588 word count

**Nation’s employers need veterans’ tech skills** 6 wc

**I was saddened recently by some sobering statistics about our returning military veterans, who are experiencing some of the worst unemployment in our history. While the overall number stands at 7.5% for all veterans, the numbers are even worse for our post-9/11 vets at 9.1%, while our youngest returning veterans, those aged 18 to 24 years old, are suffering from a disgraceful 20.2% unemployment rate (the national unemployment rate for this age group is only 15.8%, by comparison).**  78wc

**The numbers were just as alarming for specific demographic groups, with African American and Hispanic veterans both suffering from 10.6% unemployment rates, and women veterans even more impacted with a 17.3% unemployment rate. Why is this happening I asked myself? These are some of the best trained and disciplined workers in the world, and our employers aren’t hiring them?** 59wc

**More importantly, our veterans are some of the most technologically advanced workers the world has ever seen. From operating aerial drones and satellite targeting systems to robotics and computer sciences, today’s soldier is more versed in high-tech systems than any previous generation.** 43wc

**This is perplexing in that it is hard to imagine a better trained, more mature worker who is already attuned to the concepts of teamwork, sacrifice and dedication to duty. Given the skill sets and work habits our veterans bring to the workforce, how can even one veteran be out of work I wondered? Even with veterans’ preference a national law, tens of thousands of soldiers will be hard-pressed to find a good paying job in the civilian sector.** 80wc

**When you couple this with the knowledge that literally hundreds of thousands of well-paying technical jobs go begging in this country because of an unqualified workforce, veteran unemployment is even more mystifying.**  33wc

**I believe we as a nation should embrace our returning war heroes and take every step necessary to ensure that they have the skills and technical knowledge needed for today’s global workforce. The President has certainly recognized this problem and has offered such innovative steps as large tax credits for employers hiring veterans, challenging America’s employers to hire or train 100,000 veterans and their family members by the end of 2013, and adopt a career-ready policy for our veterans that includes training, education and credentialing.** 87wc

**The education component of course appeals to me. With the skills and knowledge of advanced technologies our veterans received while in military service, I believe we have a ready-made workforce for the 21st Century economy. From robotics to engineering, or aeronautics to biology, our veterans have practical knowledge and working experience in many of the fields that will fuel our future economy.** 63wc

**I would encourage the President to focus on getting these returning heroes into advanced degree programs that focus on science, technology, engineering and mathematics, the so-called STEM skills, as well as on manufacturing, the STEM+M as it is known in academic circles. These are the fields that our nation desperately needs qualified workers for, and who better to fill them than those who have already proven themselves on the battlefield?** 70wc

**Harrisburg University understands the nexus that exists between our veterans’ unemployment rates and the technocracy that awaits them when they return. By immediately shifting them into higher education classes and technical training that focus on the STEM+M skills, we can ensure good-paying jobs for every veteran that wants one, and careers that will prove fulfilling and rewarding over a lifetime. A circumstance certainly more befitting a grateful nation.** 69wc