



GRAND CHALLENGES
OF THE
TWENTY FIRST CENTURY

HOW VETERANS CAN LEAD
THE TWENTY FIRST CENTURY GREEN ECONOMY



Before the
OFFICE OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY POLICY
Washington D.C.

Regarding the Grand Challenges of the 21st Century

Request for Information FR Doc. 2010-2012

COMMENTS OF
THE G.I. GO FUND

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I. Introduction

1. These comments are provided in response to the Request for Notice and Comment regarding the Grand Challenges of the 21st Century (hereinafter "Grand Challenges") initiative established by President Obama and this agency. Among the many challenges is finding workers to help implement the next generation of scientific and technological innovations needed to maintain this country's prominence. The following comments are aimed at aiding and assisting the agency with a strategy that will help lead to the success of these goals.

2. The G.I. Go Fund (hereinafter "G.I. Go") is a non-profit, 501(c)(3) charity organization which supports our nation's military veterans; aiming to assist our former men and women in uniform with their transition back to civilian life upon their return home from overseas. We aid veterans in areas such as preventing homelessness, direct financial assistance, and navigating through the VA system. One of the most fundamental and essential aspects of our organization, however, is

employment. We have assisted countless veterans in the Northeast and throughout the country in seeking employment from all economic spectrums. In addition, our organization has opened a Transition Center in Newark's City Hall. The Center is the first of its kind; a partnership between a non-profit organization and a municipality to create an office of veterans affairs which serves as a one-stop hub that handles any and all veteran's needs.

3. Since our organization is so focused on employment, we feel obligated to submit comments regarding how best to implement this broad and bold initiative. Of particular importance is the need to find workers to build the 21st Century infrastructure in America. This is an issue that could have a significant impact on the future of this country, and one in which veterans can and must play a critical role.

4. This comment will focus on three main priorities. First, when compared with the civilian population, America's veterans have a disproportionately high level of skills directly applicable to this challenge. Second, veterans are in great need of economic opportunity, now more than ever, in order to have any chance of financial stability in these difficult times. And lastly, the government's immediate involvement in finding employment for veterans will have tremendous financial benefits in the future.

II. The 21st Century Veteran and the Beginning of the Next "Greatest Generation"

5. After World War II, millions of American soldiers returned home to their country and their loved ones, reuniting with those they left behind and those they left to protect. And when they returned home, they found a country clamoring for economic progress, feeling the need to advance the nation's technology and infrastructure. What ensued was the largest boom in domestic prosperity in this country's history, with many veterans working to create roads, buildings and technology that would lead the world into an era of advancement that had never been experienced before. With the leadership and determination skills that they learned from their years in combat and military training, they were the driving force behind our economic growth in the latter half of the 20th century. For their efforts, they have been called "the greatest generation," creating an economic infrastructure that would benefit this country for over fifty years.

6. Now times have changed, with far less of the population having military experience. The need for their unique and unparalleled skill set, however, has only grown. In many ways, our country needs to remake itself in order to lead the way as we move through the 21st century. The President has highlighted some of these needs in his Grand Challenges, which include: rebuilding our transportation infrastructure for roads and bridges; modernizing the electrical grid; creating a high-speed rail system; and developing the next generation of air traffic control.

7. These are lofty goals, but ones that must be met in order to maintain our leadership in the world. The best way to achieve these goals is to tap into the same stream that made us great a half century ago. Veterans have more discipline, leadership ability, and drive than any civilian in this country. They *volunteered* to go halfway across the world to do the hardest work there is. They learn crisis management and quick thinking skills under fire that simply cannot be

matched. The only thing holding them back is the inability of employers to understand just how much knowledge they have. Now is the time to change that, and when we do, we will have solved the problems facing this country.

a. Roads and Bridges

8. Of all the initiatives laid out by the Grand Challenges, the goal to revitalize and restore this country's highways and transportation systems is perhaps the most extensive. The President has allocated \$36 billion towards this objective, more than what was allocated to the other three projects combined. It is clear that the President believes that this one sector alone is essential to a strong transition into the next hundred years. Thankfully, it is in this area that today's veterans are the most capable of achieving the goals set out by their Commander in Chief.

