

## NATIONAL VETERANS EMPLOYMENT & EDUCATION COMMISSION

### TOPIC 1: ECONOMY

Sales of new US single-family homes dropped by the most in more than 6.5 years in March, and further declines are likely as the novel coronavirus outbreak batters the economy and throw millions of Americans out of work.

The Commerce Department said on Thursday; new home sales fell 15.4% to a seasonally adjusted annual rate of 627,000 units last month. The percentage decline was the largest since July 2013. February's sales pace was revised down to 741,000 units from the previously reported 765,000 units.



Economists polled by Reuters had forecast new home sales, which account for about 10% of housing market sales, plunging 15% to a pace of 645,000 units in March.

New home sales are drawn from permits and tend to be volatile on a month-to-month basis because of a small sample. Sales declined 9.5% from a year ago in March.

States and local governments have issued “stay-at-home” or “shelter-in-place” orders affecting more than 90% of Americans to control the spread of COVID-19, the potentially lethal respiratory illness caused by the virus, and abruptly halting economic activity. A record of 26.5 million people has filed for unemployment benefits since March 21.

The housing market was back on the recovery path, thanks to low mortgage rates, before the lockdown measures. It had hit a soft patch starting in the first quarter of 2018 through the second quarter of 2019.

While extraordinary steps by the Federal Reserve to cushion the economy's free fall, including aggressively cutting interest rates near zero, will keep mortgage rates low, which is unlikely to boost the housing market because of historic unemployment and faltering consumer confidence.

A report on Tuesday showed sales of previously owned homes falling by the most in nearly 4-1/2 years in March. Homebuilding collapsed in March at speed, not seen in 36 years.

Last month, new home sales dropped 8.1% in the Midwest and tumbled 38.5% in the West. They plunged 41.5% in the Northeast and slipped 0.8% in the South, which accounts for the bulk of transactions.

The median new house price increased by 3.5% to \$321,400 in March from a year ago. Economists expect slower house price growth or even a decline in home values this year as the coronavirus undercuts demand.

New home sales last month were concentrated in the \$200,000-\$749,000 price range. New homes priced below \$200,000, the most sought after, accounted for 10% of sales.

There were 333,000 new homes on the market in March, up from 324,000 in February. At March’s sales pace, it would take 6.4 months to clear the supply of houses on the market, up from 5.2 months in February.

<b>HOUSEHOLD</b>		<b>DATA</b>				
<b>Table A-5. Employment status of the civilian population 18 years and over by veteran status, period of service, and sex, not seasonally adjusted</b>						
[Numbers in thousands]						
Employment status, veteran status, and period of service	Total		Men		Women	
	MAR 2019	MAR 2020	MAR 2019	MAR 2020	MAR 2019	MAR 2020
Unemployed	106	140	87	107	19	33
<b>Unemployment rate</b>	<b>3.1</b>	<b>4.1</b>	<b>2.9</b>	<b>3.7</b>	<b>4.0</b>	<b>6.2</b>

*The national unemployment rate is 4.4 percent (March 2020). Gulf War II veterans' unemployment rate is 4.1 percent.<sup>i</sup> Currently, the unemployment rate for Gulf War II women veterans is 6.2 percent (up from 2.8 percent in February).*

**TOPIC 2: CONFERENCE CALLS**

*On Monday, April 20<sup>th</sup>*, the Veterans Employment & Education Division spoke with the employment representative of the Department of Veterans Affairs. We discussed concerns that VA HR staff and Hiring Managers may not be fairly applying “Veterans’ Preference” to veterans applying for non-competitive positions. The American Legion will continue to monitor this situation and take necessary corrective actions supported by Resolution No. 317: Enforcing Veterans’ Preference Hiring Practices in Federal Civil Service.

*On Monday, April 20<sup>th</sup>*, the Veterans Employment & Education Division held a conversation with Senior Senate Staff on 3696 schools facing penalties. They were followed by a weekly call with HVAC staff members on minority HVAC calls. Staffers from the Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs (DAMA) subcommittee discussed a letter sent from Takano and Roe expressing concern about the plan for making sure dependents receive their checks.

