

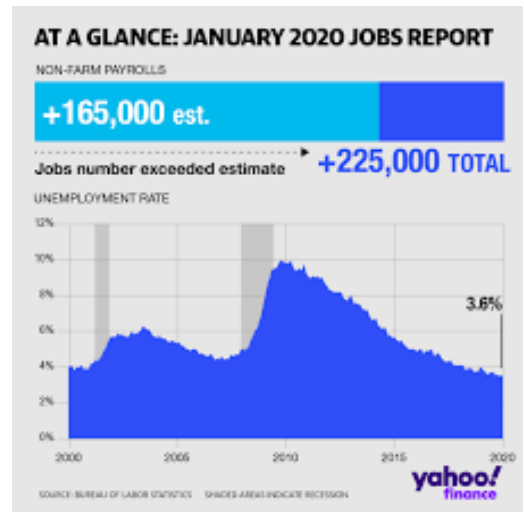
NATIONAL VETERANS EMPLOYMENT & EDUCATION COMMISSION

TOPIC 1: ECONOMY

Employers added 225,000 jobs in January and the jobless rate was 3.6%, signs that the U.S. labor market is positioned to fuel economic growth in 2020.

Wages increased 3.1% from a year earlier, a touch higher than December's annual rise of 3%. Economists surveyed by The Wall Street Journal had forecast job growth of 158,000, an unemployment rate of 3.5% and year-over-year wage growth of 3.0%.

January's robust payroll gain points to a continued healthy labor market in a U.S. economic expansion now in its 11th year. Over the past three months, the U.S. economy added an average 211,000 jobs. Job growth was revised higher in the last four months of 2019.



Robert Jones, president of American Sale, an Illinois-based retailer of home-recreation goods such as trampolines and hot tubs, said his company will add more workers this year. He expects a low unemployment rate and solid economy to help spur spending on big-ticket items.

"When you have more demand, you have more to do, so you just need more people," Mr. Jones said. A strong labor market should help propel the broader economy, which was expanding at a moderate pace as 2019 came to a close.

The Federal Reserve left its benchmark interest rate unchanged at its meeting last week, after cutting interest rates three times last year. It is taking a wait-and-see approach on its next move with an eye on trade, business investment and global growth.

In recent weeks, new risks have emerged particularly for the manufacturing sector. Boeing Co. halted production of its troubled 737 MAX aircraft, an impediment to manufacturing output that is expected to reduce first-quarter U.S. growth. The coronavirus outbreak that originated in China could hinder a rebound in global manufacturing activity.

In January, manufacturers cut jobs. Meanwhile, industries including construction, health care and transportation and warehousing added jobs at a strong pace. Historically low unemployment hasn't translated into an acceleration in wage growth. Average hourly earnings increased by 7 cents last month to \$28.44. Wages were up 3.1% from a year earlier. Pay has grown at an annual pace of 3% or higher for 18 consecutive months.

Wage growth is one factor that influences Americans' desire to seek work. The share of Americans working or looking for work ticked up in January to 63.4% from 63.2% in December. The so-called labor-force participation rate has remained steady in recent years, defying economists' expectations for the retirement of baby boomers to drag down the rate.

Annual revisions released Friday showed the overall employment level for March 2019 was revised down by 514,000 jobs to 150.28 million. For all of 2019, employers added 2.096 million jobs, a downward revision of 12,000.

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 3 to Friday 7, 2020 the National Veterans Employment & Education Division completed an article on Legion's role in education and training for the Legion magazine. Rescheduled trip to Raleigh to visit DeVry University campus as promised to Adjutant Wheeler

On Monday, February 3, 2020 the National Veterans Employment & Education Division spoke with Angel Richards, Veterans Program Manager, Advance Auto Parts. Mrs. Richards would like to see if there are opportunities for collaboration with TAL to fill vacancies in their chain auto parts stores located in urban areas.

On Monday, February 3, 2020 the National Veterans Employment & Education Division spoke with the Senate Small Business Committee regarding the reauthorization of the SBA's Community Advantage pilot program and fee waivers for veteran small business loans.

From Tuesday 4 to Thursday 6, 2020 the National Veterans Employment & Education Division participated in a joint Department of Texas and Texas Veterans Commission career fair, including resume writing workshop.

On Wednesday, February 5, 2020 the National Veterans Employment & Education Division attended the Center for Women Veterans meeting at the Department of Veteran Affairs in Washington, DC.

On Wednesday, February 5, 2020 the National Veterans Employment & Education Division continued to work with Senator Tillis office on the Borrower Defense CRA, worked on quality issues in higher education. Also, talked with Senate and House Staffers on the Protect the GI Bill Act being considered for introduction in the Senate.

