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**MeriTalk Announces 2026 Powering Progress Award Winners**

*Government and Industry Leaders Celebrated for Their Impacts on AI and Cyber Progress in Federal IT*

Alexandria, Va., May 1, 2026 – Today, MeriTalk announced the winners of the 2026 Powering Progress Award Winners. The awards recognize government and industry leaders driving meaningful progress in two categories, including the 5th Annual Cyber Defenders Awards and 3rd Annual AI Innovators Awards.

“These leaders are meaningful change in the shifting government tech landscape – from strengthening our nation’s cybersecurity to advancing the transformative potential of AI,” said Caroline Boyd, principal, government programs at MeriTalk. “We’re proud to recognize our Cyber Defenders and AI Innovators for their leadership in shaping a more secure, innovative, and mission-driven future for government.”

This year’s winners are listed below.

**AI Innovators, government:**

- Larry Allen, General Services Administration
- Doug Freeman, Department of Commerce
- Travis Hoppe, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
- Mangala Kuppa, Department of Labor
- Hai Ah Nam, Lawrence Berkley National Laboratory
- Brian Peltier, Social Security Administration
- Nael Samha, Customs and Border Protection Office of Information Technology
- Revolution Crossroads Team, Smithsonian and Library of Congress

**AI Innovators, industry:**

- Guy Cavallo, Planet Technologies
- Brandy Durham, MANTECH
- Kathleen Featheringham, Maximus
- Christian Hoff, Amazon Web Services



- Austin Keller, IntelliDyne, LLC.
- Nikhil Krishnan, C3 AI
- Vimesh Patel, World Wide Technology
- Dan Tadross, Scale AI
- Bryan Thomas, Everpure

**Cyber Defenders, government:**

- Christopher Green, Citizenship and Immigration Services
- Matt House, Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency
- Seth McKinnis, Office of the National Cyber Director, The White House
- Steven McAndrews, Department of Energy Office of Cybersecurity, Energy Security, and Emergency Response
- Austin Pearson, Department of Veteran Affairs Office of Information Technology, Enterprise Command Operations
- Michael Post, Small Business Administration
- Rosa Underwood, General Services Administration

**Cyber Defenders, industry:**

- Curtis Arnold, Core4ce
- Gary Barlet, Illumio
- Hemant Baidwan, Knox Systems
- Felipe Fernandez, Fortinet Federal, Inc.
- Phil Fuster, SpyCloud, Inc.
- Anand Janjal, REI Systems
- Robert Makheja, MFGS, Inc.
- Anish Patel, Cloudflare
- Egon Rinderer, NinjaOne
- Shawn Shortridge, CGI Federal
- Ashique Tanveer, REI Systems
- Chris Townsend, Elastic
- Daniel Wilbricht, Optiv + ClearShark
- Joseph Wingo, Armis



The Powering Progress winners will be recognized during the VIP Reception on Thursday, May 21 at MeriTALK's Tech Tonic, held at Morton's Steakhouse in Washington, D.C.

### **About MeriTALK**

The voice of tomorrow's government today, MeriTALK is a public-private partnership focused on improving the outcomes of government IT. Our award-winning editorial team and world-class events and research staff produce unmatched news, analysis, and insight. The goal: a more efficient, responsive, and citizen-centric government. MeriTALK connects with an audience of 160,000 Federal community contacts. For more information, visit <https://www.meritalk.com/> or follow us on X, @MeriTALK. MeriTALK is a 300Brand organization.

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