

# Veterans returning from service to get preference for job openings at Port of New York and New Jersey

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Star-Ledger file photo Longshoreman Brian Murray, right, works at the Port of New York and New Jersey in Staten Island in this 2006 Star-Ledger file photo. The International Longshoremen's Association union and the New York Shipping Association announced veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan will receive preferential treatment for jobs when they become available.

**NEWARK** — Apart from the physical disabilities and emotional readjustment process, another difficulty faced by troops returning to civilian life from service in Iraq or Afghanistan is America's lingering high unemployment, said Albert Bucci, Director of the Veterans Services for the state Department of Military and Veterans Affairs.

Bucci, who served in the Army in Vietnam in 1966-67, said the unemployment rate for veterans is typically 5 percent higher than for the general public, making the state's overall 9.2 percent jobless rate that much worse for former servicemen and women.

"They're hard hit coming back, competing from a limited number of jobs," Bucci said.

But vets are getting some help from the region's shipping community.

On the eve of Veteran's Day, the International Longshoremen's Association union and the New York Shipping Association, made of port employers, announced that veterans returning from the two conflicts will receive preferential treatment in hiring as jobs become available at the Port of New York and New Jersey.

"The NYSA cannot think of a stronger, more diverse group than U.S. Veterans to join our workforce," the shipping association president, Joseph Curto, said in a statement.

ILA President Harold Dagget, a Vietnam veteran, said he was proud and grateful that the association had joined with the union in pledging to hire veterans first.

Under the policy, the industry will provide U.S. Veterans with preference in hiring when the longshoremen's register is opened to accept new employees into the industry. The association said up to 1,000 port jobs could become available within the next few years through growth, attrition and retirement, as 40,000 troops prepare to return home from Iraq by the end of the year.

The Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, which operates ports in Newark, Elizabeth, Jersey City, Bayonne, Brooklyn and Staten Island, issued a statement saluting the joint announcement: "This program will help these brave men and women as they seek to get back to work."