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**February 26, 2014**  
**Oversight Hearing: “American Energy Jobs: Opportunities for Veterans”**

Good morning Chairman Lamborn, Ranking Member Holt and Members of the Subcommittee. My name is Chris Haslinger and I am the Director of Training for the United Association, a union of Plumbers, Pipefitters, Sprinkler Fitters, Welders, and Heating, Ventilation, Air Conditioning and Refrigeration (HVACR) Technicians. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today on what we believe are two extremely important topics: the U.S. energy industry and employment of returning U.S. veterans.

Our organization, the UA, represents over 340,000 members employed in the plumbing and pipe fitting trades, many of whom are employed in all facets of the energy industry on a daily basis, including the construction, operation and maintenance of our nation’s energy systems.

UA members build and maintain infrastructure across the country and work in the production, distribution, and transportation of oil and natural gas, coal, nuclear power, geothermal and solar energy, hydropower, combined heat and power, and other energy sources. Our members also specialize in pollution-control and energy efficiency retrofits for industrial, commercial and residential facilities.

Together with our signatory contractors, we invest over \$220 million per year in providing cutting-edge, state-of-the-art training for our members so they have the skills, education and knowledge to successfully perform in these constantly evolving sectors.

The tremendous growth we are seeing in the energy industry presents a unique and truly awesome opportunity to create major win-win results for the industry and hundreds of thousands of returning veterans, every one of whom should be considered as a true American hero and treated accordingly.

With these veterans in mind, UA General President William P. Hite created the UA Veterans in Piping (VIP) Program, one of the only programs of its kind that prepares service members for a job prior to military discharge. The UA, without a single tax dollar, provides these men and women with high-quality training with guaranteed job placement in industries where critical skills gaps exist. From our perspective, “it’s the right thing to do” for our nation’s heroes, and it’s also a good fit for our industry.

**Job Opportunities in Energy Sector**

As this committee is well aware, the energy sector is expanding rapidly and thousands of new jobs are being created that offer American workers, including veterans, a chance at a quality career. For example:

- Shale gas development is expected to provide 2.5 million jobs by 2015, with 40% growth from 2012.<sup>1</sup>

- We also have 1,000s of miles of antiquated oil and gas pipelines in this country that need to be replaced because they pose serious public health and safety risks. Many of these lines have exceeded their life expectancy and should be replaced.
- There are many others areas as well—such as Green Building initiatives, which involve retrofits of our building stock, especially in urban areas.
- There are also vast possibilities in the fields of nuclear energy, clean coal and carbon capture technology, alternative and renewable energy development and on and on . . .

### **Veterans in Need of Employment**

At the same time, military members transitioning to civilian life often face difficulties connecting to employment.

- The Veteran unemployment rate continues to be unacceptably high: 10% at the end of 2013. Younger veterans tend to face even higher rates.<sup>2</sup>
- In 2012, the Department of Defense spent nearly \$1 billion on unemployment insurance for unemployed veterans.<sup>3</sup>

These veterans offer a unique skill set as they are focused, highly disciplined, dependable, resourceful and good leaders, as well as good team members. Many of them already have high level federal government clearances, which are importance since many energy sites now have increased security.

These men and women just need a pathway to job placement and career advancement, which is why the UA is proud of the success the VIP Program has had in placing hundreds of our veterans in quality careers.

### **UA VIP Program Connects Veterans to Jobs**

As I mentioned, the UA VIP Program prepares service members for a career prior to military discharge, bringing the training directly to them on military bases.

The program comprises 18 weeks of highly specialized, intensive training in highly marketable skills such as welding and HVACR work. We also provide participants with additional skill training opportunities after they complete this program by connecting them to our established apprenticeship training programs, which are recognized in the industry as the best in the business. On top of all this, these individuals can earn college credit along the way for this training that can be applied to toward a college degree.

All of this adds up to success—success in equipping veterans with good skills and placing them into good jobs and success in helping them facilitate an efficient transition to the private sector which they critically need and so rightfully deserve.

The UA VIP Program has been recognized as one of the leading programs in the country for assisting veterans, which is an honor we take great pride in. There are several key reasons for this recognition, including the fact that the VIP Program provides not only high skills training in key

occupations, but also guaranteed job placement. We place 100% of our VIP graduates in quality jobs with good pay, along with healthcare and retirement benefits. This allows them the opportunity to provide for their families after their service to our country has been completed.

So this is training that is not only directly connected to jobs, but GOOD jobs and lifetime careers--which is what really sets us apart from many other veterans programs.

And we do all this at absolutely no cost to the military, the government, or participants because all costs are paid by the UA and our contractors.

We are now operating the UA VIP program in four states (CA, WA, CO and TX) and we have received broad support for the program from across the board, including members of Congress, the administration, current and former Secretaries of Labor, military leadership and the media. In fact, UA General President William Hite was the first labor leader in history to be recognized by the Military Officers Association of America for this program.

### **Conclusion**

For all of these reasons, the United Association applauds the Committee for highlighting the potential of seeking to connect our returning veteran heroes with new job opportunities in the America's fast-growing energy sector, and we stand ready to assist these efforts in any way we can, including working with you to develop new policies that will lay the foundation for building this bridge in the best possible way.

Thank you again for the opportunity to be here with you this morning. I'd be happy to answer any questions you may have.

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<sup>1</sup> Maeve McKenna, "Hydraulic Fracturing: The Key to American Energy Jobs," Blog for House Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources (Nov. 20, 2013), <http://naturalresources.house.gov/blog/?postid=362299>.

<sup>2</sup> Brad Plumer, "The Unemployment Rate For Recent Veterans Is Incredibly High," Wonkblog, The Washington Post (Nov. 11, 2013), <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/wonkblog/wp/2013/11/11/recent-veterans-are-still-experiencing-double-digit-unemployment/>

<sup>3</sup> "DoD spends nearly \$1B A Year On Unemployment," Army Times (Mar. 15, 2013), <http://www.armytimes.com/article/20130315/NEWS05/303150001/DoD-spends-nearly-1B-year-unemployment>.