

NATIONAL VETERANS EMPLOYMENT & EDUCATION COMMISSION

TOPIC 1: ECONOMY

The US economy shrank 4.8% in the first quarter of 2020, ending a record streak of expansion, according to a preliminary estimate released by the Commerce Department on Wednesday.

The real gross domestic product (GDP) is among the first economic indicators to show the impact of the novel coronavirus pandemic on the US economy.

In the fourth quarter of 2019, real GDP increased by 2.1%. The Government attributed the decline in the first quarter partly to "stay-at-home" orders issued by governors in March. "This led to rapid changes in demand, as businesses and schools switched to remote work or canceled operations, and consumers canceled, restricted, or redirected their spending," the Government said.

Economists were expecting a decline in GDP of about 3.5% to 4%. This is the first negative GDP since the 1.1% decline in Q1 of 2014. Also, the largest decline since the recession in Q4 of 2008 when GDP dropped 8.4%.

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought vast swaths of the economy to a screeching halt.



Streets are empty, and businesses have been shuttered in Jersey City, April 27, 2020, in Jersey City, New Jersey.

Streets are empty, and businesses have been shuttered in Jersey City, April 27, 2020, in Jersey City, New Jersey. Non-essential businesses have been forced to shutter, and some 30 million people have lost their jobs and filed for unemployment amid the crisis.

In just over a month, the pandemic wiped out all the job gains since the 2009 recession.

Earlier this month, the International Monetary Fund released its 2020 World Economic Outlook, projecting the global economy will contract by 3% as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, a steeper decline than the 2008-2009 financial crisis.

The group forecast that the cumulative loss to the global GDP from 2020 to 2021 as a result of the pandemic could be approximately \$9 trillion, or more than the economies of Japan and Germany combined.

Gita Gopinath, the economic counselor, and director of research at the IMF, referred to the contraction as "the Great Lockdown" in a blog post, saying it will be "the worst recession since the Great Depression, and far worse than the Global Financial Crisis." "This is a truly global crisis as no country is spared," Gopinath wrote. "Countries reliant on tourism, travel, hospitality, and entertainment for their growth are experiencing particularly large disruptions."

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]

	Total		Men		Women	
Employment status, veteran status, and period of service	MAR 2019	MAR 2020	MAR 2019	MAR 2020	MAR 2019	MAR 2020
Unemployed	106	140	87	107	19	33
Unemployment rate	3.1	4.1	2.9	3.7	4.0	6.2

The national unemployment rate is 4.4 percent (March 2020). Gulf War II veterans' unemployment rate is 4.1 percent.ⁱ 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 27th, the Veterans Employment & Education Division spoke representative from the Department of Veterans Affairs, regarding their hiring practices. It id once again been indicated that the Department of VA has been finding ways to circumvent Veterans' Preferences. The staff will continue to monitor this situation.

On Monday, April 27th, the Veterans Employment & Education Division held weekly calls with HVAC staff members on minority HVAC calls. Senior Staffer said that they are unsure that a Covid 4 Bill is in the works still. Staffers from the DAMA subcommittee stated that the VA file records have gone to the IRS to ensure veterans get their stimulus checks. Health subcommittee staffers reported that VA says there are concerns with some providers not being about to make telehealth appointments in all cases. This is leading to worries about a building backlog of

exams. VA has a plan to begin doing elective surgeries. VSOs were reminded about the virtual forum on veteran homelessness. More of those types (virtual) forums to be done in the future. Congress is still not slated to return before May 4. Also held a virtual meeting with State Approving Agencies who will be piloting the new risk-based method of oversight for GI Bill approved institutions. Concerns included no access by SAAs to the GI Bill complaint system and the need to ensure that this new method of oversight is data-driven.

On Monday, April 27th, the Veterans Employment & Education Division attended a VSO weekly meeting with the House Veterans Affairs Committee minority staff to review VA policy proposals. Committee staff shared their proposal for a "COVID-19 Veterans Rapid Training Program", conceived of with elements of both the Veterans Retraining Assistance Program (VRAP) and VET TEC program.