9. In Iraq and Afghanistan, we have set out to create stability and self-reliance within the respective governments. Such permanence is impossible without a basic infrastructure, and roads and bridges are at the forefront of such efforts. One of the most prominent and prevalent forces involved in creating and building these needs is the Army Corps of Engineers. While the Corps is made up of primarily engineers, it is the common soldier who does much of the groundwork for the Corps. This branch of the Army has been working on the ground in both nations since the two conflicts began, ensuring that they have access to the basic amenities that would have been impossible before their arrival.

10. In Afghanistan, the Corps has done remarkable work in turning a country that had essentially no infrastructure into one that is on its way to interconnectedness. For example, bridge construction in the Kunar province has created business in the region that would never have existed without the work of the US Army.¹ Two and half years ago, before the construction, there were thirty to forty shops and one car dealership in downtown Asadabad. Then, the U.S. completed the road connecting Jalalabad to Asmar, and now there are more than 200 shops and four car dealerships.² The efforts of the Corps in Iraq are even more laudable, especially when one takes into consideration the daily volatility of the country. Since the outset of the conflict, the Corps has completed 279 village road projects and expressway projects, with thirty road projects still ongoing.³

11. The fact that these examples are those of the Army Corps of Engineers, a primarily civilian force, is not lost. While it is true that such innovations and creations have been done by these civilians, soldiers nonetheless still bear a large responsibility in the implementation of these projects. In fact, the Army has several positions within their ranks for military personnel, many of which do not require any formal background. For instance, the army has members of the military serve as technical engineers, who assist in much of the work in laying out roads and bridges.⁴ The engineers conduct land surveys, make maps and prepare detailed plans and

¹ Chuck Simmons, Roads to tie Afghanistan together, <http://northshorejournal.org/roads-to-tie-afghanistan-together> (Sep. 25, 2009).

² Id.

³ U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in Iraq, Cumulative Reconstruction Fact Sheet, http://www.grd.usace.army.mil/news/factsheets/docs/March_2010.pdf (March 1, 2010).

⁴ Careers and Jobs, <http://www.goarmy.com/JobDetail.do?id=91> (Last visited Apr. 10, 2010).

drawings for construction projects, as well as assist in technical support for construction projects.⁵ These men and women are involved in the most critical aspects of development, and they do not need, nor were they required to have, any past experience or training in the field.⁶

12. What makes this truly remarkable is not just the amount of work completed, but the fact that they were able to do this in an incredibly hostile environment. It must be recognized that these are not wars that are fought on a clearly drawn battlefield where efforts are taken by both sides to avoid civilian losses, but rather they are fought in populated cities where the enemy measures success by how many people are killed, regardless of status. This makes for a very difficult environment to work in, where the risk of failure is compounded by the risk of death. And yet, these men and women were able to achieve their missions in this area, bringing two third- world nations to the brink of infrastructural stability.

13. In addition to the fact that the work done in these countries was conducted in a warzone, it also needs to be emphasized that, unlike our country that merely needs to have its roads modernized, Iraq and Afghanistan were in need of having the roads built in the first place. They did not have the benefit of a road system already in place before the Army came, but instead were living in a country with only a handful of roads, few of which extended far enough to be truly beneficial to the country. The Corps was responsible for building roads where none existed before, something no civilian in this country can claim. Having learned all of these skills in Iraq and Afghanistan, and having done so at great risk with very little to work with, it is not difficult to imagine how capable these veterans can be in renovating the roads and bridges here at home.

b. Modernizing the Electrical Grid

14. The job of revolutionizing our electricity use and consumption is perhaps the most complex challenge facing this country. Our current electrical grid needs to be modernized to reduce congestion, maintain reliability, and accommodate the output from new sources of renewable energy. The technologies for such a bold move are already established or on the verge of being realized. What is needed now is a capable workforce that can put these technologies to use and remake our electrical grid. Once again, the American veteran is best suited for such efforts.

15. As was the case with basic infrastructure, the Army Corps of Engineers has been working in Iraq and Afghanistan to bring electricity to parts of the war-torn nations that never before had it. In Iraq, the Corps USACE has completed 610 electrical projects with an additional ten ongoing and nine planned. Furthermore, they have strengthened and stabilized the electrical transmission grid through the completion of fifty-one 132/400 kilovolt substations and twenty-two overhead line projects.⁷ And as of three years ago, the Corps has been able to bring electricity to 1.7 million homes, a truly remarkable feat considering their circumstances. Meanwhile, efforts in Afghanistan have been particularly impressive. Along with expanding electricity to reach more

⁵ Id.

