

NATIONAL VETERANS EMPLOYMENT & EDUCATION COMMISSION

TOPIC 1: ECONOMY

The VA, which was given Cabinet status in 1988, is responsible for providing for U.S. veterans. It contains three parts: the Veterans Health Administration (VHA), which is responsible for providing health care and conducting biomedical research; the Veterans Benefits Administration; and the National Cemetery Administration.

Since 9/11, the VA's budget has increased dramatically. In fiscal year 2001, the total VA budget was \$45 billion. By the end of the George W. Bush administration, which started the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, it had grown to \$85 billion. When Obama left office, the VA's budget had more than doubled to \$180 billion. Since Trump has taken office, it has grown by another \$40 billion.

The VA's budget for FY 2020 is \$220.2 billion, an increase of 9.6 percent over that of FY 2019. It is the second largest government agency, trailing only the DOD. The VA's budget comprises two components: \$97 billion in discretionary funding and \$122 billion in mandatory funding. The VHA is part of the discretionary budget and accounts for approximately \$80 billion, or about 40 percent of the total VA budget. The VA has around 370,000 employees, provides services to approximately 9 million veterans each year, and maintains 172 medical centers and 1,200 health care facilities. Its hospital system is the largest in the country. In addition, the VA oversees education funding for veterans using the GI Bill, handles disability compensation, and manages the nation's military cemeteries.



There is no doubt that the VA, like any government bureaucracy, has some problems. But independent assessments of the VA—including those by private firms such as Grant Thornton and McKinsey & Company as well as research organizations such as the RAND Corporation and the Mitre Corporation—have found that, when compared with the private sector, VA health care in nearly every case is better and more effective.

Moreover, at least four of the VA's current problems are not of its own making. First, the VA has seen too much turmoil at the top, thanks to four different secretaries over the past seven years. The VA also currently has 33,000 job vacancies, including several senior staff positions, and continues to struggle to retain employees in part due to President Trump's pay freeze and open war on government bureaucrats. In addition, the VA's aging infrastructure needs to be replenished, and the guidelines for who is eligible for benefits need to be stabilized by Congress. Finally, the VA needs to modernize its health records system and make it comparable to that of the DOD so that individuals can move seamlessly from the Pentagon to the VA.

Nonetheless, critics of the VA who want to provide more private care and get the government out of the health care business altogether continue to voice several complaints. They argue that the VA cannot provide timely access to medical care and, as a result, veterans often die while waiting for care. In May 2014, a doctor who retired from the VA said that at least 40 veterans died because of delays in getting care at the Phoenix VHA facility. However, an inspector general investigation found that three, not 40, veterans had died while waiting for care, and there was no evidence that they had died because of the delay. The IG did find, however, that some VA personnel altered scheduling data to make it seem like they had met their appointment scheduling targets.

This scandal led Congress to pass and then-President Obama to sign the Veterans Choice Act of 2014. Four years later, Congress passed and President Trump signed the VA Mission Act of 2018, which superseded the Choice Act. Both of these laws had the purpose of providing veterans with more access to health care outside of the VA because of concerns that the VHA was in a state of crisis.

To analyze the situation, Congress established a 15-member Commission on Care in 2015. According to Phillip Longman, a member of the commission, there are five myths about VA-provided health care. First, the claims process is not slow because of VA bureaucrats, but rather restrictions in the law that make it difficult for veterans to receive VA care. Veterans must show that they are below a certain income threshold and/or that their disability is directly related to their military service. Second, wait times at the VA are actually shorter than those in the private sector, whether for new-patient primary or specialty care, urgent care, or nonurgent care.

Third, the quality of care delivered by the VA is generally equal to or better than care delivered in the private sector. In fact, the quality of the VA's behavioral health programs generally exceeds those of the private sector, and not surprisingly, 91 percent of veterans who use the VA would recommend it to others. Fourth, giving patients the right to choose their doctors and clinics without conditions would not improve the quality of care. Instead, it would be prohibitively more expensive and would threaten the viability of VA hospitals and clinics. Finally, allowing veterans to see private doctors under certain conditions does not mean privatizing the VA as the Choice Act claims. The VA should continue partnering with private medical schools, as it does now, and should continue to provide care in all communities, especially in rural areas.

