

NATIONAL VETERANS EMPLOYMENT & EDUCATION COMMISSION

TOPIC 1: ECONOMY

Federal Reserve officials agreed during their policy-setting meeting at the end of April that the coronavirus pandemic continued to pose a "considerable risk" to the US and pledged to deploy their full arsenal to protect the economy.

The central bank on Wednesday released minutes from its virtual gathering -- the first since the crisis began -- held on April 28 and 29, during which policymakers vowed to use their "tools and act as appropriate to support the economy."

FED'S POWELL SAYS US ECONOMY MAY NEED MORE POLICY HELP TO AVOID 'PROLONGED' RECESSION

"Participants judged that the effects of the coronavirus outbreak and the ongoing public health crisis would continue to weigh heavily on economic activity, employment, and inflation in the near term and would pose considerable risks to the economic outlook over the medium term," the minutes said.

Despite what they agreed will likely be an "unprecedented" slowdown in the second quarter, Fed officials said they expect the economy to begin to recover in the second half of the year. Still, they do not expect to see a complete recovery by the end of 2020. Of growing concern to Fed officials is the possibility of a resurgence of the virus later in the year. The minutes noted that the "more pessimistic" outlook for the economy was now no less plausible than the baseline forecast. Members worried that the possibility of a second outbreak could hamper businesses' desire to engage in new projects, rehire workers, or make new capital expenditures.

US CONSUMERS' EXPECTATIONS DETERIORATED 'SHARPLY' IN APRIL, FED SAYS

"In this scenario, a second wave of the coronavirus outbreak, with another round of strict restrictions on social interactions and business operations, was assumed to begin around year-end, inducing a decrease in real GDP, a jump in the unemployment rate, and renewed downward pressure on inflation next year," the minutes said.

Fed officials left interest rates near-zero last month, and in their post-meeting statement, reiterated previous guidance that the benchmark federal fund rate will remain at a range between 0 percent and 0.25 percent "until it is confident that the economy has weathered recent events and is on track to achieve its maximum employment and price stability goals." Some members also indicated they'd like to designate a specific date before rates could be raised. Chairman Jerome Powell followed the meeting with a bleak press conference, during which he suggested both the federal government and the central bank may need to pass additional policy measures to ensure the economy rebounds. "We've seen an extraordinary, historically large reaction," Powell said. "But I would say it may well be the case that the economy may need more support from all of us if the recovery is to be a robust one...It'll come with a hefty price tag. But we would come out of this with less long-run damage to the economy."

FED PLEDGES AGGRESSIVE ACTION TO SUPPORT US ECONOMY

Central bankers have already taken a range of extraordinary actions to support the economy in addition to slashing interest rates, including purchasing an unlimited amount of Treasury's (a practice known as quantitative easing) and launching crisis-era lending facilities to ensure that credit flows to households and businesses. It has also said it will buy corporate bonds and lend to states and cities.

In the past two months, the Fed has pumped about \$2.9 trillion into the economy, an unprecedented amount, and its balance sheet has swelled to \$7 trillion.

| 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 | |
| | APR 2019 | APR 2020 | APR 2019 | APR 2020 | APR 2019 | APR 2020 |
| Unemployed | 59 | 453 | 33 | 347 | 26 | 106 |
| Unemployment rate | 1.7 | 13.0 | 1.1 | 11.8 | 5.4 | 20.0 |

The national unemployment rate is 14.7 percent (May 2020). Gulf War II veterans' unemployment rate is 11.8 percent.ⁱ Currently, the unemployment rate for Gulf War II women veterans is 20.0 percent (up from 6 percent in April).

TOPIC 2: CONFERENCE CALLS

On Monday, May 18th, the National Veterans Employment & Education Division spoke with Nathan Williamson, Deputy Director, Department of Veterans Affairs - Office of Transition, Education & Development. We discussed their role on TAP.