On Wednesday, February 5, 2020 the National Veterans Employment & Education Division researched on issues involving oversight of approved institutions. Also, discussed with staffers on California SAA and fixes and called with Senior VACO leadership on oversight and quality in education.

From Thursday 6, 2020 the National Veterans Employment & Education Division talked with Kelsey Baron, SVAC staff, to coordinate new legislative initiatives on school quality and oversight and protect the GI Bill act before the Senate.

From Thursday 6 to Sunday 9, 2020 the National Veterans Employment & Education Division participated in the 99th Regional Support Command (RSC) in their semiannual Yellow Ribbon event. The event is expected to have 300 reservist and their spouses in attendance.

On Friday, February 7, 2020 the National Veterans Employment & Education Division attended a legislative conference call with Opportunity Starts at Home Campaign.

On Friday, February 7, 2020 the National Veterans Employment & Education Division met with JP Morgan and Chase regarding supplier diversity and certification initiatives for small businesses as well as Legion priorities in access to capital reform.

TOPIC 3: EMPLOYMENT

The American Legion is encouraged and please to see that while “Reserve Differential Pay” does not apply to private sector employer; there are a growing number of employers who offer some form of “Reserve Differential Pay” to their employees regardless of call up status (Voluntary or Involuntary).

Status Upon Entry into Active Duty

- Separation-US
- Absent-US (AUS) -- whether you are in a paid or nonpaid status.
 - ◆ Per OPM change on 01/01/2012 - effective date of AUS action is:
 - Date the orders begin if military duty is qualifying for the Reservist Differential (RD) provision.
 - First day of nonpay status if military duty is not qualifying for the RD.
- SF 52 required for all periods of military service.
 - ◆ Local Exception – No SF 52 will be required *if and only if* you are in a “paid” leave status for the *entire* duration of the military order.

June 2012

When U.S. Naval Reserve Lt. Marc J. Soss was called to active duty, his employer gave him more than a goodbye. Because Soss earned much more as a tax attorney than as a military officer, his law firm offered him a stipend for six months to help fill the gap between his military pay and his regular salary.

The firm also gave Soss money it received from a Florida grant program for private-sector employers who pay workers called to active duty. Soss, who left his family in Sarasota, Fla., to serve

in Afghanistan, says that “it was very generous” of his firm to supplement his military pay. He returned to the law firm in May after 14 months of military duty.

The payments that Soss received from his employer, called military differential pay, are strictly voluntary. The law that protects the civilian jobs and benefits of employees called to active duty—the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act of 1994, or USERRA—doesn’t require employers to pay anything to employees called to active duty with the Reserves or the National Guard.

But many employers offer military differential pay. Some even continue to pay full salary, whether it’s for two weeks of regular training or two years in a war zone. Employers’ reasons for offering military differential pay can range from patriotism or a wish to ease soldiers’ financial burdens to a desire to retain employees after their military duty ends.

“If your human capital strategy is based on recruiting and retaining employees, military differential pay is an effective method for developing loyal employees,” says Air Force Maj. Rob Palmer, spokesman for the National Committee for Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve (ESGR), a Department of Defense agency that promotes cooperation between service members and their civilian employers.

Although paying a military differential is generally a minimal administrative task for employers, it can present some unusual circumstances for employees, particularly at tax time. HR can make sure that employees called to active duty understand that they will be taxed on military differential payments. And those taxes can be easy to overlook throughout the year because federal tax withholding is not permitted on military differential pay.

A Variety of Calculations

More than 580,000 Guard and Reserve members have been called to active duty since the terrorist attacks in September 2001. (Each state’s National Guard can be mobilized by a governor in peacetime for state emergencies or by the president in times of war. Each military branch has a Reserve that can be mobilized only by the president.)

It’s uncertain how many of the 80,000-plus Reserve and National Guard members on active duty as of late April were receiving differential pay. Soss estimates about 10 percent.

In a Society for Human Resource Management Weekly Online Survey conducted in April, 45 percent of the randomly selected HR professionals who responded said their organizations offer military differential pay, 10 percent said they pay full salary and benefits for part of the employee’s time on active duty, 6 percent said they do so for the entire period of activation, and 35 percent said they provide no direct compensation support to employees called to active duty.

According to a 2003 Mercer Human Resource Consulting survey, 68 percent of 201 employers provided military differential pay, 8 percent paid full salary, and 23 percent paid nothing. Some employers make military differential payments for a limited time, such as one year, while others pay for the full period of deployment. Generally, private-sector employers pay the difference between civilian and military salaries, while public-sector employers pay the difference between the civilian salary and total military income, which includes pay and allowances for housing, food, clothing, family separation and hazardous duty—reducing the size of the differential, Palmer says.