*On Monday, April 20<sup>th</sup>*, the Veterans Employment & Education Division held a conversation with Veterans at Wake Forest University to discuss how COVID 19 was impacting their educational experience and how the campus was responding to their needs. No severe impact but they are concerned that the university is not doing as much as it could for veterans

***On Tuesday, April 21<sup>st</sup>***, the National Veterans Employment & Education Division teleconferenced with the “Virtual Resume Workshop” planning team. We discussed the final details for the upcoming virtual resume workshop hosted by The American Legion.

***On Tuesday, April 21<sup>st</sup>***, the National Veterans Employment & Education Division discussed with TAL Legislative Division the solvency of the United States Postal Service. USPS funding is running low and may be forced to close down some facilities. The American Legion strongly opposes the closures of any facility, as it would adversely affect the employment of veterans. If there is a downsize, the veteran is protected under Veterans’ Preference. However, if the facility is closed, the veteran is not protected. The staff will continue to monitor this situation.

***On Tuesday, April 21<sup>st</sup>***, the National Veterans Employment & Education Division held conversations with HVAC and SVAC staff on the work of the Risk-Based Survey committee and school oversight. They plan to put language in a bill to ensure RBSs are done and to set the parameters of what the survey will include.

***On Tuesday, April 21<sup>st</sup>***, the National Veterans Employment & Education Division had a weekly teleconference with HVAC SVAC 4 corners to discuss concerns. They are beginning to think of how to rebuild the calendar in post-emergency DC. They are looking at potential virtual round tables on veterans' housing and other issues. Announced that HR 6322 will pass today and go to the President for signature.

***On Tuesday, April 21<sup>st</sup>***, the National Veterans Employment & Education Division talked with Directors of Texas and Illinois on earlier expressed concerns about the potential impact on OJT/Apprenticeship due to the requirement to report 116 hours of work monthly.

***On Tuesday, April 21<sup>st</sup>***, the National Veterans Employment & Education Division teleconference with state-federal VA leadership on challenges posed by the COVID 19 environment for education for veterans in the state. Conversation with SVAC staff on the veteran's impact of 3696 enrollment suspensions.

***On Tuesday, April 21<sup>st</sup>***, the National Veterans Employment & Education Division joined a meeting hosted by the National Association of Counties (NACo) for an update on local level priorities in federal coronavirus response efforts. In attendance was US Secretary of Labor Eugene Scalia, who discussed new federal resources available for county residents and new requirements for county governments as employers due to recently enacted COVID-19 response legislation.

***On Wednesday, April 22<sup>nd</sup>***, the National Veterans Employment & Education Division held its first “Virtual Resume Workshop.” There were 82 attendees, ranging from transitioning servicemembers, veterans, spouses, and family members; Attendees were from across the nation to include Armed Forces Europe.

***On Wednesday, April 22<sup>nd</sup>***, the National Veterans Employment & Education Division held a call with VA VSO Representative Jason Beardsley to discuss 3696 situations and oversight of institutions. Also, conversation with James Patterson, EANGUS Comms Director on VA school Oversight. First administrative meeting the VA Committee on Education, chaired by Sarah Roberts of LinkedIn, and Mona Dexter of the US Chamber of Commerce.

***On Thursday, April 23<sup>rd</sup>***, the National Veterans Employment & Education Division, replied to 219 survey responses requesting employment assistance. We provided them with viable resources as well as directing them to The American Legion webpage.

***On Thursday, April 23<sup>rd</sup>***, the National Veterans Employment & Education Division attended a webinar hosted by the US Chamber of Commerce Foundation with small, medium and large businesses and banks are assisting the community in the fight against the coronavirus. The discussion was about rearranging priorities, money, logistics, and innovating on the fly to get personal protective equipment to front line users.

***On Friday, April 24<sup>th</sup>***, the National Veterans Employment & Education Division hosted a teleconference call with Ellen Roeder; we discussed marketing opportunities for all upcoming virtual events.

***On Friday, April 24<sup>th</sup>***, the National Veterans Employment & Education Division weekly Meeting with EdCounsel/Lumina Risk-Based Survey Executive Team to discuss Risk-Based Survey Advisory Committee work, including continued review of the flow chart on how to determine which schools receive a Risk-Based Survey

***On Friday, April 24<sup>th</sup>***, the National Veterans Employment & Education Division further discuss the next Advisory Council meeting when it will occur. Finally, we will discuss further questions on how SAAs will conduct compliance at non accredited institutions. Conversations with VES and GA SAA on noncompliant Bible School with multiple campuses.

