

**Opening Statement of Chairman Bill Flores,
U.S. House Veterans' Affairs Committee Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity
"Texas' Innovative Approaches to Jobs and Employment for Veterans"
November 6, 2013**

Good morning.

I thank everyone for joining us for today's field hearing of the Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs.

As many of you know, I am Congressman Bill Flores and not only is it my pleasure to serve as the Congressman for the great city of Waco and the rest of the 17th district of Texas, but to also serve as the Chairman of this Subcommittee.

Whether it is the popular Post 9/11 G.I. Bill or rehabilitation and training for disabled veterans, the goal of the subcommittee is ensuring that veterans have economic opportunity and success.

I am proud of the great work we have already accomplished this year by improving the transition assistance program which assists servicemembers' transition to civilian life, streamlining the processing of G.I. Bill benefits, examining education outcomes for student veterans, and various other legislative and oversight accomplishments to improve the lives of America's veterans.

I am joined here this morning by my colleague and Ranking Democratic Member of the Subcommittee, Mr. Mark Takano of California. Mr. Takano is a former educator from Riverside, California, and it was a pleasure to be in his district on Monday for another field hearing.

I am very happy to have him here today and I hope you all will show him some of our famous Texas hospitality while he is with us. So welcome to you Mr. Takano and thanks again for traveling to Waco to be with us today.

I also want to extend a special thanks to Baylor University who has graciously provided the facilities for our use today.

We are here this morning to focus on one of the most important goals I have for this subcommittee - reducing unemployment amongst our nation's veterans. While this is a hearing we could easily have had in Washington, DC, I think it is very important to hear from folks firsthand here in Texas about this issue.

We are lucky that the unemployment rate for veterans in Texas was 5.5% for the month of September, which is well below the national average of 6.8%.

We all know that some of the reasons for this difference is our great state's focus on pro-growth policies, low taxes, and efficient and innovative government programs that partner with the

private and non-profit sector to give unemployed veterans the little boost they need to be successful.

I would also be remiss if I did not highlight the people of Texas' long standing commitment to the military and to those who have served. This is shown not only in the priority our small and large businesses place on hiring veterans, but on the policies, programs, and benefits our institutions of higher learning offer to these heroes.

I am excited for our witnesses today to bring attention to these laudable efforts and hope we can bottle a bit of that Texas magic and share it with the rest of the country.

Congress can write all the laws and create all the programs they want, but as a former businessman myself, I know that jobs for veterans start and end with continued commitment from American enterprise.

While we will hear about many successes today, our work in Congress is never complete, and I look forward to hearing from our distinguished panelists about how we can improve the oversight of federal programs to help put our veterans back to work.

A few housekeeping items before I recognize the Ranking Member. I want to remind our audience that today's hearing is not a town hall and we will be hearing only from members and invited panelists. My staff and I would be happy to speak with members of the public following the hearing. I would also like to point out Penny Forrest and Jessica McKinney with my staff, who are available to help you with any veteran casework issues you may have.

I now recognize Mr. Takano for any opening remarks he may have.