



**Testimony Submitted
By:**

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“Clean Energy Infrastructure and the Workforce to Build It.”

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Chairman Rush, Ranking Member Upton, Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the invitation to participate in today's hearing and allowing me the opportunity to discuss Pike's initiatives in hiring underrepresented populations into the Energy sector, and in particular, our commitment to hiring and training veterans to join the energy field.

My name is James Simpson and I am the Manager of Military Talent Acquisition at Pike Corporation.

Pike Corporation is a privately owned and operated business that was founded in 1945. The principle business of the company is powerline construction and maintenance, gas line construction, and engineering. Pike offers turn key solutions for our customers. Our customers range from some of the largest energy producers in the United States to smaller local cooperative utilities. In my opinion, this hearing could not have come at a better time. In today's market, we are seeing growth of about 14% in the industry resulting in a need of several thousand new employees annually for the foreseeable future to keep up with demand.

As like a lot of industries today, the energy sector has struggled to find willing and able employees to fill the thousands of current openings throughout the country, let alone the thousands of new jobs I just referenced that will be needed on an annual basis. The jobs at Pike are hard work; there can be long days; and most work is done outside. One of the biggest aspects Pike is known for, and you might have seen our trucks in Northern Virginia, is storm restoration work. When citizens are speeding out of the path of hurricanes, our crews and trucks can be seen speeding the other direction, right into the eye of the storm.

Pike realized not too long ago that the average retention rate for our veteran employees was a lot higher than non-veteran employees. When we studied this deeper we realized that the veteran population was an untapped pool of diverse talent that carries the same vision and work ethic as our workforce. The desire to serve others, the desire to run headlong into the face of adversity, and the ability and desire to work in teams are all fundamental tenants of our workforce which many veterans bring out of the military with them. I was honored with the opportunity to spend over 25 years in the US Marines and recently retired from the military service. I was quickly approached by Pike and was hired in July of 2018 with the sole purpose of expanding our outreach, training, and ultimate hiring of our nation's veterans.

While there is a lot of confusion or naivety about what exactly a lineman is and the skills that they must develop and hone let me take just a little time to explain some of the background that is needed in our field. While this might seem simple, there is a significant amount of knowledge required to understand and work safely with electricity. Math is a critical skill for Linemen; geometry, trigonometry, basic industrial math and algebra involving linear equations, quadratic equations and determinants are all needed. A lineman must be able to determine the proper gauge wire for each application, the proper transformer size, fuses, etc., to ensure a safe transfer of power from the point of production, across transmission lines, into substations, and eventually into distribution systems where the power will be delivered to a business or residence. Linemen have to understand electrical energy distribution, circuit analysis and Ohm's law. Knowledge of

capacitors and inductors, alternating circuits, and magnetism and electromagnetism are also necessary. While intellect is a requirement so is strength. These are physical jobs requiring strength or the knowledge of pulleys, winches, and other mechanical devices to safely distribute a load for those lacking physical strength. Linemen are required to climb wooden, concrete, and metal poles with all their required tools in many areas where the use of a bucket truck is not practical. These are not simple tasks where mistakes can be made and Pike has made safety and job training the foundation of our work.

For example, Pike has developed and been approved to administer a Department of Labor and Veterans Administration On-the-Job Training/Apprenticeship Program. New employees can enroll in the program to document their work and training history toward attainment of a Journeyman level credential. Military veterans with GI Bill benefits are eligible to draw a Monthly Housing Allowance from their GI Bill while participating in the program. In some cases, veterans who have been participating in the U.S. Military Apprenticeship Program are able to attain credit for previously completed hours in another apprenticeship program where the skills overlap.

Pike is also a participating member of the Center for Energy Workforce Development (CEWD). The CEWD has developed a career roadmap for veterans to identify a path into the energy industry. Through their Troops to Energy Jobs portal CEWD has several resources available for veterans. Veterans can view and follow a roadmap to an energy career, they can register in an Energy Jobs database to show an interest in energy careers, they can research the energy related industries in each state, and they can identify training programs in many states.

As I briefly mentioned above, Pike has established a Military Talent Acquisition program, of which I am the lead, to engage service members as they near transition as well as to engage veterans who have already separated from the military. This program includes conducting continuous outreach at military installations, participation in military employment events, and one-on-one engagement with military candidates. Each military applicant at Pike is the subject of a targeted notification sent to their hiring manager for the position they apply for. We highlight their industry skills and compare their existing skills to skills required by the industry. We maintain one-on-one engagement with candidates as they progress through our applicant tracking system and notify them of new opportunities as they become available. Since implementing this program just last year we have seen a 7% gain in veteran hiring. This effort is part of our CEO mandate to make veteran employment a companywide priority.

We are constantly developing our network of military base contacts to identify ways to connect with the transitioning workforce from the military. Soldier for Life, Marine and Family Programs, Fleet and Family Readiness, and Airman and Family Services centers are all working to support transitioning service members, military spouses, and military family members with transition training, employment and educational opportunities. The opportunities to connect through these resources is extremely limited especially within the 5 day seminar transitioning service members are required to attend. Some bases offer weekly or monthly job fair style events, others allow a few minutes in the curriculum to provide an overview of a company, some even offer to post and share employment opportunities on their organizational website or social media pages. There is no singular

source of policy or guidance to refer to. Each base is its own domain with local rules and policies that must be adhered to in order to connect to their populations.