On Monday, May 18th, the National Veterans Employment & Education Division discussed with small business stakeholders, manufacturers, and industry groups, the lessons learned from the industry response to COVID19. It is now a National Security imperative that supply chains remain intact and free from foreign reliance. The staff is working with the National Security Division to prepared a whitepaper that outlines key supply chain breakdowns during the COVID 19 pandemic and proposes solutions that will keep the manufacturing and distribution of personal protection equipment, sanitation chemicals, and other emergent supplies within the US.

On Monday, May 18th, the National Veterans Employment & Education Division weekly call with HVAC staff members on minority HVAC call. The minority is concerned about the new House rules imposed by the majority on a proxy vote, etc. Ranking Member Roe made a written response. Jon Clarke discussed the Rapid Hiring Authority extended to VA and some discussion of legislative fix to allow for some form of it permanently. Discussion of the possibility of moving HR 1199 (VA Website Accessibility Act). SB 746 (senate version) hopefully headed for the floor.

On Monday, May 18th, the National Veterans Employment & Education Division teleconferenced with the Health subcommittee staffer; we discussed that VA plans to move forward with opening up twenty facilities for selected services. There is still no update on the PPE availability question.

On Monday, May 18th, the National Veterans Employment & Education Division spoke with Jon Clark and discussed his retraining proposal, modeled on a hybrid of old VRAP program and Vet Tech program. Conversation with NASAA leadership and VA on the Risk-Based Survey project. VA is seeking an update on the RBS work so that they can plan for the FY21 contract beginning in October. Conversations with J. Kamin on borrower defense issue.

On Tuesday, May 19th, the National Veterans Employment & Education Division participated in a Virtual Career Fair hosted by Jobzone. The staff was able to speak to 22 veterans who were interested in knowing more about The American Legion's programs and services to include membership.

On Tuesday, May 19th, the National Veterans Employment & Education Division attended the NASAA legislative committee meeting to discuss oversight challenges during COVID and NASAA's legislative agenda for 2021.

On Wednesday, May 20th, the National Veterans Employment & Education Division spoke with our federal partners (DOL, VA, and DOD). We discussed the feasibility of hosting a virtual panel (Townhall style), where they would discuss their specific roles concerning the Transition Assistance Program (TAP). The concern is that transitioning servicemembers may not be receiving the level of quality of information (pre-COVID) that would allow for a seamless transition.

On Wednesday, May 20th, the National Veterans Employment & Education Division had a conversation with Hill Staff and VSO on a legislative response to COVID 19.

On Wednesday, May 20th, the National Veterans Employment & Education Division talked with HVAC minority lead staff on the bill being developed to retrain veterans who lost their jobs due to the pandemic. Bill, modeled on VPRAP and Vet Tech, would provide on years' worth of training benefit, separate from the other GI Bill Chapters, to veterans aged 59 and below. Bill still under consideration but hopes to introduce next week. Conversations with Legislative Directors for 3696 impacted schools about their responses to the VA. (And VA seeming unwillingness to schedule meeting with schools seeking further guidance.)

On Thursday, May 21st, the National Veterans Employment & Education Division conference call regarding VA GI Bill Update call hosted by Education Service. Director Bogue announced they would be going to the Microsoft meeting platform. James Ruhlman discussed CARES act implementation and challenges. VA updated the group on new RFIs (\$10 million each) on outsourcing compliance survey work and outcome measures. Space Force is fully covered for Veteran Benefits, and there is a new designated call line for survivors at VA.

On Thursday, May 21st, the National Veterans Employment & Education Division discussion of the mandated surveys (from Miller – Blumenthal bill) and updates on where the VA was on overseeing those. MITRE is involved in working those for VA.

On Thursday, May 21st, the National Veterans Employment & Education Division discussions with SVA on VA Tech residency issue and then with SVA on VET TECH running out of money and leaving veterans stranded.