On Tuesday, April 28th, the National Veterans Employment & Education Division spoke with Hakeem Bashruud-Deen, Director, Veterans Program Office of Personnel Management (OPM). He was not aware of any changes regarding the changing of veterans' preferences.

On Tuesday, April 28th, the National Veterans Employment & Education Division completed an assessment of the phase 4 rollout of the CARES Act and created an updated paycheck protection program (PPP) summary and factsheet to account for the administrative changes to the program. The American Legion will continue to monitor the SBA implementation of the PPP and other disaster relief loans.

On Tuesday, April 28th, the National Veterans Employment & Education Division held a weekly teleconference with HVAC SVAC 4 corners to discuss concerns relating to the GI Bill and the present Covid Crisis. Concerns that some students who haven't had their full class load canceled with not be covered by HR 6322, and this may have to be addressed in a new bill. Still concerned about how APP/OJT impacted by the inability of some to do the required to 130 hours. SVAC AND HVAC requested our findings on the impact in Illinois and other states.

On Tuesday, April 28th, the National Veterans Employment & Education Division had conversations with SAA Directors and Project Manager for RBS Project on the way to provide proper oversight with a new model. Also, further conversation on the need for APP/OJT fixes during the Covid Crisis.

On Tuesday, April 28th, the National Veterans Employment & Education Division conversation with SVAC and HVAC staff on the impact on veterans of 3696 enrollment suspensions.

On Tuesday, April 28th, the National Veterans Employment & Education Division attended a VSO weekly meeting with the four corners HVAC/SVA economic opportunity staff to discuss policy proposals. After weeks of advocacy, HVAC staff concurred with the Legion's concerns on OJT GI Bill challenges and is developing language to support veterans who are no longer able to earn their apprenticeship hours.

On Wednesday, April 29th, the National Veterans Employment & Education Division Spoke with Mark Toal, Director, Veterans Outreach, Department of Labor, Veterans Employment & Training Services (DOL-VETS). We discussed the Transitions Assistance Program (TAP) new delivery online platform and it's effectiveness. The staff will attend one of their online courses.

On Wednesday, April 29th, the National Veterans Employment & Education Division held another Call with VA Senior VSO Representative Jason Beardsley to discuss 3696 situations.

Continued concern over oversight of institutions and further discussion of RBS (Risk-Based Surveys). Conversations with Kelsey Baron (SVAC) on veterans impacted by the VA 3696 decision. Research on Distance Learning and Covid Crisis.

On Thursday, April 30th, the National Veterans Employment & Education Division spoke with the TAL Legislative division regarding VE&Es legislative & policy initiatives.

On Thursday, April 30th, the National Veterans Employment & Education Division met with the alternative lending company LSQ. Discussed their programs focusing on reducing risk, improving cash flow, finding liquidity, and forecasted economic trends as a result of the government-induced economic slow-down in response to COVID19.

On Thursday, April 30th, the National Veterans Employment & Education Division participated in a meeting with RBS / Lumina Project Manager. Conversations with VA State Leadership (NC). Worked on The American Legion Letter to SEC VA on 3696 and brief for the TAL Executive Director.

On Thursday, April 30th, the National Veterans Employment & Education Division attended a virtual trades roundtable hosted by AFL-CIO. The roundtable featured remarks from Directors from Veterans in Piping, the Dixon Center, the Teamsters, and the Utilities Workers Union of America on adjustments to training programs in the wake of COVID-19.

On Friday, May 1st, the National Veterans Employment & Education Division held a weekly meeting with EdCounsel/Lumina Risk-Based Survey Executive Team. We discuss the Risk-Based Survey Meeting with NASAA Executive Board to discuss Veterans Education Issues, COVID impact, and potential delay of the national convention.