State laws also play a role. In Arizona, for example, public-sector employers are required to pay called-up service members the difference, if any, between their civilian pay just prior to leave and their military pay and allowances for the duration of deployment. Massachusetts requires public-sector employers to give 17 days of paid military leave for service in the Reserves and 34 days for service in the Massachusetts National Guard. Other states, including Pennsylvania, pay a bonus to

returning Reserve and Guard members. Under USERRA, employees can use accrued vacation and personal time to continue receiving pay during military leave, although employers can't require them to do so. Employees cannot use sick leave, however, unless the employer allows all employees to use sick leave for other types of absences.

TOPIC 4: CAREER FAIRS

On February 5, 2020. The Department of Texas, in collaboration with the Texas Veterans Commission held a Career Fair in Austin, Texas during their midwinter conference. The National staff provided assistance by conducting a resume workshop.



Anthony Thomas, Director, Wounded Transitioning Battalion, brought 30 Soldiers from Fort Hood, Texas where they were able to take advantage of the resume workshop and 50 plus employers who came with the agenda of hiring veterans.

There were several follow up interviews scheduled, contingent job offers extended, and one on the spot hire made.



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

Recently Homeless Veterans May be a Part of Fairview Center in Costa Mesa, CA



Costa Mesa leaders met with state officials in recent days, pitching a housing vision for the 114-acre Fairview Development Center in hopes of assuring the city keeps a place at the table in deciding the property's future use. Once home to hundreds of residents with developmental or intellectual disabilities, the center has been phased out. The last two residents will soon be leaving.

"If we don't have a proposal that makes sense, and that strikes a balance between our need for additional housing and some of those state priorities, we are not going to have a say at all," Councilwoman Andrea Marr said.

“We are at the ground level here,” Foley said. “We know what the site constraints are.” Jennifer Iida, spokeswoman for the state Department of General Services, said a team of architects, engineers and environmental consultants is typically hired to assess a property such as the Fairview Development Center for future uses. That study is expected to be completed later this year, she said.

“While it is premature for the state to take a position on the city’s vision for the site, DGS absolutely appreciates that the city is dedicated to providing housing at the site and is interested in helping the underserved,” the department said in a written response. “Both the state and the city believe that the site should ultimately be used for housing, and that sort of alignment will make our continued conversation more fruitful and effective.”

The council included in its proposal a vision of having amenities that will keep the residents from constantly getting in their cars and emptying out onto Harbor Boulevard to get something. “Obviously traffic on Harbor is a huge concern,” Marr said. “We are going to have to get creative about having the coffee shops and the dry cleaners and all the things on site so we aren’t creating additional traffic on Harbor.”

Mar is part of a City Council ad hoc committee that worked up the city’s proposal, which suggests 200 units of housing for homeless people with support to help them keep it; 311 units of veterans housing – that is the number of veterans last counted living on the streets in Orange County; and some mix of affordable and workforce housing, all of which meet goals that have been stated by Gov. Gavin Newsom and Orange County leaders.

The city’s suggestion is a broad brush approach, not detailed with density levels or acreage divisions, but it does offer a cap of about 1,500 homes. “We’ve put a lot of thought and time and attention to trying to take into consideration our community at large,” Mayor Katrina Foley said.



Trying to resist housing development or fighting it by complaining about potential traffic on Harbor Boulevard, which cars coming and going to the property have to use, would just get Costa Mesa iced out of the process, city leaders said.

And if local leaders aren’t at the table when the campus’ future is determined, Foley said, “It won’t be pretty.” She said state officials have talked housing that got up into the 4,000 units range.

“We believe this proposal is one that ensures the community that we build will remain safe and balanced and sustainable while ensuring the quality of life and protecting our traditional residential neighborhoods that are just across Harbor,” she said.

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“Obviously traffic on Harbor is a huge concern,” Marr said. “We are going to have to get creative about having the coffee shops and the dry cleaners and all the things on site so we aren’t creating additional traffic on Harbor.” The city’s ad hoc committee was expected to update council members at their meeting Feb. 4 about the recent discussions with state officials.

TOPIC 6: SMALL BUSINESS



For veteran entrepreneurs with disabilities there are now numerous avenues to obtain capital to start and grow a small business. The term "disability" covers many conditions, including limited mobility, deafness, blindness, PTSD or autism. Veterans qualify for funding even if their disability isn't physical. And don't forget: They can also apply for financing not set aside to address

disabilities. Here are seven popular resources to help ensure a disability is no longer an impediment to achieving entrepreneurial goals.