On Friday, May 22nd, the National Veterans Employment & Education Division conference call with The American Legion's IT Division. We are now ready to launch our second "Virtual Workshop" on Financial Literacy scheduled for May 28.

On Friday, May 22nd, the National Veterans Employment & Education Division weekly meeting with EdCounsel/Lumina Risk-Based Survey Executive Team to discuss the Risk-Based Survey project. Discussions on VA an update on the work and schedule and topics covered a second Advisory Council session this summer. Continual review of the VES package on state advocacy on discussion with Carrie Wofford on the same. Continued research on quality oversight of institutions.

TOPIC 3: EMPLOYMENT

The American Legion continues to monitor the unemployment rate for veterans and the negative effect that it has taken on them. With servicemembers still leaving the military, it is has become even more imperative that we take a proactive stance. By ensuring that transitioning servicemembers and veterans are adequately educated on their benefits and where they would be able to find resources. Below is a list of frequently asked question:



1. What is VA doing to engage Veterans during this time when most of us are sheltering in place and practicing social distancing?

Despite the current environment, all of VA, including the call center, benefits advisors and those processing [claims](#) are working to meet the needs of Veterans to prevent disruption as much as possible.

Programs like the [Transition Assistance Program](#) (TAP) and other in-person services can be accessed virtually or by phone. Through the Solid Start Program, VA will be following-up with every Veteran in the first 90 days, at six months, and one year after separation to ensure each Veteran has access to crucial information and resources. Solid Start can be accessed by phone at 1-877-222-VETS (1-877-222-8387).

2. How can I access TAP virtually?

To keep Veterans and service members safe, VA canceled in-person TAP events and on-site activities on March 30, 2020. You can access the [VA Transition Assistance Program](#) online. Additionally, all VA Benefits and Services courses are available through [Joint Knowledge Online \(JKO\)](#). Also, VA Military Life Cycle (MLC) modules are available on the JKO platform.

3. Will there be any changes to GI Bill benefits due to the COVID-19 pandemic? What should everyone know?

No, there will be no changes to GI benefits. On March 21, President Trump signed into law a bill, S. 3503, which enables VA to continue providing the same level of education benefits to students who must now take courses online due to the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak. The law gives VA temporary authority to continue GI Bill payments, uninterrupted, in the event of national emergencies, allowing for continued payment of benefits even if the program has changed from resident training to online training.

4. Are Veterans eligible to file for unemployment?

Yes, some Veterans may be able to file for unemployment. By federal law, certain members of the military can get Unemployment Compensation (sometimes called the “UCX Program”) based on their active-duty services. The program provides weekly income to service members as they look for work, including those who can only find part-time work. While it is based on federal law, the program is run by each state, and each state may have different rules about eligibility.

To file an unemployment claim, contact your state workforce agency as soon as possible after your discharge. You can find yours by going to the [Career One Stop website](#) and selecting your state. It may be helpful to have a copy of your service and discharge documents, such as your DD-214 or similar form, when you open your claim.

Additionally, you must have been separated under honorable conditions to qualify. There is no payroll deduction from service members' wages for unemployment insurance protection. Benefits are paid for by the various branches of the military.

5. What types of cash assistance may transitioning service members and Veterans qualify for?

There are several monetary, tax-free compensation benefits that many Veterans and transitioning service members may be eligible for.

They include:

- disability compensation (a benefit paid to Veterans with disabilities that are a result of disease or injury incurred or aggravated during active military service),
- special monthly compensation (a benefit that can be paid to Veterans, their spouses, surviving spouses and parents), and
- dependency and indemnity compensation (payable to a surviving spouse, child, or parent of service members who died while on active duty, active duty for training, or inactive duty training or survivors of Veterans who died from their service-connected disabilities),
- other benefits including adapted housing grants, automobile allowance, Service-Disabled Veterans' Insurance, and Veterans' Mortgage Life Insurance.

6. How can transitioning Veterans and service members with a service-connected disability who need to work with the Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (VR&E) program get set up for counseling and support?

Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (VR&E) Chapter 31 Services have shifted from in-person counseling sessions to Tele counseling, allowing Veterans to meet with counselors virtually through **VA Video Connect**, accessible on any web-enabled device with a webcam and microphone. Tele-counseling is being provided as the recommended method for conducting initial evaluations, and for case management appointments to include job placement assistance and educational counseling.

Eligible transitioning service members, and Veterans without a service-connected disability, can access the Personalized Career Planning & Guidance Program, also known as Chapter 36, through tele-counseling. Chapter 36 counseling will provide assistance deciding which civilian or military jobs you may be eligible for, assistance finding a training program or a job, and academic or adjustment counseling to help you manage any difficulties that may get in the way of securing employment or training.

TOPIC 4: VETERAN HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS



St. Augustine Police Officer Steven Fischer made his rounds on Thursday, checking in on people in St. Augustine who don't have a home. He talked with several men around the intersection of St. George and Hypolita streets, some of whom had signed with them seeking help from passersby. In February 2019, Fischer joined Officer Caroline Drouin in serving homeless people in the city after the City Commission approved

the positions. While Drouin has been on patrol because of staffing issues, she should return soon, Police Chief Barry Fox said.

Officials said the program is helping people find housing and get into rehab. For Fischer, a crucial part of the effort is being able to focus solely on the homeless and not having to respond to dispatch calls. "I'm super grateful to the city and the chief ... for them creating this because it makes a difference," Fischer said. "It makes a difference." Officers check in with people who are homeless, including people who live in homeless camps, Fischer said. They work with a range of service providers to connect people to resources, including St. Francis House, St. Johns Care Connect, which helps connect people to services in the community, The Salvation Army, Home Again St. Johns, and others.

The officers help with a wide range of needs as well. "Anything and everything. ... Sometimes it's just chatting with people," Fischer said. "They have nobody to talk to. Everybody treats them with disdain." After a homeless veteran died, Fischer and the police department were able to have him cremated and inurned at the Jacksonville National Cemetery with full military honors in

January. Recently, Fischer helped arrange free COVID-19 testing for homeless people in St. Augustine, which was provided on Friday at Francis Field by the Florida Department of Health in St. Johns County. This month, St. Augustine Police Chief Barry Fox released statistics about some of the work the department has done from December 2018 to about January 2020.

The police department helped 146 people get into a family support environment through its family reunification program, Fox said. The program pays for travel for that person and helps connect them with a family who is willing to take them in. To test the success of the program, the department reached out to 32 random people who had taken in a family member, Fox said. The department was able to contact 14 people, and about 10 of them said that their family member was still living with them and doing well or had recovered and was living independently. Working with St. Johns Care Connect, close to 20 people found housing, Fox said. Police brought 233 people to shelter beds at St. Francis House, which has several beds set aside for overnight shelter for people brought in by the police department police need the beds to enforce City Codes against sleeping in public during certain hours.

Through on-street counseling, officers were able to get seven people to go into a rehab facility, Fox said. Officers worked with judges to get another 13 people into rehab. "Our hats off to the judges in the court system," Fox said. "They've been working with us in that effort." The arrangement came from frequent arrests downtown for things such as open-alcohol-container violations and public intoxication, Fischer said. The police department was dealing with the same people over and over. "Literally they would put someone in jail on Monday, and Wednesday they'd be back on the street again ... and they'd re-offend continually, Fischer said. Fischer spoke with Judge Charles Tinlin and Judge Alexander Christine Jr., of the Seventh Judicial Circuit, about the problem. What evolved from that was a program to allow people to serve their sentences in rehab instead of spending the time in jail, Fischer said.