On Friday, May 1st, the National Veterans Employment & Education Division had conversations with GA SAA on noncompliant Bible School and how to protect veterans enrolled in this institution.

TOPIC 3: EMPLOYMENT

The American Legion has and will always be a strong advocate for Veterans' Preference. Therefore the staff is closely monitoring the results and recommendations from a recent report initiated by Inspired to Serve, The Final Report of the National Commission on Military, National, and Public Service, March 2020, and what actions the current administration will take. Below are the findings of Veterans Preference along with a link for their recommendations



The challenges facing Government hiring are so severe that GAO has identified strategic human capital management as an area of "high risk."¹⁶⁰ In particular, lack of adequate talent management has led to "mission-critical skills gaps" that significantly contribute to 16 of the 34 other "high-risk" areas identified in GAO's latest report.¹⁶¹ For the Government to remain a competitive employer, Congress, OPM, and individual agencies should change the recruitment, application, qualification, and assessment processes to more closely mirror broader workforce practices and to enable agencies to more accurately appraise candidates' credentials.

No discussion of hiring reform would be complete without addressing veterans' preference and non-competitive hiring authorities. Federal civil service law specifies that veterans who meet certain criteria, such as serving in a particular military campaign or experiencing a service-connected disability, receive preference over other candidates within the competitive hiring process.¹⁶² Dating back to the Civil War, this preference was instituted to offset economic loss experienced by service members in comparison to their civilian counterparts, to ease the transition from military service back to gainful employment in civilian life, and to honor the Nation's obligation and debt to veterans.

The Commission received a great deal of feedback regarding the impact of veterans' preference on the hiring process. As currently employed in a competitive examination, veterans' preference does not produce optimal outcomes for veterans transitioning to civilian life. Just as importantly, it undermines the merit system and severely limits nonveterans' ability to serve in Government. Veterans' preference is not just a tiebreaker—many preference-eligible veterans are automatically categorized as the highest qualified or best qualified, even if they were originally assessed as minimally qualified. Agency officials and public service experts alike agree that this policy damages the hiring process and frequently results in highly qualified nonveterans having little chance of Federal employment, while also contributing to a lack of diversity at some agencies. Further, many of the special hiring authorities that have emerged are intended to get around veterans' preference, thereby increasing the complexity—and decreasing the fairness and transparency—of the personnel system. The recommendations below would make veterans' preference work better for younger, recently separated veterans, helping them to transition successfully to civilian life by ensuring that they are entering Federal positions for which they are a good fit.

At the same time, the recommendations would expand non-competitive hiring authorities (that is, alternative hiring processes outside of competitive examining) to make it easier for agencies to hire veterans without limiting their ability to access highly qualified nonveteran talent. Proposed changes to non-competitive eligibility (NCE) attempt to make this hiring option easier for individuals and agencies to understand and use.

These changes would enable the Government to capitalize on high-performing individuals participating in developmental programs more uniformly and to facilitate the return of high-performing employees.

They left to pursue growth opportunities outside of the Government. Collectively, the recommendations aim to make hiring processes more seamless, help agencies better meet their workforce needs and promote a competitive process that elevates the most capable candidates to achieve the Government's mission.

<https://inspire2serve.gov/reports/final-report#figure7>

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 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

Veterans and their supporters say they don't want to leave another veteran behind, even if there is a health pandemic.

Helping homeless veterans has been nothing new for Stacey Buckner, who started her nonprofit Off-Road Outreach about three years ago. Buckner takes her Jeep around Cumberland County to provide showers, a hot meal, and hygiene kits to the area's veteran and homeless population.

And once government buildings and public spaces closed because of the coronavirus, one of Buckner's first questions was how could the population she helps serve to follow Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidelines to wash hands if they don't have access to a sink.

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"The homeless population's lack of stable shelter, access to proper hygiene, and basic food supplies makes them a particularly vulnerable group during the COVID-19 pandemic," she said. That's when Buckner partnered with other organizations and Axios Investigations Firm to purchase portable handwashing stations to place around Fayetteville. The effort started about a month ago.