⁶ Id. This position is open to "active-duty" soldiers and not officers, which shows that no college degree was required to fill the position.

⁷ U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in Iraq, Cumulative Reconstruction Fact Sheet, http://www.grd.usace.army.mil/news/factsheets/docs/March_2010.pdf (March 1, 2010).

of the Afghan people, members of the Corps have installed solar panels in parts of the country, including the capital city of Kabul.⁸

16. Furthermore, the Corps receives tremendous assistance from military personnel, both in the Army and the Navy. The Army's Power Generation Equipment Repairer is responsible for supervising and performing maintenance and overhaul of power-generation equipment, internal combustion engines and associated equipment.⁹ Additional responsibilities can include maintenance on tactical utility, precise power-generation sets, internal combustion engines and associated equipment. The Navy, meanwhile, has additional positions for military personnel, as they offer several positions to its sailors dealing with both traditional and nuclear power maintenance and assistance, whether on land or at sea.¹⁰

17. Energy is perhaps the biggest challenge facing this country. The President has outlined the need for renovation in any and all ways possible.¹¹ With gas and oil prices reaching incredible highs and no mass alternatives in place, the time for change is now, and there is no better force to lead this change than the men and women who have done it before in a warzone. In both the Army and Navy, they promise those who fill the positions mentioned earlier that their experience in those positions will lead to world class training for future civilian positions, and they are right.¹² All that is missing is the connection; the link between having the unique and unparalleled experience and training to revolutionize the electrical grid and the opportunity to use those skills here at home. It is up to us, in this moment, to reach out to these men and women and begin recruiting our best to do what is hardest.

c. The High-Speed Rail System

18. Another task outlined by the Grand Challenges is the creation of a high-speed rail system, a state-of-the-art transportation network stretching out as far as six hundred miles. The President wishes to have such a project created in order modernize transportation for this century. Our railways were one of the most important contributions to the industrial revolution and were once the crowning jewel of American innovation. But a shift away from their use in the past decades has created a need to start anew, and restore and re-erect one of our country's greatest technological achievements. And, yet again, our former military members have great experience to help us reach our goal.

19. In Iraq, the Army has been integral to the repair and revolutionizing of a rail system largely ignored by Saddam Hussein. As of today, the Army has been able to renovate 112 Railway

⁸ Hank Heusinkveld, The Freedom Builder, [Renewable Energy for Afghan National Army Outpost](http://www.aed.usace.army.mil/FreedomBuilder/February-2010.pdf), <http://www.aed.usace.army.mil/FreedomBuilder/February-2010.pdf> (Feb. 2010).

⁹ Careers and Jobs, <http://www.goarmy.com/JobDetail.do?id=130> (Last visited Apr. 10, 2010).

¹⁰ Energy and Power, <http://www.navy.com/careers/enlisted/energy/> (Last visited Apr. 10, 2010).

¹¹ Sunlen Miller, ABC News, [Obama Says Safe Nuclear Power Plants are a Necessary Investment](http://blogs.abcnews.com/politicalpunch/2010/02/obama-says-safe-nuclear-power-plants-are-a-necessary-investment.html), <http://blogs.abcnews.com/politicalpunch/2010/02/obama-says-safe-nuclear-power-plants-are-a-necessary-investment.html> (Feb. 16, 2010). President Obama outlined the need to develop more nuclear power plants, an idea he once believed was unnecessary.

¹² Careers and Jobs, <http://www.goarmy.com/JobDetail.do?id=130> (Last visited Apr. 10, 2010). Energy and Power, <http://www.navy.com/careers/enlisted/energy/> (Last visited Apr. 10, 2010).

Stations in Iraq, giving the country the capacity to sustain itself economically through internal trade when the American Forces pull out.¹³ Of particular interest is the Basra railroad station, which was completed in 2007 and turned over to the Iraqi Ministry of Transportation.¹⁴ The station is vital, as it is the direct line between the northern and southern parts of the country, but it was completely unusable when the Army arrived. Now it is fully updated and operational, serving as a crucial economic tool for the country.

