

# Marketplace

Tuesday, September 23, 2008

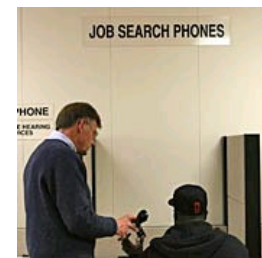
[INTERESTED PARTIES](#)

## For Vets, jobs are a big campaign issue

Almost 2 million people have returned from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. One in five doesn't have a job. One in four makes less than \$22,000 a year. Nancy Marshall Genzer reports.

### TEXT OF STORY

**SCOTT JAGOW:** Today, we begin a new election series called "Interested Parties." We're looking at the economic concerns of different voting groups. This first piece is about veterans. Almost two million people have returned from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. One in five of them don't have a job. One in four make less than \$22,000 a year. Nancy Marshall Genzer has our story.



A job seeker about to make a call about a job listing. (Justin Sullivan / Getty Images)

---

**NANCY MARSHALL GENZER:** The military promises training opportunities and a lifetime of experience.

**TAPE FROM AD:** The Army takes you to your strongest point. And whatever you do after that, you'll just keep getting stronger.

**MICHAEL DEVAUGHN:** I make \$10.75 an hour here, and \$11 an hour at the other job.

Michael DeVaughn is a 24-year-old army veteran. After five years as a military police officer, he wound up as a security guard at a JC Penney in Annapolis, Maryland. He also stocks groceries. DeVaughn wanted a job as a civilian police officer. But he had a hard time explaining the value of his army experience in job interviews. Veteran Paul Rieckhoff has heard that before. He's founder of Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America. Rieckhoff says the military does train troops to use high-tech weaponry.

**PAUL RIECKHOFF:** A young 19 or 20-year-old could be responsible for literally millions of dollars worth of equipment.

Rieckhoff says the problem is what comes next. He says veterans need help with everything. From treatment for post-traumatic stress syndrome to getting bigger home and small business loans, and most of all, finding jobs.

**RIECKHOFF:** If you're a 19-year-old machine gunner and you come out of the 82nd airborne there's not a lot of work done to mentor that young soldier to help them market themselves in the corporate world and help them transition.

Rieckhoff says vets need help explaining how experience as a gunner or tank driver would be valuable in a civilian job. The Pentagon does require all departing troops to attend short, job-hunting courses. But former Marine officer Narelle Helmer says her four-day course mainly involved how to enroll for VA benefits.

**NARELLE HELMER:** After that four days you're on your own. It's just fending for yourself in a stressful environment in a failing economy.

So Helmer went to a private job fair in Virginia for officers leaving the military. Former Army Capt. Thomas

Sullivan was also there. He says the government offers plenty of help, like online college courses troops can take from anywhere.

**THOMAS SULLIVAN:** There is a good chance that a lot of soldiers don't take advantage of the particular assets out there. That's really on them.

Advocates like Paul Rieckhoff say that's easy for officers with higher degrees to say. He says rank and file troops need serious government support to see action on the civilian job front.

In Washington, I'm Nancy Marshall Genzer for Marketplace.

#### COMMENTS

[Comment](#) | [Refresh](#)

By Mason Harris  
From Spartanburg, SC, 09/25/2008

I empathize with these returning veterans and I am saddened that not much has changed in 40 years regarding serious help for the veteran reentering the civilian world. In 1968, the brief time that I spent at Treasure Island, CA before being released from active duty, found me answering questions about my physical health and being told not to lose my DDN 214 (separation document). I used my G.I.Bill to pay for college and took a job as a trim carpenter during the recession of 1973. I am thankful that I had that job but it took me years to adjust, and I am still working on trying to be the best person that I can be. Your story brings back memories of a very difficult time and I just am sorry to hear that we have not made much progress in the area of helping our veterans really readjust. College was just something to help keep my mind off what I had just experienced.

By Dereck Cram  
From Grand Rapids, MI, 09/24/2008

To Serwo, others:

I agree that in a normal Mayberry situation a person should take stock in themselves and show initiative.