"It was really to start a movement to get the city to get behind us and supply these hygiene resources to our un-housed men and women," Buckner said.

Veterans and the homeless population can wash their hands, receive hygiene kits and hand sanitizer, and meals each week.

Buckner is also trying to help those who don't have access to the internet or public library obtain their federal stimulus checks.

Axios Investigations Firm and Kraken-Skulls have handed out free meals in neighborhoods and grilled the past six Sundays near Santa Fe Drive and Bingham Drive, said Jereme Dozier, chief executive officer of Axios Investigations Firm.

"We are still working to enhance the homeless and homeless veterans' quality of life," Dozier said.

On Thursday, Buckner and Dozier were at the nonprofit Veterans Empowering Veterans off B Street to install another handwashing station and hand out sandwiches provided by Subway off Skibo Road.

Marine veteran Joshua Halleck was one of the veterans who came out. Halleck, who lives with his daughter, helps Veterans Empowering Veterans by fixing cars. "They help you out with clothes anything you need," he said of Veterans Empowering Veterans.

Bandle Codrington, who served in the Army from 1978 to 1982, including in Panama, said the nonprofit helps with education and health benefits.

"This is very good because a lot of people don't have it," Codrington said of Off-Road Outreach and Axios' efforts. "And the more that we put out, I think the better off we will be in this area." William Sessoms was in the Army from 1971 to 1972, before the end of the Vietnam War. After Veterans Empowering Veterans helped him access VA health benefits, he said it's an organization he supports.

"Winston Churchill said 'Never, never, never give up,'" Sessoms said of advice he shares with fellow veterans during the current health pandemic. For Buckner, she said she doesn't want to give up on veterans in the community right now and hopes residents share the same mindset.

"These are resources that are needed year-round. And having a mobile shower and having a handwashing station, we're just doing our part to help stop the spread of COVID, but beyond that, when the pandemic is over, we don't want people to forget that these resources are needed," she said.

Buckner said anyone wanting to help could make an online donation or bring non-perishable food donations, toilet paper, and hygiene kits to Veterans Empowering Veterans, at 325 B St. in Fayetteville.

TOPIC 6: SMALL BUSINESS

This week, another \$310 billion is being added to the federal Government's Paycheck Protection Program so that lenders can offer more forgivable loans to small businesses. The loan program -- which the Small Business Administration had to shut down on April 16 when the first \$349 billion tranches ran dry in less than two weeks -- opened again at 10:30 a.m. Monday.

The second round of money is expected to go quickly. Bank of America reports they have \$50 billion worth of applications ready to go through the second round. JPMorgan Chase also says they have 150,000 applications ready to process. So, unless your application is already in at one



of the larger banks like Chase or Wells Fargo, you're going to want to check out some alternative options.

The loans, which are part of the Government's coronavirus relief package, don't have to be paid back if they're immediately used to meet pre-crisis payroll expenses.

There was outrage that some public companies got loans, such as Ruth's Chris, Auto Nation, and Shake Shack. While those businesses and others have said they will return the money, the new round of funding includes provisions to make sure that it doesn't happen again.

The new round of funding sets aside \$60 billion for small- and medium-sized community banks, credit unions, and less traditional lending companies that are SBA-approved.

And if your application is not already in with one of the central banks, you're going to want to look at those other SBA-approved options. For example, BlueVine, Centerstone SBA Lending, Funding Circle, even PayPal are all accepting applications for PPP loans. Another option is to go straight to the source.

On the SBA website, there is a page dedicated to showing you SBA-approved PPP lenders just by entering your ZIP code.

No matter where you decide to apply, the most critical piece of advice is not to wait around. This round of funding is less than the amount that went out the first time, and you don't want to get left behind.