### **TOPIC 3: EMPLOYMENT**

More than 7,000 newly discharged service members headed straight to unemployment lines last week amid a historic downturn in the jobs market caused by the novel coronavirus pandemic, the Labor Department reported Thursday.

The benefits claims for newly discharged vets came to 7,068 for the week ending April 18, the Labor Department said in its latest stunning report, which showed that another 4,427,000 Americans are out of work.

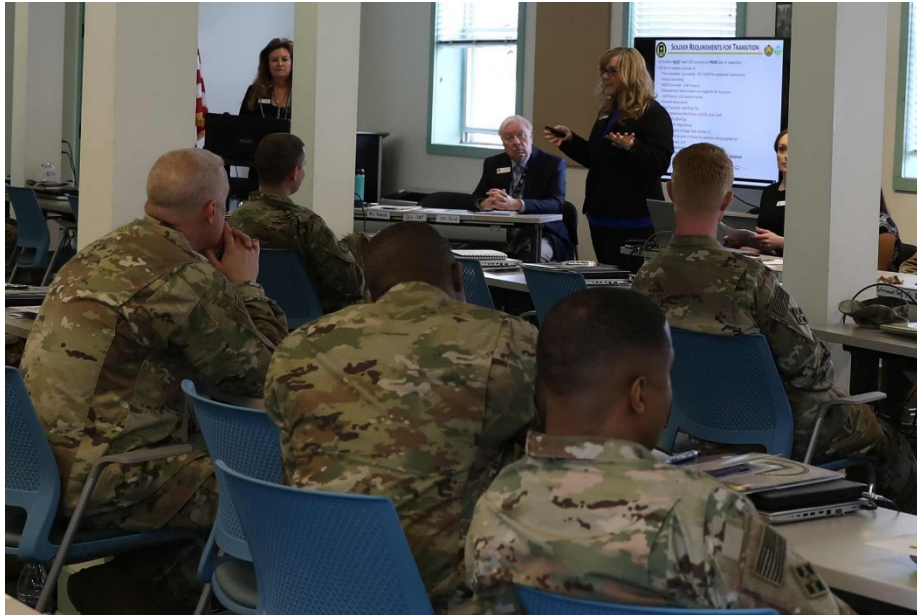
More than 6,300 new veterans who recently separated or retired filed for unemployment in the week ending April 11, and more than 5,400 in the week before that, for a total of more than 18,600 over the last three weeks, according to the Labor Department's weekly reports.

The 4.4 million total who filed claims in the week ending April 18 was down from the record 6.6 million who filed in the week before. But in the last five weeks, the unemployment total reached 26.4 million -- a staggering figure that has no precedent, the Labor Department said.

In response to the cratering of the economy, the Navy and Army last month began offering extensions to service members, partly to allow them to delay entry into a job market in free fall.

"The Navy is accepting applications from officers and enlisted personnel who desire to delay their separation or retirement" for six to 12 months in an effort "to mitigate the effects of COVID-19," the Navy said in a March 20 administrative notice signed by Vice Adm. John Nowell, the chief of personnel.

As of April 17, the Navy had received 530 extension requests, a personnel spokesman said.



The Army is offering extensions of three to 12 months. Soldiers are "being offered the option to extend if they want to do that or to reenlist or withdraw. Again, it's voluntarily," Maj. Gen. Joseph Calloway, head of Army Human Resources Command, said in a conference call with reporters Tuesday.

Marines with upcoming retirement or separation dates can request extensions with the length to be determined by unit commanders, according to Marine Corps Manpower and Reserve Affairs.

In a Facebook live session on April 6, Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. David Goldfein also said that airmen set to retire soon would be allowed to push back their retirement dates until the pandemic subsides.

In a statement accompanying the weekly unemployment claims report, Labor Secretary Eugene Scalia attributed the economy's downturn to the coronavirus crisis.

He pledged oversight by the department's Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) "to protect workers and ensure safe workplaces" as states begin to relax restrictions.

Based on the record numbers of unemployment claims in recent weeks, economists and investment banks have been predicting an unemployment rate well into the double digits when the Labor Department's Bureau of Labor Statistics releases the rates for April in the first week of May.

In the last BLS report for March, before the claims began to mount at record rates, the unemployment rate for all veterans rose to 4.1%, less than the national rate of 4.4% for March.

The unemployment rate for "Gulf War II-era," or post-9/11 veterans, was also 4.1% in March, BLS said. The 4.1% rate for all veterans in March represented a 0.5% increase from the 3.6% rate in February, it added.