20. The accomplishments of the military in building Iraq's basic infrastructure are something that we as a nation simply cannot ignore. Whether it was building roads, generating electricity, or revitalizing railroads, the men and women of the military have done remarkable work. Especially when we take into account the risk and additional combat requirements they faced as soldiers in a war, it is impossible to ignore the one of a kind knowledge and determination they possess. They have every capacity to create, produce, and lead, and those skills were on full display during the war. Now it is time to give them the opportunity to put those skills to use here at home.

d. Air Traffic Control

21. Perhaps the greatest connection between the military and the Grand Challenges is in air traffic control. The government is seeking to expand air traffic control to make flying safer and more efficient, convenient, and organized. There may be no area for which veterans are more suited to help.

22. It is widely known that our Air Force is among the best in the world. But what may be less known is that its superiority is due to the people on the ground who are dedicated to making every aspect of the flight operate with perfect precision. So far, most of the men and women who serve in the Air Force have gone on to become commercial pilots and avionics mechanics, but there are still many logistical and planning jobs that can be filled by qualified Air Force and Navy veterans.

23. Among the challenges that are outlined in this area is the need to transform the ground-based radar surveillance system to a more accurate satellite-based surveillance system. The Grand Challenges also discuss the need for improvements in aviation weather information. One of the most prevalent examples of how our veterans have first-hand knowledge and experience in these areas is the Air Force Satellite Control Network (AFSCN). The AFSCN is a global, robust, continuously operational network of communications links that support launch, command, and control of various space programs managed primarily by the Department of Defense and other national security space organizations. In addition, it supports certain nonmilitary U.S. space assets, such as the weather satellites operated by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and select programs of allied nations.

¹³ U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in Iraq, [Cumulative Reconstruction Fact Sheet](http://www.grd.usace.army.mil/news/factsheets/docs/March_2010.pdf), http://www.grd.usace.army.mil/news/factsheets/docs/March_2010.pdf (March 1, 2010).

¹⁴ Mohammed Aliwi, Basrah Railroad Station Turned Over to the Iraqi Ministry of Transportation, <http://www.grd.usace.army.mil/news/releases/NR07-09-23.pdf> (Sept. 23, 2007).

24. The military has been using and improving upon this technology for decades, especially in the last twenty years. For instance, the first Persian Gulf War underscored and brought widespread recognition to the value of military space operations. Communications, intelligence, navigation, missile warning and weather satellites demonstrated that space systems could be indispensable providers of tactical information to U.S. fighters. Since then, U.S. Space Command has further strengthened its focus on combat by ensuring that soldiers and marines in the foxhole, sailors on the ship's bridge, and pilots in the cockpit have the space information they need when they need it.¹⁵

25. These goals that the federal government wishes to implement are things that the Air Force has been doing for almost a decade. The men and women who serve in the Air Force have first-hand knowledge regarding the very thing that the commercial airline industry needs in order to modernize. It must be veterans who have trained in these areas to implement them into our aviation system, as they will be more than capable in ensuring its success.

e. Bridging the Gap

26. It is well established that veterans are highly skilled, hard working, dedicated individuals who would be an asset to any perspective employer. Nevertheless, many veterans find it very difficult to translate these skills onto a resume and into a civilian career. While the jobs mentioned above are directly correlated to the tasks at hand, there are still many other veterans who might feel that the combat work may not translate to the needs of the Grand Challenge. For instance, a veteran who recently served in the Marine Corps as an 0811, a military occupational specialty (MOS) of an artillery canyoneer who primarily fired a howitzer during combat, may not feel that his most recent work experience has a place in the civilian workforce. However, if a veteran could look deeper into his MOS, he will find that experience as an 0811 also brings with it organizational skills, leadership skills, administrative skills, clerical skills, and an attention to detail that any civilian employer would find appealing when searching for a prospective employee.

27. We at G.I. Go hope to soon bridge this gap by creating an MOS translator, which will serve as the vehicle by which our veterans can look deeper into their military careers and locate the skills that are attractive to a civilian employer. The veteran will have the opportunity through the MOS online translator to input his or her specific MOS and rank, thereby generating a list of the associated skills that should be included in a resume. This resume will then be generated by the online program for the veteran's use during their job search. Once the resume is generated, the veteran will be directed to a page that details careers that require the skills identified through the MOS translator, allowing the veteran to refine his or her career goals rather than waste time aimlessly searching for a job.

