone, and have a great lunch.

*Disclaimer: This transcript was generated by AI and has been reviewed by individuals for accuracy. However, it may still contain errors or omissions. Please verify any critical information independently.*