It's also worth noting technical issues plagued the second round of emergency funding for small businesses that opened Monday, with users reporting error messages and slow processing.

The problems mirrored the initial rollout of the PPP earlier this month, which was troubled by technical hiccups and questions about if lenders were prioritizing the businesses that needed the money most.

National Small Business Town Hall and Loan Updates

The National Veterans Employment and Education Division participated in the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and INC. Magazine's weekly National Small Business Town Hall and Loan Updates. The webinar was moderated by INC. The panel of experts included: Eugene Cornelius, Senior Director, Center for Regional Economics, Milken Institute; Sarah Jennings, CPA, Principal, Maner Costerisan; Michelle Sourie Robinson, President and CEO, Michigan Minority Supplier Development Council; and Bridget Weston, Acting CEO, SCORE

The Panel shared strategies for navigating through COVID-19. They also shared best practices for small businesses that were seeking to acquire an Economic Injury Disaster Loan or participate in the Payroll Protection Program. The majority of the small businesses (SBs) shared the difficulties they were experiencing with the complex application process. The SBs want SBA to provide a simplified application process. The webinars are hosted weekly at www.uschamber.com/co/.

VE&E is continuing their research on resources for small businesses located in the rural areas. We are finding there are many local grants, and other resources, that are being provided to small businesses in their respective areas, especially by Small Business Development Centers.

The Lowlander Center, in Gray, Louisiana, and Regional Tribes, have asked the State to donate surplus computers. Many small business owners in rural areas don't have personal computers, so they use computer resources at their local libraries. Unfortunately, due to COVID-19, most libraries are closed, which is having an impact on the small businesses ability to continue operations. This should be a nation-wide initiative, especially in rural states.

TOPIC 7: EDUCATION

President Donald Trump late Tuesday signed into law a second emergency GI Bill fix for student veterans whose studies have been disrupted by the coronavirus pandemic, protecting work-study programs and providing extra insurance in the case of college closings.

The move came just days after Congress finalized the legislation without objection in abbreviated House and Senate sessions. It also came just a few weeks after lawmakers rushed through another legislative package to ensure that student veterans would not see their education stipends halted as colleges shifted from in-person classes to online learning.

Hundreds of college campuses nationwide have shut down nearly completely in recent



weeks — along with many public schools, places of worship and local businesses — in an effort to slow the spread of the illness, which has caused more than 54,000 fatalities nationwide.

Both Republicans and Democrats on Capitol Hill hailed the president's signature as much-needed relief for veterans dealing with those sudden changes in their education plans.

“Throughout this crisis, I have heard from too many student veterans about the uncertainty the COVID-19 pandemic is causing,” said Rep. Mark Takano, D-Calif., and chairman of the House Veterans’ Affairs Committee, in a statement.

“By signing my bipartisan legislation into law, we can finally grant our student veterans the peace of mind that their benefits won’t be impacted by this crisis.”

Committee ranking member Rep. Phil Roe, R-Tenn., echoed that sentiment. “With colleges and universities transitioning to online courses, students should be focused on their studies, not worrying about whether their benefits will continue.”

Under the latest measure, students using GI Bill programs can keep receiving payments for work study programs 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.

About 950,000 individuals received some type of veterans education benefits last year.

TOPIC 8: COVID-19 RESPONSE SURVEY

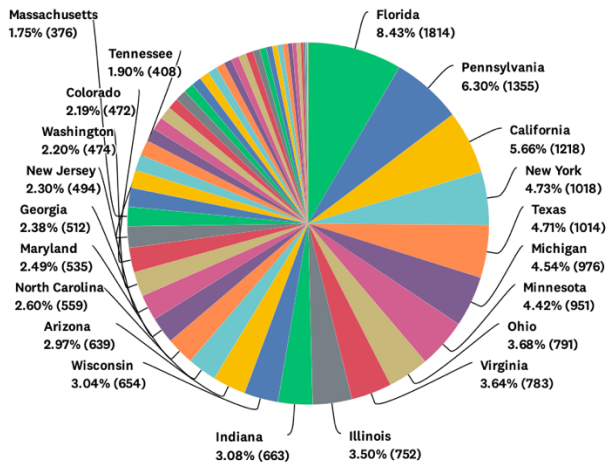
As Americans adjust to a temporary era of ‘stay home orders’ and social distancing, it is important that TAL HQ empowers Legionnaires to share the experiences of their homes and communities. The clearest route through the epidemic is aggregating data, and TAL must take the mantle as America’s largest VSO to ensure that the voice of our veterans and military families is heard.