The Salvation Army Adult Rehabilitation Center in Jacksonville Beach has been accepting people into its program, Fischer said. Fischer said the police department has probably seen success stories from the program, where people completed the work and were able to support themselves again. Tinlin said he hadn't had much success with putting homeless people on probation because they don't have the means to comply with a lot of it. If people need it, they can go to the rehab center where they can learn skills and get off drugs and alcohol. "We realize that jail is not going to be a rehabilitative situation for them," Tinlin said. People can serve their sentences at The Salvation Army rehab. But if they abscond, they have to serve the rest of their time in jail, he said.

"So it's got some teeth in it," he said. The program has applied to people who are not homeless as well, and Tinlin estimated he has dealt with 20 to 25 cases. The St. Augustine Police Department has been working on the homelessness issue for many years, including offering the family reunification program, Fox said. While there are people who are chronically homeless who have been on the streets for 5-10 years, the city can now better connect people to resources, Fox said. Fischer said St. Augustine will always have a homeless population because of the presence of tourists. But the department has made a difference. "I think we've made great strides in helping people and getting people off the street and into housing," Fischer said.

TOPIC 5: CAREER FAIRS

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

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

THE NEXT VIRTUAL EVENT (FINANCIAL LITERACY) WILL BE MAY 28, FROM 11:00 AM – 12:00 PM EST



The American Legion Financial Literacy Workshop

Thursday, May 28, 2020 ★ 11:00am-12:00pm (Eastern Time)



Join us for a fast-paced, highly practical, and informative workshop on Financial Planning:

- » Learn the 5 Core Competencies of Financial Literacy, and how to implement them into your own personal financial strategy
- » Plan ahead for the 5 Key Threats to your retirement security
- » Invest wisely to minimize risk

Judy Viccellio is a keynote presenter to the World Bank Retirement Seminars, and holds many Financial Planning Workshops for various groups and non-profit organizations. Judy has over 28 years in the Financial Services industry, and is the President of V-Star Financial Strategies.

RSVP Here

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 6: SMALL BUSINESS

Facebook Inc. will give \$20 million to US small businesses owned by women, minorities, and veterans, Chief Operating Officer Sheryl Sandberg said Wednesday. The same day that shares of the Menlo Park-based social media giant hit an all-time high following the announcement of a new e-commerce feature.



Sandberg, speaking with host Jim Cramer on CNBC's "Mad Money," said the grant money will come out of the \$100 million Facebook small-business grant program announced back in March, as the threat of Covid-19 to the US economy started to emerge. Overall, \$40 million of the program is going to minority, women, and veteran-owned businesses around the world, with the other half going to companies outside the US. The money will be disbursed in the coming weeks, Sandberg said.

A Facebook survey released Tuesday revealed the extent of the damage of the Covid-19 pandemic on the small businesses that make up the backbone of the American economy: 31% of the 86,000 US small-business owners surveyed said their businesses are no longer operating, with 11% expecting to fail in the next three months if conditions continue as they are now. "We know when crises hit, the most vulnerable get hit the hardest," Sandberg said Wednesday.

On Tuesday, Facebook announced a new Facebook Shops feature that allows small businesses to feature their products on their Facebook or Instagram profiles. “The idea is that anyone can have a virtual storefront for free,” Sandberg said Wednesday. Analysts were bullish on the potential for the new feature to revive Facebook revenue, with Deutsche Bank analysts writing in a note obtained by CNBC that “we think Facebook Shop in a simplistic bull case could drive up to as much as a \$30 [billion] revenue opportunity, across a combination of take-rate driven transactional and advertising revenue.” Facebook shares closed Wednesday up 6 percent at \$230.75, an all-time high.

TOPIC 7: EDUCATION



Tens of thousands of National Guard troops responding to the coronavirus pandemic could see their deployments halted one day short of qualifying for a host of veterans benefits, according to a new report from Politico released Tuesday.

The newspaper said federal officials in an interagency call last week acknowledged that the Guard deployments are scheduled to stop on June 24, one day short of the 90 days needed to qualify for certain retirement and GI Bill benefits.