28. Although we believe this is an important and integral part to getting veterans the employment they are most qualified for, it is only one step. It is still the responsibility of the employer, and all those involved, to recognize these skills and show a willingness to hire these veterans. The goal

¹⁵ Air Force Space Command, http://74.125.47.132/search?q=cache:o7rGcpoP_Q0J:www.globalsecurity.org/space/agency/afspc.htm+air+force+satellite+control+network+soldiers&cd=9&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=us&client=firefox-a (Last visited Apr. 10, 2010).

of these Grand Challenges is to usher in the next generation of basic tools and amenities that this country needs in order to stay ahead of the curve. Both the government and the private sector have recognized that this is essential to retain our presence on the global stage but are unsure of how to reach the goals set out.

29. For the past few years, our organization has been holding numerous job fairs, inviting employers ranging from local businesses to Coca-Cola. Upon their arrival, all of the employers are instantly impressed by the level of focus and drive that our veterans possess, characteristics that they confess are lacking in many of the civilian candidates they interview. When they hire a veteran, they do not feel that they have offered assistance to a war hero, but rather that they have won a contest where the prize is a terrific employee. And when the next job fair is announced, they immediately ask to attend, looking to further quench their thirst for quality workers. Such a realization should be made by the employers given the responsibility of implementing these Grand Challenges. Our organization will continue to work with veterans in order to help with their resumes, but such work will do little without the willingness of both the government and the private sector to hire them. Once such efforts are made, the work of the Grand Challenges can truly begin.

III. The Dire Employment Situation for Veterans

30. The Great Recession of 2008 has had a significant effect on every sector of the economy. From the white collar executive to the blue collar steel worker, jobs are evaporating into the abyss almost weekly. But while all Americans are feeling the effects of a declining economy, veterans might be feeling it more than any other group. The reason does not lie merely in general unemployment numbers (although those numbers are also rather indicative of the problem), but also in the lack of employment across the board, and the particular condition in which veterans find themselves. In 2009, the US Department of Labor stated that unemployment among veterans from the current conflicts is 14%, which is four percentage points higher than nonveterans.¹⁶ However, these statistics do not tell the whole story as this counts veterans who are unemployed and currently seeking employment. When we factor in the number of veterans who have given up looking for a job altogether, the number could be much higher.¹⁷

31. Such statistics are astronomical, especially considering the fact that veterans do not have the same ability as their civilian counterparts to convince potential employers to hire them. When a civilian applies for a job, he is able to list previous occupations. On the other hand, a veteran can usually only reference his or her assignments under their MOS. Such a conflict can cause problems, as an employer for a delivery company can understand a civilian's application that discusses his work shipping products for another company, but is unable to comprehend the value of a veteran who has an MOS of driving a tank. Because of this, there has been more

¹⁶ US Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Unemployment and Veterans who served since 2001, 2009 statistics, <http://www.bls.gov/opub/ted/2009/mar/wk4/art01.htm> (March 23, 2009).

¹⁷ US Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Veterans Statistics Summary, <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/vet.nr0.htm> (March 12, 2010). This statement is due to the participation rate among veterans, which estimates the number of veterans who are either employed or seeking employment. The DOL has estimated that 79% of the veteran population is participating in the workforce, leaving over 20% unaccounted for.

gridlock over the past years, as civilians are finding jobs much more easily than are their veteran counterparts.

a. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

32. When a veteran does not have a job and remains unemployed, numerous problems emerge that civilians simply do not face. The most obvious, and perhaps the most publicized, is Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, or PTSD. Many veterans return from their numerous tours of duty with this illness, and it can have a wide range of effects. Some veterans will be less impacted by PTSD, having only some sleep loss or other minor health problems. But many others suffer far worse, becoming increasingly depressed, isolating themselves from their family and others, and turning in some instances to suicide.¹⁸

33. PTSD is extremely problematic because, as the illness is mainly psychological, problems in one's social life can exacerbate the mental symptoms of the disorder. One of the most problematic situations in which anyone can find himself is that of being unemployed. When a veteran is unemployed, he or she cannot pay bills, pay rent, or buy food for his or her family, leaving all involved in a dire economic condition.