More than 9 million U.S. veterans are currently enrolled in the VA and eligible to receive health care from the VA's medical centers and outpatient clinics. The overall number of veterans in the United States has been declining because of the deaths of veterans from the WWII, Korean War, and Vietnam War eras. However, the number of veterans receiving health care has increased, both because of expanded coverage for Vietnam War veterans exposed to Agent Orange and because today's veterans are living longer.

HOUSEHOLD**DATA****Table A-5. Employment status of the civilian population 18 years and over by veteran status, period of service, and sex, not seasonally adjusted**

[Numbers in thousands]

Employment status, veteran status, and period of service	Total		Men		Women	
	DEC 2018	DEC 2019	DEC 2018	DEC 2019	DEC 2018	DEC 2019
Unemployed	147	149	141	134	6	15
Unemployment rate	4.2	4.4	4.7	4.7	1.2	2.6

The national unemployment rate is 3.5 percent (December 2019). Gulf War II veterans' unemployment rate is 3.1 percent.ⁱ Currently, the unemployment rate for Gulf War II women veterans is 3.1 percent (down from 8.0 percent in November).

TOPIC 2: MEETINGS

From Monday February 10 – 14, 2020 The National Veterans Employment & Education Division attended NASAA Conference and meetings on Capitol Hill. Also, completed an article on the Legion's role in education and training for The American Legion magazine.

On Monday, February 10, 2020 The National Veterans Employment & Education Division spoke at the National Association of State Approving Agencies (NASAA) Washington Conference, briefing state approving agency representatives on the American Legion's higher education advocacy efforts. NASAA is a collaborative of all state agencies that audit and approve schools for GI Bill funding based on quality and compliance.

On Monday, February 10, 2020 The National Veterans Employment & Education Division attended a webinar "VA Peer Specialists: Who uses them and what benefit do they convey?"

On Tuesday, February 11, 2020 The National Veterans Employment & Education Division attended an event at the Department of Veterans Affairs hosted by the Center for Women Veterans and the Center for Minority Veterans, where Secretary Robert L. Wilkie served as the guest speaker.

On Tuesday, February 11, 2020 The National Veterans Employment & Education Division spoke at the College Board's 2020 "Improving College Opportunity for Veterans Convening" at Johns Hopkins University, briefing school representatives on the Legion's recommendations for veterans education best practices. The Convening focused on expanding admissions and improving graduation rates for the top 100 colleges in the country.

On Wednesday, February 12, 2020 The National Veterans Employment & Education Division spoke at a press conference organized by Senator Dick Durbin urging congress to approve S.J.

Res. 56, to overturn the Department of Education's 2019 Borrower Defense rule. The Department of Education rewrote the Borrower Defense rule to strip it of protections that would provide veterans and service members the right to group relief for schools that fraudulently mislead students on their support for the military and veterans.

On Wednesday, February 12, 2020 The National Veterans Employment & Education Division spoke with Carlos Miguel, Director, International Associations of Machinist and Aerospace Workers. Discussed opportunities for collaboration to address their veteran population on the different programs and services offered by The American Legion.

On Wednesday February 12, 2020 The Veterans Employment and Education Division attended the formal Signing Ceremony for the AbilityOne Apprenticeship Program through a partnership with the nonprofit, About Giving, to fulfil the National Defense Authorization Act's 809 Panel mandate to increase the number of disabled veterans currently participating in AbilityOne programs.

On Wednesday February 12, 2020 The Veterans Employment and Education Division met with Senior NASAA and state education leadership. The first meeting of the National Veteran's Education Oversight Advisory Council formed by NASAA and Education Counsel to develop a national Risk Based Survey model to ensure better quality education and Training Programs to ensure veteran's success, while making sure that we can identify bad actors early on so as to prevent another ITT or Corinthian closure crisis.

On Thursday, February 13, 2020 The National Veterans Employment & Education Division participated in a conference call with Kathryn Poynton, Director of Events, U.S. Chamber of Commerce- Hiring Our Heroes. We discussed the upcoming Career Fair during The American Legion's 60th Winter Conference.