In the same state, Ft. Bragg, Seymour Johnson Air Force Base, and Camp Lejeune all have different processes. Even Camp Lejeune and MCAS Cherry Point, both Marine Corps locations within 50 miles of one another, have different processes. As a company operating in over 40 states with over 250 open positions at any given time it is almost impossible to keep up with all the unique criteria to access veterans and educate them about career opportunities. Simply attaining and maintaining points of contact for each base can be an issue.

We work with federal agencies including the Department of Labor and individual state One Stop offices to connect with candidates. Here too, access is an issue. There are several layers of service in each office. There are core services staff who deal with military spouses and veterans without “significant barriers to employment“. Disabled Veterans Outreach Program Specialists work with veterans who have significant barriers to employment. There are partner agencies who manage Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act WIOA grant programs to aid in funding job skills or curriculum education programs. Even internally these organizations can be disconnected due to differing service criteria. Our positions are listed in each state where we have operations through a “scraping service” offered by Direct Employers. This service pulls new positions from our website daily and publishes them to the state workforce agency. Scraped positions are treated differently than those input manually. Manually posted positions are reviewed by veteran services staff they use an electronic search to identify and notify registered veterans of new job opportunities that match their skill sets. Scraped in positions are not able to receive this service. This means that unless a veteran is intentionally searching for a position in the energy industry they will not be aware of our open jobs. Employing an HR team large enough to manually post every position in the appropriate state, while still maintaining our corporate postings on our website is cost prohibitive. While we operate in 40 states our Human Resources function is consolidated at our corporate headquarters.

While a worthwhile program, as you may be aware, Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act funding has different rules for who qualifies to use it and which educational programs can be paid for. Workforce Development Boards in each state generally determine how the funds are used. In some states there is one board in others there are multiple regional boards. In North Carolina there are 23 independent Workforce Development Boards that determine criteria for use and qualification of WIOA funding.

On the other hand, the Department of Defense Skillbridge program represents an incredible opportunity to engage and train servicemembers as they transition. However, today there are only a few programs teaching skills required for linework. Individual organizations can create their own training, but there is considerable risk in doing so. Employers have no guarantee that the students they train will accept employment upon completion of their certification. If individual companies create a program they may be training people who exit the military and then take positions with competitors who have positions closer to the service members desired location. A collaborative approach between several companies or a federal workforce development program teaching

industry standardized material meeting pre-apprenticeship training criteria would help the industry attract military candidates who are ready to enter the workforce immediately.

On a local level we are engaging community colleges and private training programs who have established pre-apprenticeship programs. Many of these programs do not fall within the DoD SkillBridge or Army Career Skills Program because there is no employer associated with the programs to guarantee employment opportunities after graduation. At this time long waits for openings/limited seats are the biggest limiting factor for local programs. In military communities Skillbridge would potentially allow entire classes of military candidates. Reducing wait times with all military classes/cohorts would be invaluable to the transitioning service members and to the industry. Military students have a small window of opportunity to engage with training, transition, and to ultimately attain employment.

Skillbridge program attendance is at the discretion of local commanders. Commanders who have never had to transition back into the workforce are determining whether attendance of a training program is beneficial to candidates and whether a transitioning service member can attend the training or not. Military commanders still have a mission to accomplish and the service members are not replaced through the training pipeline until they depart the unit. As such, a military commander may hesitate to approve training because he needs personnel to meet other requirements (field training, guard, etc.).

One of the biggest needs in the energy industry is for employees to be able to obtain a commercial driver's license (CDL). While there are a number of Skillbridge programs that offer Commercial Driver's License training there remains barriers to veterans in obtaining a CDL. The number one question from many field managers is, "Does the applicant have a CDL?". Operating a bucket truck and trailer requires a CDL permit or license. Most if not all states now offer a CDL Waiver for military candidates. However, the waiver has a very short 1-year window of availability and some states limit the waiver to select occupational specialties. In my personal experience as a Marine, many non-motor transport personnel operated vehicles that would require a CDL in the civilian sector. Opening up the criteria at the state level to ensure that any MOS where a unit commander is willing to endorse the vehicle operating experience should be allowed a waiver not just motor transport MOS'.

In conclusion, it is my belief that reducing the obstacles in connecting with transitioning service members and veterans would serve all industries well. Creation of an energy industry training program which develops more job ready candidates would likely reduce DoD expenditures of unemployment benefits, result in lower expenditures from GI Bill benefits, and give veterans careers to meet the long-term needs of themselves and their families. The opportunities being offered at Pike are high paying, career developing jobs that can offer stability, while at the same time offering challenging, satisfying work. I appreciate the Committees attention to opening the energy sector to many underrepresented communities in the sector and the opportunity to share with you my experience. I look forward to answering any questions you may have.