## TOPIC 4: CAREER FAIRS

ALL CAREER FAIRS SCHEDULED THROUGH APRIL HAVE BEEN CANCELLED, SUSPENDED, OR POSTPONED.

**The American Legion is working on hosting virtual workshops and career fairs.**

The National Veterans, Employment & Education Division, conducted its first “Virtual Resume” workshop on April 22<sup>nd</sup>, from 11:00 am – 12:00 pm. One hundred nineteen preregistered for the event, 82 participated in the event from 11:00 am – 12:00 pm, an additional 23 logged in the event afternoon, where they received some information and resources.

There was positive feedback on the virtual resume workshop. The National Veterans Employment and Education Division will begin planning the next virtual events (Financial Literacy, LinkedIn, and Virtual Career Fair), more to follow.

*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

Tent cities and tiny-house villages for homeless people have long been taboo in Los Angeles, where they've been deemed too expensive to maintain and too difficult to dislodge once established. But the novel coronavirus has a way of upending the most profoundly entrenched thinking. Last week, the US Department of Veterans Affairs set up LA's first temporary tent city in four decades. It's for veterans without homes -- 25 initially, with a plan to expand to 50 as needed -- so they can wait out the COVID-19 crisis by sheltering in place and social distancing in their tents.

Until now, the city and county of Los Angeles have relied mainly on shelters -- and increasingly hotel and motel rooms -- to help protect homeless people who are most at risk for contracting the virus. But last week, a homeless man tested positive while staying at a shelter in the San Fernando Valley, and 68 homeless people and two staffers were infected in an outbreak at a shelter in San Francisco. Now the incidents are prompting a fresh look at campgrounds.

"It's not a bad idea to try it as an emergency measure," said Mike Neely, a former commissioner with the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority. But with officials warning that stay-at-home orders could last into the summer, such campgrounds could become semi-permanent fixtures. They also could face some of the same problems as shelters in trying to separate guests during mealtimes or in restrooms. The VA was quick to note that its site, on a parking lot on the VA's Greater Los Angeles Healthcare System campus on the Westside, was not a campground but rather a "services center." The operation includes medical and psychiatric care, as well as monitoring, food services, bathrooms, showers, and security.

A long-delayed VA bridge shelter also has opened on the campus, but with a reduced capacity of 50 people to accommodate the social distancing recommended to prevent the spread of the coronavirus. Just three months ago, VA officials had ignored an oversight board's call for more emergency shelter beds on the sprawling 388-acre campus, with rolling green hills and decrepit buildings that are mostly empty. The VA argued then that there was a surplus of beds for homeless veterans. Then came the COVID-19 pandemic and acute risk to 44,000 people -- including 2,900 veterans -- who live in vehicles, makeshift cabins, and tents in Los Angeles County. Frequent hand-

washing and social distancing, the gold-standard recommendations for fighting the novel coronavirus, range from difficult to impossible to do while living in a grimy sidewalk encampment. Many homeless people also are medically fragile from years of living on the streets and are older, both of which put them at risk for contracting a severe case of COVID-19.

Elected leaders in Los Angeles have responded to the pandemic's threat to the street population by converting recreation centers into shelters. The city also has boosted coronavirus testing on skid row and provided outdoor hand-washing stations and bathrooms. Responding to reports that the stations were often empty of soap and water, city officials vowed to refill them more frequently and said that more are being deployed. Meanwhile, thousands of newly leased hotel and motel rooms are beginning to fill up with homeless people in Los Angeles County. Most have been reserved for those who have been relocated from crowded shelters, or for people with underlying health conditions or other factors that put them at high risk for the virus. Advocates fear that homeless people who live in cars, sidewalk tents, and lean-tos will be left behind as the pandemic escalates. And they warn that time is running out. Authorities said Monday that 23 homeless people in LA County, including four staying in shelters, had tested positive for the virus.