On Friday February 14, 2020 The Veterans Employment and Education Division met with the US Small Business Administration to discuss their participation in The American Legion's Mid Winter Conference and also cosponsorship of the Military and Veteran Entrepreneur Summit in Las Cruces which will be hosted in partnership with The American Legion Department of New Mexico.

TOPIC 3: EMPLOYMENT



The U.S. Economy generated a better-than-expected 225,000 new positions in January – although the continued loss of manufacturing positions suggests American goods producers aren't entirely out of the woods after a lackluster end to 2019.

Health care and social assistance job creation nearly doubled from December through January, as the sector accounted for more than 47,000 of last month's gains after adding just 25,000 the month prior, according to the latest employment report published by the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

"The gains are also further proof that despite the uncertain political climate of an election year, companies continue to be optimistic about 2020's economic prospects," Rebecca

Henderson, CEO and member of the executive board at Randstad Global Businesses, said in a statement Friday.

January's 225,000 additions comfortably exceed analysts' expectations for around 160,000 new jobs. But financial activities, retail trade and temporary health services sectors all contracted last month, as did a manufacturing industry that spent much of last year in recession.

Separate manufacturing reports suggest industrial activity rebounded last month, but the BLS estimates the sector still shed 12,000 positions after dropping 5,000 in December. Continued manufacturing weakness – particularly in politically significant states to the 2020 presidential election, such as Pennsylvania, Michigan and Wisconsin – could be problematic for President Donald Trump's reelection bid, considering his administration's focus on revitalizing the sector.

"Today's objective labor market data show a stable but much cooler economy than the one described by President Donald Trump this week," Michael Madowitz, an economist at the left-leaning Center for American Progress, said in a statement Friday, referencing Trump's State of the Union address. "Rather than a 'blue-collar boom,' the United States is still in a manufacturing recession with manufacturing losing another 12,000 jobs this month."

The unemployment rate ticked up to 3.6% last month, though that was in part the result of the labor force participation rate rising to 63.4%. Unemployment rose for the right reasons as Americans who were not actively looking for work jumped back into the workforce.

"It's clear that plentiful work opportunities are enticing more people to enter, or in some cases re-enter, the labor market," Jason Pride, chief investment officer of private wealth at Glenmede Trust Company, wrote in a research note Friday.

Manufacturing aside, much of Friday's jobs report was positive. Average hourly earnings rose at an annual rate of 3.1%, outpacing inflation and serving as a boon to U.S. consumers. Revisions to job gains in November and December added 7,000 previously unrecorded positions.

But the BLS had previously announced significant revisions to past jobs reports, which were published in conjunction with January's employment report. Nonfarm employment in March 2019 was revised down by more than 500,000 positions. Although the bulk of those revisions impacted prior years' data, 12,000 previously reported jobs were knocked off of last year's job creation totals.

Fewer than 2.1 million new positions were created in 2019, making it the worst year for job growth since 2011.

"Amid virus-induced fears of a sharp economic slump, strong job creation and firming wage growth in January provided reassurance that the record-long economic expansion still has room to run," a team of analysts at Oxford Economics wrote in a research note on Friday. "But this latest health report also points to a maturing labor market with 2019 job creation cooling to its slowest pace since 2011."

TOPIC 4: CAREER FAIRS

On March 5, 2020 The National Veterans Employment and Education Commission in collaboration with Hiring Our Heroes will be conducting the Washington Conference Hiring Fair. The following are the career fair flyer, agenda and list of employers:

AMERICAN LEGION WASHINGTON CONFERENCE HIRING FAIR

MARCH 5, 2020

THURSDAY, MARCH 5

8:00 A.M. - 4:00 P.M.

THE WASHINGTON HILTON
1919 CONNECTICUT AVENUE NW
WASHINGTON, DC 20009



Hiring Our Heroes Hiring events are hands-on career planning events designed to connect members of the local military community with military-ready employers. Attendees will have the opportunity to:

- attend an interactive workshop
- hear insider tips from hiring managers and recruiters
- learn about online tools designed to translate military or volunteer experience on a resume
- build a professional network
- find out about certifications required to segue into high-demand careers

This free professional development event is open to active duty service members, National Guard members, military reservists, veterans, military spouses, and military caregivers. Come ready with your resume to learn about resources that help connect military families with meaningful employment at local and national employers.

