



UNITED STATES OFFICE OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT
Washington, DC 20415

The Director

Friday, March 1, 2002
MSG 2002-018

MEMORANDUM FOR: Heads Of Executive Departments And Agencies

FROM: Kay Coles James, Director

Subject: Ensuring Maximum Opportunity for Veterans in Federal Employment

The purpose of this memorandum is to call your attention to the importance that this Administration places on veterans' employment issues - in particular ensuring that veterans receive the employment preferences they have earned.

The veterans' preference laws have long been a cornerstone of the Civil Service, and OPM has been at the forefront of efforts to preserve and protect veterans' preference in Federal employment. We share the view held by veterans' service organizations that the Nation owes a debt of gratitude to its veterans. Veterans' preference provides a measure of compensation for those brave young men and women who left their families, home, and hearth to answer the Nation's call to arms.

Not too many years ago, veterans made up fully 50% of the Federal workforce. However, with the passing of the WWII, Korean, and now Vietnam generations, and the establishment of an all-volunteer force, the percentage of veterans in Federal employment continues to shrink. It now stands at about 26%. This still far exceeds the percentage of veterans (11%) in the civilian labor force. Compared to the private sector, the Federal Government employs over twice the percentage of veterans, 5 times the percentage of disabled veterans, and 9 times the percentage of 30% or more disabled veterans.

Thus, veterans have been, and continue to be, one of the main sources of candidates for Federal jobs. Despite dramatic downsizing by most agencies in recent years, and the continuing drop in the percentage of veterans in the labor force, the employment of veterans in the Federal service has held constant. In fact, in recent years, veterans have made up almost one third of permanent new appointments to the Federal service. This far exceeds the percentage of veterans in the labor force and the percentage being hired by private industry. These results speak for themselves and would not be possible if agencies were not taking their obligations to veterans seriously.

But, while the Government certainly has every right to be proud of its overall record of hiring and retaining veterans, the record of individual agencies is mixed. As could be expected, the great majority of veterans are employed by just two departments - Defense and Veterans Affairs. While these agencies traditionally attract former military members, employment figures suggest that other agencies could do more to recruit and hire veterans.

To demonstrate our commitment to this issue, OPM has created a task force on veterans' employment issues. We will be collaborating with VA, the Department of Labor, and others, and will share program information with the Human Resources community.

We believe that hiring veterans is simply good business. The majority of our ex-servicemen and women are already the beneficiaries of tens of thousands of dollars worth of Government training. They have already demonstrated their patriotism and commitment, as well as a willingness to learn and work hard. Perhaps most importantly, they have learned invaluable leadership skills in the military which are not taught anywhere else.

I am sure you will find that, given the chance, veterans make fine employees. I urge you to give them that chance. They have earned the opportunity.