34. Some may argue that this is where unemployment and VA benefits come into the picture . However, these benefits do not do nearly enough to ease a veteran's financial burdens, particularly regarding veterans from recent conflicts, because so many of them were sent overseas at a very young age, often leaving behind a young wife and young children. And the benefits that they receive from the government for their services are often not enough to pay bills. Our organization alone sees dozens of veterans returning home each day to find an eviction notice on their door and no money to provide for their family. They are often thousands of dollars in debt, with no money and no job to pay it off. When they are in this situation, stress will begin to take effect. And since they are already suffering from an illness that was caused by high levels of stress and anxiety, the men and women that we sent overseas to defend us are on the brink of both financial and psychological disaster.

b. Homelessness

35. These problems have had many devastating effects, including mental breakdown and divorce. But perhaps the most prevalent effect, and the most troublesome, is homelessness. Of the homeless population in America, one in three is a veteran.¹⁹ Of those homeless veterans, almost 20% served in recent conflicts, which means that there is an incredibly large number of veterans sleeping in alleyways who have yet to see their twenty-fifth birthday .

36. Once again, these veterans are young. They enlisted when they were eighteen, hoping to have the opportunity both to defend this country and to reap the rewards of their service upon their return. But when they return, oftentimes no older than twenty-two, they are in a state of ruin.

¹⁸ Gregg Zoroya, USA Today, [VA report: Male U.S. veteran suicides at highest in 2006](http://www.usatoday.com/news/military/2008-09-08-Vet-suicides_N.htm), http://www.usatoday.com/news/military/2008-09-08-Vet-suicides_N.htm (Sept. 8, 2008). Statistics showed that the suicide rate among veterans is more than twice that of nonveterans.

¹⁹ National Coalition for Homeless Veterans. <http://www.nchv.org/background.cfm> (Last visited Apr. 10, 2010).

37. This is not a new problem. Veterans were in a recession of their own long before the stock market fell in late 2008. In 2005, unemployment among veterans aged 18-24 was at 17%.²⁰ Those number have since risen considerably, currently standing at 21%, five points higher than their civilian counterparts.²¹ So veterans have had difficulty finding jobs and enjoying financial stability since they began returning home five years ago, and the problem has only gotten worse.

38. The American veteran needs help. We have too often equated supporting our men and women in uniform with donating small checks and paying lip service. But they do not need a simple handout, nor do they want it. What they want is an opportunity to provide for themselves, to support their families, and to make their own money. They need employment, and in particular they need employers who will finally begin to recognize their worth. It is here that the Grand Challenges can bridge the gap and help get our nation's heroes back on their feet.

IV. A Big Step Toward Solving Veterans' Issues

39. When someone is unemployed, whether he or she is a veteran or a civilian, it can cause tremendous hardship on his or her everyday life. With the veteran, however, this is particularly true, as their lack of employment can often be compounded with PTSD. This is the crippling reality that faces our office every day. Nevertheless, our experience has shown that once a veteran is able to secure employment, other aspects of his or her life begin to get better as well.

40. One of our most successful cases involved Sgt. Joe Pace, a former Marine who served in Iraq. A Staten Island native, Sgt. Pace signed up for the Marine Corps just two days after the horrific attacks of 9/11. As a Marine, he took part in the initial incursion of Iraq, and was involved in the overthrow of the Hussein government and pursuit of the former dictator. He would eventually serve three tours in Iraq, risking his life for the better part of a decade trying to protect his country. When he returned home, he was greeted by his wife and young daughter, but no job. Worse yet, he was diagnosed with having a form of PTSD.

41. He spent months unemployed, wondering how he was going to pay his bills or rent. He was also having trouble sleeping due to his PTSD, often not sleeping for more than two or three hours a night. Then he attended a G.I. Go Job Fair in Newark. It was there that he approached representatives from PSE&G, New Jersey's main power supply company, to see if they would hire him. The representative, impressed by Sgt. Pace's spirit and intensity, decided to do so. Now, on his way to becoming a full time employee, he is making over \$60,000 a year, enough to pay his bills and enjoy the peace of mind that follows from the knowledge he and his family are secure.

42. Another example is Sgt. Paul Marks, a 39-year-old Army veteran from the 50th Infantry Brigade that returned home from Iraq last summer. Since his return, however, he was struggling

²⁰ US Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Unemployment and Veterans who served since 2001, 2005, <http://www.bls.gov/opub/ted/2006/may/wk5/art01.htm> (May 30, 2006).