NEED A RESUME?

Visit

ResumeEngine.org

or

MyCareerSpark.org

Resume Engine and Career Spark are the quickest and easiest way to send your resume to employers at the Career Fair. Build a powerful resume at ResumeEngine.org for service members and MyCareerSpark.org for military spouses. Powered by Toyota.

REGISTER NOW

Visit

HiringOurHeroes.org/events
to find upcoming events
and register now.

HIRING OUR HEROES
U.S. CHAMBER OF COMMERCE FOUNDATION

AGENDA/TIMELINE:

- | | |
|----------------------------|---|
| 8:00 am | JOB SEEKER CHECK-IN |
| 8:20 am – 8:30 am | OPENING REMARKS <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mr. Lou Celli – Executive Director
The American Legion, Washington DC Office |
| 8:30 am – 10:00 am | CIVILIAN RESUME WORKSHOP <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ms. Kashi Russell – The American Legion<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Location: Holmead, Lobby Level |
| 10:00 am – 11:00 am | FINANCIAL LITERACY WORKSHOP <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ms. Judy Viccellio – V-STAR, LLC<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Location: Holmead, Lobby Level |
| 11:00 am – 12:00 pm | LINKEDIN – SELF BRANDING WORKSHOP <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mr. Ariel De Jesus – The American Legion<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Location: Holmead, Lobby Level |
| 12:00 pm | EMPLOYER CHECK IN |
| 12:00 pm – 1:00 pm | NETWORKING LUNCHEON <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lunch between Job Seekers and Employers to get insight about what employers are looking for in during the hiring process. |
| 1:00 pm – 4:00 pm | CAREER FAIR <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The American Legion and Hiring Our Heroes<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Location: International Grand Ballroom, Terrace Level |
| 1:00 pm – 2:00 pm | FEDERAL RESUME WORKSHOP <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ms. Renetta Bradford – National Veterans Employment (VA)<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Location: Holmead, Lobby Level |



U.S. CHAMBER OF COMMERCE
FOUNDATION

Washington, DC HIRING FAIR

March 5, 2020

PARTICIPATING EMPLOYERS

AS OF: 7Feb20

Airstreams Renewables, Inc.
Amazon
ARServices
AvalonBay Communities
CACI International Inc.
Capital One
Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services
Chenega Corporation- Security Business Unit
Fairfax County Fire and Rescue
Federal Emergency Management Agency
Fors Marsh Group
Frontier
General Dynamics Mission Systems
George Mason University
Geostabilization International
Herc Rentals
Hilton
International Gourmet Foods, Inc.
Jim Koons Automotive
Leidos
Lincoln Property/Lincoln Military Housing
Lowe's
M Powered Strategies
MassMutual of Greater Richmond
Montgomery County 9-1-1 Emergency
Communications Center
Montgomery County Police
Nakupuna Companies
National Industry for the Blind
Newport News Shipbuilding, A Division
of Huntington Ingalls Industries
NEXCOM
Office of the Chief Financial Officer of the
District of Columbia
Oracle Corporation
Orbis Inc.
PAE
Parsons Corporation
PenFed Credit Union

Peoplescout in Partnership with McKesson Corp
Perspecta
Prince George's County Department of Corrections
PRISM Inc.
Rainier Cyber
Raytheon IIS
Ridgeline International
Sabre Systems, Inc.
SBG Technology Solutions
SOS International LLC
Succession Planning for Railroads (SPRING)
The Excalibur Group
Transportation Security Administration
Trescal
Triple Canopy (A Constellis Company)
U.S. Customs and Border Protection
U.S. Department of Commerce
United Rentals, INC.
United States Capitol Police
VSE

SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS

Citizen Soldier For Life
Department of Employment Services
Dog Tag Inc.
Military OneSource
Psych Armor Institute
State of Maryland
U.S. Dept. of Veterans Affairs

The mission of The American Legion's National Veterans Employment & Education Commission is to take actions that affect the economic wellbeing of veterans, including issues relating to veterans' education, employment, home loans, vocational rehabilitation, homelessness, and small business

TOPIC 5: VETERAN HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS

A Resource for Programs Serving Rural Veterans

USDA's Rural Housing Service offers a variety of programs to build or improve housing and essential community facilities in rural areas. We offer loans, grants and loan guarantees for single- and multi-family housing, child care centers, fire and police stations, hospitals, libraries, nursing homes, schools, first responder vehicles and equipment, housing for farm laborers and much more.

