

## **After the Uniform: Latino Veterans Rejoining the Civilian Workforce**

**Breakout Session - Monday, September 20, 2021 from 3:45 pm - 4:45 pm EST**

**Sponsored by:** Geico and United States Air Force

**Moderator:** Ruth Umoh, Editor-in-Chief, The Filament

**Panelists:** James Albino, Director, Center for Minority Veterans, VA  
Major Tahina Montoya, U.S Air Force  
Angel Lugo, Manager, Corporate Diversity & Inclusion Training, GEICO

Representative Mike Levin (CA-49), served as panel chair and opened the session by shining a spotlight on the achievements and challenges faced by rejoining Latino veterans. Veterans are faced with many choices once they transition back into civilian life, he believes, “we need to set conditions for our veterans to excel and succeed, streamlining community resources, strengthening veteran care benefits and services, and improving the transition assistance program.” As for legislation, he believes Congress should also be able to provide immigrant service members with citizenship after completing their service. Repatriate our Patriots Act in the Veteran Deportation Reform Act, which would create a path towards citizenship, prevent service members from being deported and to help bring those service members back.

### **Challenges that Veterans face**

The levels of resources for reentering military service members can be overwhelming. Culturally, Latinx communities are reluctant to seek help and as Major Tahina mentions in her remarks, seeking help for navigating these services should not be something that we allow ourselves to not do. Angel Lugo mentions that the mindset of military members is a hard one to shift, members will have to think of themselves as individuals and less as teams as they did during their service. So, self-promoting and being able to sell themselves is going to be pretty important as they navigate the workforce. Many other challenges exist for reentering Veterans, James Albino thinks that other issues such as not having strong or robust networks outside of the military can be an issue when seeking employment.

### **Generational Challenges**

How military members experience these transitions can be different depending on many factors, especially for the many ages, genders, and other demographics of service members. Panelists discuss how there were several services and programs for transitioning veterans that exist today that did not exist many years ago, so it might be very difficult for some members to transition.

### **What are Employers Doing?**

Employment opportunities for veterans have improved dramatically over the years. The jobless rate for the roughly 19 million [veterans in the U.S. declined](#) from 6.6% in 2013 to 3.1% in 2019. James Albino mentions that once he had transitioned from active service back into civilian life,

that he experienced the private sector playing a big role in hiring veterans and this may be happening now.

### **Areas of improvement**

Improve Transition Assistance Program (TAP) service members leaving the DOD and entering the VA. This information can provide assistance for college, and job assistance. Service members that are looking to provide a caregiving role for military members. The VA is looking to help improve TAP. Not only does the VA provide assistance through the federal government but also the state government is able to provide assistance as well. Finding a way for both of those systems to talk to each other would be more useful and easier for veterans to navigate. Major Tahina mentions that for public and private employers they should look into paid internships or fellowships that could help give veterans the ability to learn on the job.

### **How can employers do more to hire veterans?**

Panelists all agree that employing hardworking veterans is critical and doing their part for active recruitment is important. Additionally, many spoke about the importance of thinking about retaining these employees and empowering them to move up in the promotional ladder within the workplace. Hiring employers must be intentional about their hiring process to be able to not only help with attracting great talent but also do their part to ensure that the many demographics of veterans feel welcomed and supported.

Parting words for the audience: (optional - if there is space and interest in calling out one or two of these quotes - may also add visual interest to lay out)

Angel: Valuable and promising aspect would be for public and private partnerships to continue to work together to provide all the necessary services for Latinx veterans.

Major Tahina: "Take the initiative, work on your brand, think about and take all the responsibilities of your brand. Where you will live, what jobs you want, and other aspects that have a huge impact on you. Take advantage of all the programs and services available to transition military members".

James: "The process of transitioning after the uniform but you ought to be thinking about it before the transition. The process should be 6-8 months prior to you leaving, you will need all the time possible. Organizations that are hiring need to be intentional about hiring veterans if that is what they want, its not able to put up a banner or sticker and that is it"

Ruth: "Veterans are adaptable and flexible employees. Organizations that are not taking advantage of hiring these hard working employees are missing out on many opportunities. If you are thinking about or in the process of leaving the military, please take advantage of all the services available to you."