²¹ Washington Post, Unemployment rate for young veterans hits 21.1 percent, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/03/12/AR2010031204123.html> (March 13, 2010).

to maintain steady employment. Mr. Marks had been collecting unemployment, but since he is divorced with children, he did not receive all the unemployment funds. He also decided to attend a G.I. Go Job Fair at the Teaneck Armory, hoping that an opportunity would present itself. At the job fair, he was approached by Firmenich, a fragrance manufacturer located in Port Newark. The two sides spoke at the job fair, and then again later in the day over the phone. After extensive conversations between the two, Sgt. Marks was offered a job merely ten days after his initial meeting.

43. These are just a few examples of the countless veterans we have seen make a complete turnaround. They, like many other veterans, came to our organization looking, not for another handout, but for a way to lend a hand. These men and women do not seek our sympathy, nor do they feel that they are entitled to perpetual offerings from the government or G.I. Go. Instead, they want to work; they want to be able to provide for their families and take care of themselves.

44. When they don't work, they begin to face problems. These problems, as mentioned earlier, can spiral out of control, leaving a veteran no choice but to live on the street. We have tried to do what we can to prevent these problems, whether it is hosting job fairs or providing financial assistance to families on the brink of disaster. Countless veterans come into our office on a daily basis, telling us that they just returned home from their second, third, or even fourth tour of duty, and are already facing financial hardship. They might have an eviction notice on their door, or a young baby who needs food and diapers, or car payments that need to be paid off, or all three. They come to us needing thousands of dollars immediately, or else they will be forced onto the streets. We do our best to help them, but our work is only a band-aid to their underlying problem. Without employment, without a steady job that they can attend everyday to gain the capacity to provide for themselves, they will simply return to us with the same problems.

45. The government has similar problems with today's veterans in financial struggles. The G.I. Go Fund co-hosts numerous events for homeless veterans called "stand-downs," which involve bringing veterans indoors for an afternoon to get a hot meal and a shower. This event is designed to help those veterans unfortunate enough to be forced to live on the street, but the sad reality is that it does not help them get off those streets. A veteran living on the street is not there because he or she has personal problems or is a failure, but because we have failed them. We have never lived up to our ultimate responsibility to take all measures necessary to prove our appreciation for the men and women who left to protect us. We offer handouts to these veterans, thinking to ourselves that we have done some good for them, that we have taken care of their problems. But instead, all we have done is turn our nation's heroes into another class and category for welfare assistance. We need to realize, both in the government and in the private sector, that work always pays better than welfare; that no amount of money given on a welfare check will ever match the money given by an employer.

46. Many states around the country recognize the need to transition from welfare to work, as states like Connecticut have established a "Jobs First Employment Services" program to try to get lower income families into paying jobs in order to better provide for themselves.²² The Department of Labor has also worked on getting veterans gainful employment, as it established the Veterans' Employment & Training Service (VETS) program to help guide and train veterans

²² Welfare to Work Overview, <http://www.ctdol.state.ct.us/weltowrk/overview.htm> (Last visited 4/12/10)

in the job market.²³ Sadly, these services have had little impact on the overwhelming rise of unemployment in the veteran community, as VETS has had a difficult time guiding veterans through these tough economic times. But a new opportunity has emerged with the Grand Challenges, a commitment by the President and this agency to focus on a wide spectrum of jobs and industries that are either in need of repair or have never existed before. In these Grand Challenges, we may find our answer to two problems: America's infrastructural dilemma of the 21st century and the growing and heartbreaking unemployment rate among our nation's veterans.

V. Conclusion

47. The amount of appreciation we all have for our nation's veterans is unquestionable. They left everything behind to fight a war halfway around the world to secure our country's freedoms and principles. They were willing to make the ultimate sacrifice, and many in fact did, for the safety and security of the rest of us. Such sacrifice is of incomprehensible value, and we will forever be indebted to them.

48. However, our support and appreciation for veterans has too often been limited to what they have already done instead of to what they can do. The men and women in uniform are the most valuable asset our country has, whether that uniform is resting on their shoulders or hanging in their closets. We must realize that they can help this country move forward, not just because they have the skills and determination, but simply because they have done it before. When we needed to grow and expand our nation after WWII, the American Veteran answered our challenge, and passed with flying colors. Now a new day has emerged, a day with problems similar to those faced sixty years ago. With this before us, we must ensure that what once was will be again: a renewed determination to enlist our heroes for America, not for war, but for prosperity.

Respectfully Submitted,

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The G.I. Go Fund

²³ U.S. Department of Labor, Veterans' Employment & Training Service (VETS), <http://www.dol.gov/vets/> (Last visited 4/12/10)