We also provide technical assistance loans and grants in partnership with non-profit organizations, Indian tribes, state and federal government agencies, and local communities. We and our partners are working together to ensure that rural America continues to be a great place to live, work and raise a family.



Community Facilities Programs

USDA Rural Development's Community Facilities (CF) Program provides financing through direct and guaranteed loans and grants to units of local government, non-profit organizations and Federally-recognized Indian Tribes for the development of essential community facilities in rural areas. These loans and grants may be used to support the construction, purchase, development or renovation of essential community facilities for public use in rural communities with populations of 20,000 or less.

These facilities include schools, libraries, adult and child care centers, homeless shelters, hospitals, medical clinics, assisted living facilities, fire and rescue stations, police stations, community centers, public buildings and transportation. All facilities funded with CF funding must be open to the entire community and cannot be limited to a particular group, such as veterans. So, as long as the services, which are described below, are provided to meet rural needs, including veterans, the funding can be made available.

Specifically, CF can provide funding for critical facilities and services to support homeless veterans (and others). For example, CF funding can be used to support local and regional food system projects, such as the construction of a food bank. This funding can also be used to renovate, purchase and install equipment to maintain a kitchen to prepare food and food services and to purchase vehicles for food delivery. Additionally, funding can be used to purchase a commercial van to deliver food to disabled veterans or to pick up veterans and other rural citizens and deliver them to a center where food is provided to them. The funding can also be used to construct a wheelchair ramp access for existing food banks which provide service to veterans and other rural citizens. CF funding can be used to develop or improve a rural community health center to improve access to critical health care services for veterans (and others).

USDA's rural housing programs can help veterans become homeowners, repair or improve their existing homes, and offset the costs of rent.

Single-Family Housing Programs

USDA's Single-Family Housing Programs help rural communities build robust and sustainable economies by investing direct loans or loan guarantees to help low- and moderate-income rural residents build or buy safe, affordable housing in rural areas. USDA is able to serve more customers, and use tax dollars efficiently, by working with partners to leverage funding with other sources such as private lenders, nonprofit organizations, and State and local agencies. USDA also has innovative partnerships for self-help housing, and packagers to promote homeownership in underserved areas, and work with potential homeowners to navigate the home buying process. USDA also offers loans for site infrastructure, home repairs, and grants to elderly homeowners for accessibility, health, and safety hazards.

The Single-Family Housing Programs finance homes for low- and moderate-income rural Americans through direct loans and loan guarantees, and provide loans and grants to repair or improve existing homes, including accessibility modifications for people with disabilities.

Under the Self-Help Housing program, participants –with expert supervision – perform about 65 percent of the construction labor on each other's homes. The savings from reduced labor costs allows them to obtain low-interest mortgages through USDA. In addition to learning home construction skills, participants receive instruction in managing a household budget to help them develop important skills for being a new homeowner.

Multi-Family Housing Programs

USDA's Multi-Family Housing Programs offer loans to provide affordable rental housing for very-low-, low- and moderate-income residents, the elderly, and persons with disabilities. Funds also may be used to buy and improve land and to provide necessary facilities such as water and waste disposal systems.

In addition, USDA offers rental assistance to help eligible rural residents with their monthly rental costs and:

- Provide affordable multi-family rental housing in rural areas by financing projects geared for low-income, elderly and disabled individuals and families as well as domestic farm laborers. We extend our reach by guaranteeing loans for affordable rental housing designed for low to moderate-income residents in rural areas and towns.
- Preserve our portfolio of more than 14,000 properties by aggressively restructuring loans for existing rural rental housing and off-farm labor housing projects to allow for sufficient reserves to meet major repairs and improvements over the lifetime of the property. On a yearly basis we provide grants to sponsoring organizations to repair or rehabilitate housing for needy families. We also subsidize rents for low-income tenants in our projects who cannot afford to pay their full rent.

