

A CONVERSATION ON CALIFORNIA'S ENERGY FUTURE

Providing veterans with a powerful path to a promising career

BY TONY EARLEY, CHAIRMAN & CEO, PG&E CORPORATION

When heavy equipment operator Erick Varela answered his country's call to serve with the U.S. Army's 82nd Airborne Division in Iraq, he had ample reason to think he was risking his life—but not his career.

A journeyman in the construction trade and a member of a strong union, Varela took on numerous leadership roles in the military, including interactions with the Pentagon. But when he returned to California after his final tour, the hiring halls were empty, and even minimum-wage jobs proved beyond his reach. It wasn't long before he found himself bankrupt and homeless, living out of his car.

"I thought I'd built up this enormous skill set," he recalls. "I came home to find it was nothing. It didn't

really matter."

Even after six years of economic recovery, far too many men and women who leave the armed forces still struggle to find work. The jobless rate is highest among the 2.6 million in active service after 9/11, whose transition back to civilian life can be disorienting, if not traumatic. Companies, too, can have difficulty matching standard job descriptions with valuable but unfamiliar military skills.

Simply recruiting veterans to vacant positions won't bridge the hiring gap. For those hires to have a real shot at success, managers and even senior executives need to understand the barriers that former service members can face in the workplace, as well as how to help them apply the ingrained discipline and leadership qualities that add to their potential.

Fortunately, the past few years have seen a steady proliferation of programs to hire, train and support veterans.

At PG&E, we forged a training partnership with community colleges and local workforce development agencies called PowerPathway that has graduated



PG&E PowerPathway graduate Erick Varela sat on a long-term unemployment panel at the White House and met President Barack Obama and Vice President Joe Biden.

more than 400 veterans, 80 percent of whom have gone on to good jobs in the energy industry. Last year, we launched a project to hire 1,000 veterans over the next eight years, and put them on a path to lifelong professional development—the largest such commitment by any gas and electric company in the country.

Launched in 2008, the PowerPathway program is designed to ensure that workers in traditionally underserved communities and underrepresented populations—like veterans—have the skills to not only succeed, but gain access to the well-paying jobs of the future.

As new opportunities in sustain-

ability, efficiency and reliability within the energy sector continue to emerge, both prospective and current employees need new skills and additional training. PowerPathway is the on-ramp for a career track that will help drive the sector's growth, as well as the gas and electric infrastructure needed to support it.

The solution to integrating veterans back into America's workforce lies in just

such a comprehensive, sustained focus—not a patchwork of short-term, one-off job offers. As a nation, we have a duty to ensure that citizens who take time out of their lives for military service have access to promising career opportunities when they leave.

Anyone who wonders whether these efforts make a tangible difference might ask Erick Varela. He completed his training, and is now a substation electrician with PG&E. Given that California is home to more veterans than any other state—110,000 of whom are under the age of 30—our aim is to see that he has plenty of company.

PG&E HAS BEEN RECOGNIZED FOR 4 STRAIGHT YEARS AS A TOP 100 MILITARY-FRIENDLY EMPLOYER

by G.I. Jobs Magazine.

The company was also named in 2015 as a military spouse-friendly employer by Military Spouse Magazine.