

# BUSINESS RESPONSE

## TO BARRING TRANSGENDER SERVICE MEMBERS FROM THE U.S. MILITARY

On July 26, 2017, President Trump issued a series of three tweets announcing a ban on transgender people from serving in the military in any capacity. As with other presidential policy statements this year, the announcement sparked reaction from companies and CEOs. However, corporate activism subsided within 48 hours – perhaps as a result of the prompt reaction by military leadership, which stated no action would be taken immediately.

Building on Weber Shandwick’s ongoing research on CEO Activism, we began tracking corporate responses immediately after the ban was announced. As of August 4th, we collected responses from 28 companies and share a summary of the response composition below.

Of the 28 responses through August 4, 2017...

- + **93%** were issued on the same day as the president's tweets
- + **89%** responded through Twitter, with 36% tagging their post #LetThemServe
- + **75%** came from CEOs or managing partners
- + **75%** of companies are from the Technology sector; **11%** Finance; **11%** Business Services; **4%** Media
- + **43%** of companies achieved a 100% rating on HRC’s Corporate Equality Index; **18%** are signatories on CEO Action for Diversity and Inclusion; **11%** are members of the Veteran Jobs Mission
- + **32%** were issued by 2017 Fortune 500 companies representing companies with almost 430,000 employees and over \$450 billion in annual revenue
- + **18%** are “new” activists who did not respond to the Immigration Ban or Paris Accord Withdrawal earlier this year

In terms of content...

- + **79%** of statements are explicitly against a transgender military ban; **21%** express more neutral views, showing solidarity with the transgender community but not clearly stating a position on the tweeted ban
- + Statements express appreciation for transgender service people, advocate against discrimination and offer general support for the transgender community
- + Terms most often used highlight a patriotic undertone: “support,” “grateful,” “indebted,” and “respect”

### INSIGHTS

1. **Track record or not, think about it.** A historical position or having a reputation for being vocal on an issue may lend additional credibility, but don’t let the absence of such a track record stop you if it aligns with your mission and values.
2. **A corporate response can lend support to a group or demographic without stirring the political waters.** In this case, statements of gratitude to transgender military personnel received as many likes as those specifically voicing a policy opinion. It is possible to convey a positive message of inclusivity without overly negative or political undertones.
3. **Leverage social media.** Social continues to be the primary message distribution platform for corporate activists. In this case, Twitter was used by most, perhaps because the president chose it to announce his decision on transgender personnel. Know where your stakeholders are most active and pick the platform accordingly.
4. **The technology sector is not alone.** The technology sector has been most prevalent in our Business Response analyses, but responses aren’t limited to just this industry. For example, finance has consistently lent its voice.
5. **Live up to your reputation.** Many responses come from companies with a history of promoting equality in the workplace. Speaking up on an issue such as the transgender military ban shows these companies are consistent leaders when it comes to equality and are true to their word.

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