But encampments are primarily isolated from the broader community. In essence, a fact that may have afforded homeless people a measure of protection as the pandemic grew in March, said Dr. Joshua Bamberger, an expert on homelessness and a professor at UC San Francisco. The citywide shutdown of businesses also cut off homeless people from restaurant bathrooms, charging outlets, food donations, and other resources on which they usually rely. Many hunkered down in their tents. But on April 1, Bamberger noted, monthly government assistance checks arrived, probably prompting a good number of homeless people to venture out and buy food and other supplies. "We have to do this right, right now," he said, "before this rips through the tents." Some LA officials are calling for the city and county to do what Tampa and Las Vegas have done and open tent cities to protect and monitor homeless people. LA City Councilman Mike Bonin has proposed a "safe camping" pilot project in his Westside district, perhaps in one of the beach parking lots that were emptied to break up crowds violating the city's stay-at-home order.

Mayor Eric Garcetti declined to say if he would support or oppose organized campgrounds but pledged to protect homeless people and expressed faith in the city's current efforts. Other top officials handling the coronavirus crisis said they would not rule out tent cities if the pandemic warrants them. "Nothing is off the list," said LA County Department of Public Health Director Barbara Ferrer. Back at the VA campus on Thursday, 11 veterans and a spouse of one hunkered down in carefully spaced tents and tarps in the parking lot. One called the service center, "a godsend." Another veteran told VA spokesman Steven Ruh that he recently had been attacked while he was sleeping on the street. "Now he'll have a watchful eye over him to make sure he's safe," he said.

"This could be a turning point," said Robert Rosebrock, an Army veteran. He has long accused the VA of commercializing its medical campus and shorting healthcare services and housing opportunities for veterans. "These people have so much potential. Now with this virus thing and all of us facing troubled times, maybe we can do more for them."

## **TOPIC 6: SMALL BUSINESS**

The House has passed a \$480 billion funding bill aimed at tiding over small businesses during the coronavirus pandemic. It now heads to President Donald Trump's desk, where he's expected to sign it.

The bulk of the bill is dedicated to replenishing funds for the Paycheck Protection Program, a critical new program that provides small businesses with forgivable loans to cover payroll costs. While lawmakers allocated \$350 billion to PPP in the March stimulus package, those funds were ultimately far from enough to address the need of millions of small businesses in the US.



Thus far, 1.6 million small businesses have received funding from PPP, according to the Small Business Administration. However, hundreds of thousands are still waiting to hear on their application status after money for the program ran out last week. Millions of dollars

have also gone to large corporations because of a loophole in the original bill.

The House's passage of another spending package infuses \$310 billion into PPP, with an added \$10 billion set aside to cover administrative costs. There's also \$60 billion allocated in the legislation for the Economic Injury Disaster Loans Program, which covers forgivable grants for small businesses.

The remainder of what lawmakers are calling an "interim" spending bill contains \$75 billion for hospitals to cover growing revenue shortfalls and \$25 billion for coronavirus testing. The final version of the legislation, however, does not meaningfully address the loophole that has allowed publicly traded companies to Hoover up large amounts of the relief funds. It's also missing several critical Democratic priorities, such as more funding for states and cities, as well as additional money to expand SNAP benefits.

Because of this — and other shortcomings — progressive groups have come out against the bill and argued that it once again pushes debates about more funding to the next package, which could face serious opposition from Senate Republicans. Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez has said she opposes this interim bill as well. "If we're going to say that this new bill is going to give us \$5, and then Congress is going to peace out for another month-long recess, I'm here to say that's not going to help our communities," Ocasio-Cortez said earlier this week.

Due to Democratic pressure, the "interim" funding bill has expanded notably since Senate Republicans' initial proposal. The original Republican offer, announced roughly two weeks ago, was limited to \$250 billion in funding for the Paycheck Protection Program, which provides forgivable grants to businesses and nonprofits. The newer version includes \$320 billion for PPP and \$60 billion for the Economic Injury Disaster Loan program.

Of the \$320 billion allocated for PPP, there's also a \$60 billion carve-out for community-based lenders, as well as mid-sized banks, which can better serve smaller businesses and minority-owned firms. These businesses are less likely to have an existing relationship with a larger bank. They were more likely to get shut out in the first round of funding as a result.



Additionally, the deal contains \$75 billion for hospitals, which have been overwhelmed by the simultaneous costs of preparing for the coronavirus, and the revenue declines that have resulted as elective procedures are postponed.

Another \$25 billion in the legislation is intended to help ramp up the country's testing capacity, a development that experts view as vital to determining when to reopen the economy more fully. Those funds include \$11 billion allocated explicitly to states for test supplies, contact tracing efforts, and staffing. Much of the remainder of these testing funds are spread across different federal agencies working on testing, including the National Institutes of Health.