On April 15th, the Legion launched the VE&E designed “American Legion COVID-19 Impact Survey April 16-30”. Based upon previous Legion surveys, the benchmark for survey response success was set at 5,000.

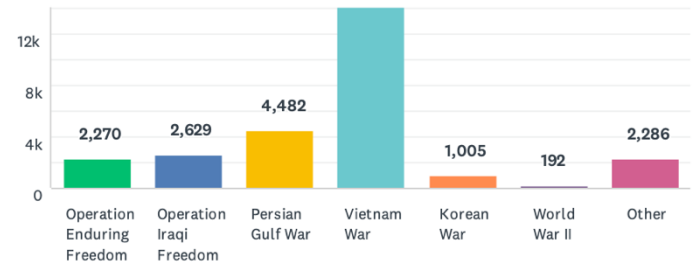
As of April 30, the survey has received over 21,000 responses, quadrupling the highest expectations.

The Veterans Employment & Education Division is honored to continue to blaze the trail for this, and pleased to share initial snapshots on responses:

RESPONSES BY STATES



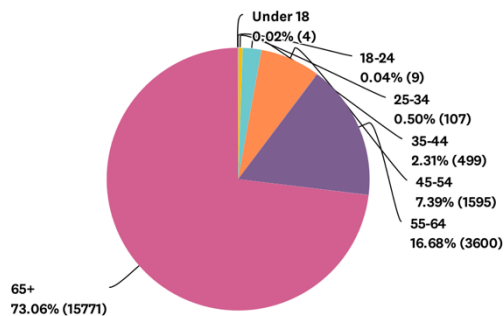
SERVICE IN CONGRESSIONALLY CHARTERED WAR ERAS



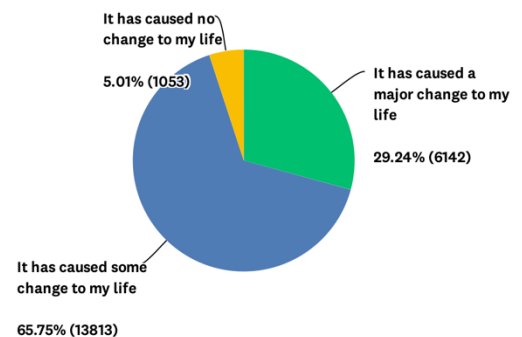
HOW CONCERNED ARE YOU ABOUT THESE TOPICS IN THE WEEKS AHEAD?

	VERY CONCERNED	SOMEWHAT CONCERNED	NOT AT ALL CONCERNED	TOTAL
Contracting coronavirus	35.78% 7,504	49.22% 10,321	15.00% 3,145	20,970
Buying groceries	13.92% 2,864	41.89% 8,622	44.19% 9,095	20,581
Job Security	11.10% 2,253	17.58% 3,569	71.31% 14,474	20,296
Paying other bills	9.39% 1,930	27.53% 5,659	63.08% 12,964	20,553
Paying mortgage or rent	7.66% 1,564	18.58% 3,791	73.76% 15,052	20,407