More than 40,000 Guard members are currently serving under Title 32 orders, the largest domestic employment of the force since the Hurricane Katrina disaster in 2005.

State officials have petitioned federal leaders to continue the deployments, arguing the military personnel is needed for continued response to the fast-spreading virus. More than 90,000 Americans have died from coronavirus-related complications in the last three months.

The White House's original orders activating Guard members had been scheduled to expire at the end of May. Still, officials extended that to late June upon request from multiple state and congressional lawmakers. No reason was given for the new date, which lands on a Wednesday.

National Guard members who have additional deployments within the same fiscal year could gain enough time cumulatively to qualify for early retirement or GI Bill benefits.

As of this weekend, more than 1,100 guardsmen had been diagnosed with coronavirus, many of whom were deployed for pandemic response missions.

TOPIC 8: TOWN HALL PARTICIPATION

1. The US Chamber of Commerce/Inc. Magazine hosted their final Small Business Town Hall Meeting on Friday, 15 May 2020. They discussed ongoing CARES Act legislations and small business survival strategies and lifelines they need to survive and succeed.
2. They also provided three key take-aways:
 - a. Legislation currently being considered by Congress would expand the 8-week period small businesses have to spend their Paycheck Protection Loans in order for it to be forgiven. They are also considering repealing the requirement that 75% of the loan must be used on payroll. It remains to be seen what the legislation will actually allow.
 - b. If small businesses are considering applying for a PPP loan, there is still money in the program and businesses can still apply.
 - c. The Main Street Lending program is also a new program that small businesses may apply for. More about the Main Street Lending program is available from your local bank.
3. As many businesses start to reopen, they need to think about how to spend their money:
 - a. Know where you are. Assess where you are and how much resources you have, to include the non-cash resources.
 - b. Discover, in this new normal, who your customers are now. Know where they are and how to find them. What staff do you need to execute a plan to reach these customers and get them to buy from you. If you pivoted your company, what will your profit margin look like. If you need cash, think profitability.
 - c. Look at what obstacles are in your way. Do you need cash or ingenuity to overcome your obstacles, or both? This will allow you to determine where you need to spend your money.
4. Create a spreadsheet to track the three criteria required to receive forgiveness:
 - i. Time: You must spend the money within eight weeks of receipt. Track the date you receive the funds and mark on your calendar the eighth week due date.
 - ii. Spending: Spend the money on the right thing. Use an accounting system similar to Quickbooks. Consider opening a second bank account to manage the PPP loan money. So that when you withdraw the money from your PPP account, you transfer it directly into your operating account. This will allow you to easily track it through Quickbooks.
 - iii. Employee Head Count: Check your payroll records. Know what your full-time employee equivalent count was, so that you can meet that criteria.
5. Additional guidance is available at www.uschamber.com/co/

TOPIC 9: TRACKING LEGISLATION

HR 6800, the Heroes Act: Allows VA to provide transport and purchase food, shelter, phones, clothing, blankets and toiletry items for homeless veterans; Authorizes VA to set up temporary encampments on the grounds of VA Medical Centers to allow homeless veterans to shelter on VA parking lots temporarily; Allows VA to provide reimbursements to social service providers receiving grants for the costs of services for minor children;

[Resolution No. 324: Support Funding for Homeless Veterans](#)

HR 2224: To direct the Secretary of Labor to prioritize the provision of services to homeless veterans with dependent children in carrying out homeless veterans reintegration programs, and for other purposes.

[Resolution No. 326: Support Funding for Additional Housing for Homeless Veterans with Families](#)

S. 2594: To amend title 5, United States Code, to modify certain requirements with respect to service and retirement for the purposes of veterans' preference for Federal hiring.

[Resolution No. 317: Enforcing Veterans' Preference Hiring Practices in Federal Civil Service](#)

Joseph C. Sharpe, Jr., Director
Veterans Employment & Education Division
202.861.2700 ext. 2989
Week Ending: 5/22/20