But what people also must understand is that the timing could not be worse. Delving from my own experience, I returned from Iraq in Feb 2005 to a state (MI) ravaged by unemployment. We lost many industry-based companies, such as auto and furniture manufacture, seemingly the moment I stepped off the plane. Even fast food wasn't hiring in my town (Grand Rapids). In pre-deployment years I worked a 35+ hour part-time job, drove to Reserves drill over a hundred miles north, and went to school full time. I spent my final post-deployment year without work and graduated from college into a very dismal work force.

I am currently unemployed, despite having shown ample initiative and having spent a year in Texas working at Office Max for an inadequate 8.50/ hr. I am not amused, but at the same time I realize that my military experience has added to the problem only by chance—assuming, of course, that the war itself has nothing to do with the economy.

BTW, my experience as a 92A auto parts clerk has not translated well in the civilian world--requires additional training. Same with computer tech I believe.

I should also note that other college-bound soldiers from my unit have suffered learning problems not present pre-deployment. Solve PTSD and the economy and we should be in business.

By Greg Serwo  
From VA, 09/23/2008

After eight years as a Marine infantryman I'm seeing a large percentage of my friends who have deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan getting out and pursuing higher education. These are everyday men who have done what they were told as infantrymen and as Marines. Now they go to schools like Cornell, Georgetown, William and Mary, and The University of Virginia. We do not live in an egalitarian society. If you lacked drive before and during your military service, there is a good chance that you are waiting for someone else to make decisions for you now. I do not want handouts. I have student loans in my name and I receive GI Bill benefits along with a part time job. Why? Whatever it takes. Fight through the pain, and keep pushing like everyone else does. I have zero tolerance for military members whether active duty, reservists, or guardsmen who cannot think for themselves when pursuing an education or job. I find it more with the part time individuals rather than the guys who deploy regularly and live the active duty lifestyle. These warriors are chomping at the bit to get back to society and succeed. I commend the groups and individuals who fight for veterans' issues, especially student veteran organizations. The results of these groups should be a stepping stone to reaching a desired end-state. They should not be a crutch. Just because we deploy does not make us heroes. Try and find some testicular fortitude and succeed.

By J.S, McCarthy  
From portland, OR, 09/23/2008

The army captain's opinion that "that's really on them" is part of the problem. While there may be many opportunities available, these opportunities depend on the participant to be healthy - both physically and mentally, have means of transportation, and time to apply. Following those basic requirements, which many soldiers do not have after returning from a deployment, the soldier must know how to navigate through piles of paper work in which any mistake can cause delays up to a year or more in benefits. The attitude that its "on the veteran" needs to be dropped. Show a little respect - these kids just lived in a third world nation, experienced situations that never present themselves in the states, the least we could do is help them translate these experiences so that they can share them in a coherent way with the civilian workforce.

By David Terra

09/23/2008

Watch the Ebglish usage:

One in five of them don't have a job  
One is singular, therefore it should be:  
One in five of them doesn't have a job

One in four make less than \$22,000 a year. It should be:

One in four makes less than \$22,000 a year.

---

By Scott Clawson  
From Gwynn, VA, 09/23/2008

In the Army was a helicopter technician, something you would think would be an advantage in the real world. However you are required to have an A&P license to work on civilian aircraft. So, instead of working on aircraft when I got out, I was loading luggage onto aircraft. I re-trained and became a heavy diesel technician. I was basically five years behind my friends who didn't serve in my career.

---

**Post a Comment:** Please be civil, brief and relevant.

Email addresses are never displayed, but they are required to confirm your comments. All comments are moderated. Marketplace reserves the right to edit any comments on this site and to read them on the air if they are extra-interesting. Please read the [Comment Guidelines](#) before posting.

\* indicates required field

First Name \*   
Last Name \*   
E-mail \*   
City   
State

Comments \*

May we contact you about future stories? \*

Yes  No

You must be 13 or over to submit information to American Public Media. The information entered into this form will not be used to send unsolicited email and will not be sold to a third party. For more information see [Terms and Conditions](#) and [Privacy Policy](#).