The Democratic primary demand that has been omitted from this deal is the additional funding that lawmakers would like to see go to cities and states, many of which are facing incredible financial strain given reductions in tax revenue. Mnuchin signaled that this would be addressed as part of negotiations for the next funding bill, though Congressional Republicans have indicated that they're likely to push back on this provision.

Trump's reluctance to consider state funding in the current bill is the result of a couple of factors, according to Politico. Among them: The administration is concerned that it would have less leverage over the states regarding when they reopen their economies if they had more funding to help them weather this period.

Senate Republicans, it appears, are also concerned about the impact of more stimulus spending on the national debt. In a radio interview on *The Hugh Hewitt Show* this week, McConnell said that he was wary of approving more aid for states and cities. "I think this whole business of additional assistance for state and local governments needs to be thoroughly evaluated," he said.

Given the evident disagreements between the two parties on the next steps, it could be a while before the next stimulus package is approved.

## **TOPIC 7: EDUCATION**

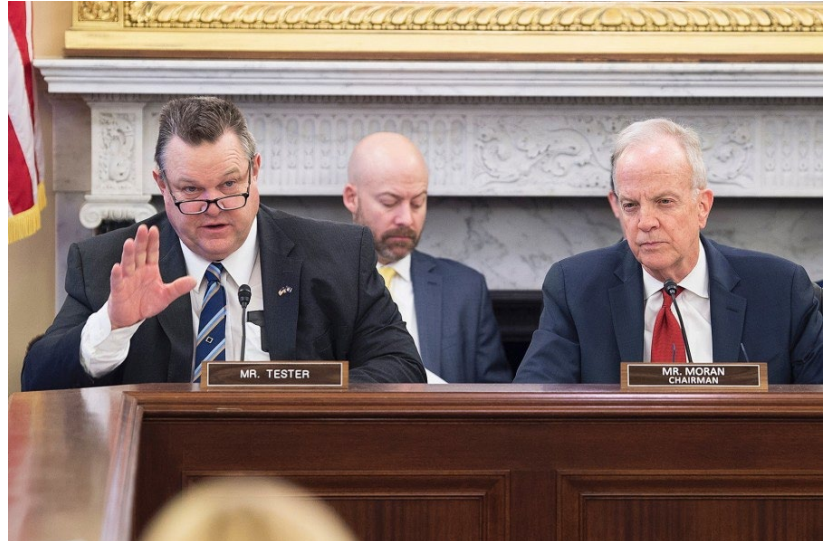
Congress on Tuesday finalized a second GI Bill fix for student veterans whose studies were upended by the coronavirus pandemic, sending the package to the White House to be signed into law in the coming days.

The measure follows legislation last month, which guaranteed students would not see any disruption in their education benefit payouts because of universities' sudden switch to online learning. Most colleges across the country have shifted to remote sessions instead of in-person classes to limit the spread of the virus.

Under previous rules, however, students who receive online-only education were not eligible for individual housing stipends. The emergency package allowed Veterans Affairs leadership to waive that restriction in light of the current emergency, guaranteeing students would not see any financial disruptions.

However, that legislation did not cover income lost from other sources, such as shuttered work-study programs connected to the GI Bill.

The latest measure — passed by the House earlier this month and by unanimous consent in the Senate Tuesday — would keep those work-study payments active through the remainder of the semester, even if students cannot reach their place of employment.



It will also make sure that, in light of the current emergency, students' GI Bill housing payments will continue even if colleges fully close down. And veterans could see any of this semester's lost entitlements restored if their institution closes down or if they are forced to withdraw from school for coronavirus-related issues.

Lawmakers hailed the passage as an essential step in protecting veterans' financial future.

"This fix built on previous legislation passed and signed into law to make certain our student veterans can continue to receive payments that they normally would from their education and training programs; during this pandemic without having to worry about losing the benefits that they have earned," said Sen. Jerry Moran, R-Kan., chairman of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee.

His House counterpart, Rep. Mark Takano, D-Calif., similarly praised the bipartisan action on the measure.

"As the nation faces the COVID-19 pandemic, no student veteran should have to worry about losing income from work-study jobs, interrupting their studies, or unexpected bills when their schools close," he said.

White House officials have not said when the legislation may be signed into law, but also have not offered any objections to the proposal.

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**Week Ending: 4/24/20**

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