TOPIC 6: SMALL BUSINESS

The U.S. Small Business Administration makes the American dream of business ownership a reality. As the only go-to resource and voice for small businesses backed by the strength of the federal government, the SBA empowers entrepreneurs and small business owners with the resources and support they need to start, grow or expand their businesses, or recover from a

declared disaster. It delivers services through an extensive network of SBA field offices and partnerships with public and private organizations.



The U.S. Small Business Administration announced this week that nonprofit organizations, state and local agencies, and institutions of higher learning are eligible to compete for funding of up to \$300,000 to deliver entrepreneurship training to women service members, women veterans, and women military spouses.

Up to six awardees receive a total of \$300,000 in grants administered by SBA's Office of Veterans Business Development to participate in the Women Veteran Entrepreneurship Training Program. The funds will be used to cover the costs of educating women service members and veterans, as well as women military spouses who are interested in starting or currently own a small business.

"Women veteran entrepreneurs have contributed in a major way to the growth of the U.S. economy, bringing in \$10 billion in receipts over a five-year period," said Larry Stubblefield, Associate Administrator for SBA's Office of Veterans Business Development. "The SBA is committed to supporting women veterans with the training and resources they need to start, grow, or expand a small business."

Eligible organizations should submit applications for the Women Veteran Entrepreneurship Training Program funding opportunity (WVETP-2020-01) through Grants.gov. Applications not submitted via Grants.gov will not be evaluated. The submission deadline is Tuesday, March 17 at 11:59 p.m. EDT.

The SBA's will host a conference call on Wednesday, February 26 at 2 p.m. EST to answer questions related to the Women Veteran Entrepreneurship Training Program grant announcement. A transcript of the webinar will be posted on grants.gov and www.sba.gov/ovbd once it is available.

TOPIC 7: EDUCATION

National staff from The American Legion joined Senators Dick Durbin and Chuck Schumer this Wednesday, in a press conference to urge the Senate to support Durbin's Congressional Review Act (CRA) Resolution, (S.J.Res. 56), which would overturn the U.S. Department of Education's 2019 Borrower Defense rule that gutted protections for student borrowers and taxpayers. Durbin and Schumer were joined by Ohio Army veteran Tasha Berkhalter who was defrauded by ITT Tech; and



representatives from the Veterans Education Success, Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, Student Veterans of America, Tragedy Assistance Program For Survivors, and National Military Family Association.

“Betsy DeVos is telling our veterans and student borrowers: You’re on your own. Lawyer up,” Durbin said. “The only winners here are the predatory schools that the DeVos rule shields from accountability. Our veterans and service members deserve better than that. I hope when this resolution comes for a vote, that all of those who give great speeches on the floor and back home about how much we honor our veterans can show it with their votes.”

“As I stand here today I currently owe almost \$100,000 in student loans for a degree that no one takes seriously. When I told employers where I went, I was shown the door. Out of the 50 students I graduated with, only two I know of are in our field, but those jobs don’t require the degree. Being married with four children – three in school and one at home – has been a hard challenge for me,” said Tasha Berkhalter, an Army veteran and former ITT Tech student. “I have no GI Bill to go back to school and an extreme amount of debt. I have dealt with stress, anxiety and depression over the whole ordeal for years.”



Last month, the House of Representatives voted on a bipartisan basis to pass its version of the measure, H.J.Res. 76 introduced by U.S. Representative Susie Lee.

The DeVos borrower defense rule makes it almost impossible for borrowers who are defrauded by their school or harmed by their school’s closure to receive the relief to which they are entitled, and which Congress intended, under the Higher Education Act (HEA). According to an analysis by The

Institute for College Access and Success, the DeVos borrower defense rule will cancel just three percent of all loans associated with misconduct. CRA resolutions of disapproval allow Congress to overturn regulatory actions of federal agencies with a simple majority vote in both chambers. A time for consideration of the resolutions on the floor of the Senate is currently being negotiated by Senate leadership.

Joseph C. Sharpe, Jr., Director
Veterans Employment & Education Division
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Week Ending: 2/14/20