Grants for Disabled Entrepreneurs

The federal government offers grants for disabled persons for starting a business, and those don't need to be repaid. Also check the Small Business Administration (SBA) grants list and Department of Health and Human Services for private foundations and organizations, many of which fund such grants. Or try the National Arts and Disability Center if you're an artist with disabilities needing money to promote your creative work. Corporate grants are another option.

Loans for Disabled Entrepreneurs

Nonprofit community lender action offers small business loans ranging from \$300-\$100,000. They can help with assistive technology, accessible workplace and adaptive work vehicle costs. Businesses must guarantee the loan, and personal guarantees are often required. Requirements differ depending on locale, so be sure to check.

Loans Unique to States

Check out local options. For example, the Advantage Illinois loan program is designed for disabled-owned businesses, and the Iowa Able Foundation has credit-builder and business-assistance loans. To combat the high cost of assistive technology, the Maryland Department of

Disabilities runs an Assistive Technology Guaranteed Loan Program that provides low-interest loans on everything from cars to home modifications for eligible state residents. And the purchase of assistive technology like screen readers, Braille translation, TTYs and voice-recognition software can be applied toward the startup costs of a small business. Nebraska also has a microlending program offering resources for people with disabilities pursuing self-employment.

SBA Loans

The SBA Community Advantage Loan is a subset of the popular 7(a) loans. Amounts run from \$50,000-\$250,000, and they're intended for established businesses with under 100 employees or partly funded startups needing a large loan to scale. They help small-business owners in underserved groups, including the disabled population. These funds can be applied toward vehicle purchases, inventory, equipment, working capital, marketing, expansion, etc.

The SBA also works with nonprofits to provide microloans. Many of these nonprofits help underserved groups, including disabled entrepreneurs. You can get up to \$50,000 for hiring staff, remodeling work spaces and more, though these loans may demand personal collateral. (For non-SBA microloans, check the Association for Enterprise Opportunity or try the AEO's DreamFund, meant to address the funding gap for underserved communities.)

USDA Business Loans

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) helps rural businesses and can be a good source of funds, as a large share of disabled Americans live in rural communities. The most popular USDA program is the Business and Industry Loan Guarantee Program, which partly guarantees loans for rural businesses in towns with under 50,000 residents.

You must have good credit and enough business revenues to qualify, and collateral may be necessary.

Assistive Technology Business Loans

These are good for persons with less than 550 FICO scores. Often, lenders are local, like the National Disability Institute, which offers assistive technology loans of up to \$30,000 for New Jersey and New York residents at below-market interest rates. Credit history can impact eligibility.

Street Shares Short-Term Business Loans

Finally, Street Shares is a short-term lender providing business loans to veterans and service-disabled veterans. Small businesses must have low revenue and be in business for at least a year. You also need at least a 600 personal credit score. Term loans are \$2,000-\$100,000. The most funding you can get is 20 percent of annual business revenue.

TOPIC 7: EDUCATION

This week, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), acting in its capacity as the State Approving Agency for the state of California, has withdrawn GI Bill approval for the enrollment of new beneficiaries at three law schools that lack accreditation by the American Bar Association (ABA). This disapproval action is based on the provisions in section 409 of the **Jeff Miller and Richard Blumenthal Veterans Health Care and Benefits Improvement Act of 2016 (PL 114-315)** that require programs designed to prepare an individual to practice law in a state to meet certain accreditation requirements.



Public Law 114-315

Jeff Miller and Richard Blumenthal Veterans Health Care and Benefits Improvement Act of 2016

In order to be approved for GI Bill benefits, programs at law schools must be accredited by an organization recognized by the U.S. Department of Education. The ABA is the only accreditor of law school programs recognized by the Department of Education. Sole accreditation by the State Bar of California is not sufficient.

Currently enrolled students at these schools may still receive GI Bill benefits to complete their programs, but no new students using GI Bill benefits will be allowed to enroll in these programs moving forward.

The schools listed below have Juris Doctor programs that are not presently accredited by the ABA and are no longer approvable because of failure to meet the requirements in sections 3672(b)(2)(C), 3675(b)(3), 3676(c)(14)(B), and/or 3676(c)(15)(B) of title 38, United States Code:

Following are the schools affected by this announcement and the number of students enrolled in Fall 2019:

- Thomas Jefferson School of Law (3160105) - **15 Students** for Fall 2019 and one currently certified.
- John F. Kennedy University (31934105) - **34 Students** for Fall 2019.
- Trinity Law School (31615405) - **11 Students** Fall 2019.

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