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## President Trump, our veterans make America great

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By Megan Andros

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### Opinion

Many former U.S. military members face challenges obtaining meaningful civilian employment.



Credit: Miguel Martinez-Jimenez

*The band director with the 116th Army band of the Georgia Army National Guard performs at the beginning of a Nov. 11 program for the 3rd Annual Veterans Day Commemoration Ceremony at Atlanta History Center in Atlanta. (Miguel Martinez-Jimenez for The Atlanta Journal-Constitution) (Miguel Martinez / AJC)*

Exit polls from the November presidential election found the [majority of veterans](#) chose Donald Trump, embracing his promise to make America great again. America's veterans — and their service to our country — are part of what makes our nation great. They deserve not merely our thanks but also our support. Voters, veterans among them, trusted Trump because they are among those struggling financially. As the new commander in chief, we call on Trump to strengthen the federal programs that help our veterans transition smoothly into family-sustaining civilian jobs.

The federal government spends \$13 billion annually on military-to-civilian transition programs, the [vast majority](#) which goes to education services such as the GI Bill. However, veterans need — and a majority of them want — the opportunity to go straight into the workforce after leaving the military. Nearly two-thirds of the nation's 4.1 million post-9/11 veterans [report](#) that their civilian jobs don't adequately align with their skills and education even six years after service. The harsh reality for many military veterans is chronic underemployment.

Though [the veteran unemployment rate is low](#), that statistic tells only part of the story. Despite their experience and technical abilities, most veterans face challenges obtaining meaningful civilian employment. An estimated 200,000 service members transition out of the military every year; [more than half struggle](#) with employment after service.



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Currently, veterans rely on one of 45 separate programs administered by 11 government agencies, most notably the [Department of Defense's Transition Assistance Program](#), which is mandatory for most service members entering civilian life. However, recent reports from the [U.S. Government Accountability Office and RAND](#) reveal the need for greater transparency and accountability for government transition programs to improve veteran employment outcomes. These programs often need to be [supplemented by nonprofit organizations](#) that fill the gaps federal programs are unable to address to give veterans the best possible chance to find jobs that match their unique training. Two nonprofits making a significant impact in this area are [Onward to Opportunity](#) and [VetJobs](#), both supported by The Heinz Endowments. Onward to Opportunity has provided credentials to more than 100,000 veterans, and VetJobs has helped an additional 100,000 veterans secure meaningful employment. Improving oversight and effectiveness of critical federal transition programs must be a policy priority of the Trump administration.

A successful transition to the workforce during the critical first three years outside the service can shape a new veteran's well-being for life. Trump can ask the successful veterans he's chosen for his Cabinet: Department of Veterans Affairs pick Ret. Navy Chaplain Doug Collins; Department of Defense pick Army Maj. Pete Hegseth; and Director of Intelligence pick Army Lt. Col. Tulsi Gabbard, all of whom have effectively navigated the military-to-civilian transition.

Supporting our veterans after service is not only the right thing to do, it's also good business. Connecting the technical experts and leaders who have served with competitive roles jump starts our economy with valuable new talent. Military experience translates well in a number of growing industries, including [energy](#) and [semiconductor manufacturing](#). Veteran employees strengthen our nation's infrastructure; some of America's largest and most influential corporations, from Boeing to Booz Allen, have [staked their success](#) on hiring veterans.

The United States prides itself on having the toughest, smartest and most skilled armed forces in the world. But as the military [consistently falls short](#) of its recruitment goals, the future of our mighty all-volunteer force — and our nation's security — could be at risk. The post-military success of veterans transitioning into jobs that pay a sustainable wage and fully use their skills is one of the most powerful ways to encourage young people to enlist.

In short, we urge Trump and his administration not just to thank veterans for their service. We want Trump and his administration to invest in their futures. That's one meaningful way Trump can deliver on his promise to make America great.

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