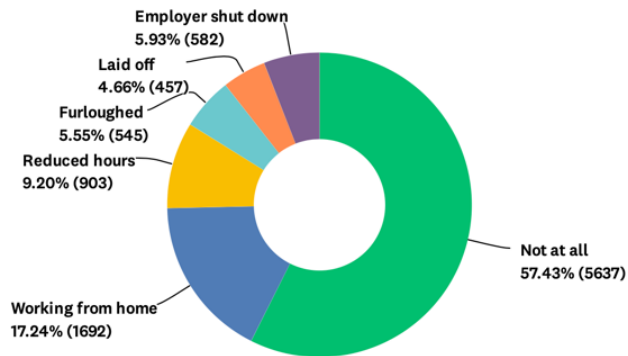
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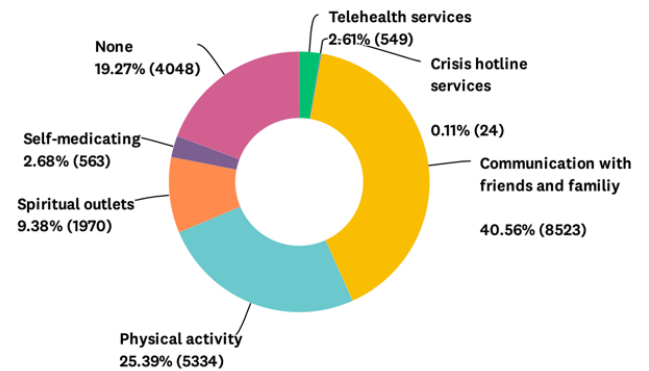
HOW MUCH HAS THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC CHANGED YOUR LIFE?



HOW HAS THE CORONAVIRUS IMPACTED VETERANS IN THE WORKFORCE?



WHAT RESOURCES ARE YOU FINDING MOST HELPFUL FOR WELL-BEING?



WHAT IS YOUR LEVEL OF CONFIDENCE IN THE FOLLOWING INSTITUTIONS TO RESPOND TO THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC?

	FULLY OR SOMEWHAT CONFIDENT	NOT AT ALL CONFIDENT	TOTAL
Local Hospital	94.57% 19,299	5.43% 1,109	20,408
VA	90.83% 18,361	9.17% 1,853	20,214
Federal Government	80.43% 16,432	19.57% 3,998	20,430
State Government	78.57% 16,084	21.43% 4,386	20,470
POTUS	71.72% 14,745	28.28% 5,814	20,559
Senate	68.22% 13,960	31.78% 6,502	20,462
House of Representatives	41.44% 8,491	58.56% 11,999	20,490

**HOW MUCH DO YOU BELIEVE THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC PRESENTS
A THREAT TO THE FOLLOWING**

	NO THREAT	SOME THREAT	A LARGE THREAT	TOTAL
The health of the U.S. population	2.94% 604	46.13% 9,490	50.93% 10,477	20,571
Your personal health	11.46% 2,353	60.71% 12,462	27.82% 5,711	20,526
The U.S. economy	0.64% 130	12.04% 2,455	87.32% 17,797	20,382
Your personal financial situation	23.42% 4,802	54.07% 11,087	22.51% 4,615	20,504

**GIVEN THE CURRENT PANDEMIC AND SOCIAL DISTANCING ADVICE, HOW
LIKELY ARE YOU TO DO THE FOLLOWING?**

	NOT AT ALL LIKELY	SOMEWHAT LIKELY	VERY LIKELY	TOTAL
Attend a crowded party	94.86% 19,918	3.00% 630	2.14% 450	20,998
Eat at a restaurant	87.47% 18,297	8.58% 1,794	3.95% 826	20,917
Go to Church/Temple	81.76% 17,132	12.17% 2,551	6.07% 1,272	20,955
Visit friends or relatives	59.04% 12,405	29.21% 6,137	11.75% 2,469	21,011
Vote at a polling location	39.61% 8,288	26.99% 5,648	33.40% 6,989	20,925
Shop at a grocery store	8.48% 1,782	39.98% 8,403	51.55% 10,835	21,020

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Week Ending: 5/1/20
