

NATIONAL VETERANS EMPLOYMENT & EDUCATION COMMISSION

TOPIC 1: ECONOMY

The veterans' unemployment rate fell for the third month in a row in July but still sits nearly double the level recorded before the pandemic started.

On Friday, officials from the Bureau of Labor Statistics said the unemployment rate among veterans fell to 7.9 percent last month, based on its monthly employment surveys. That figure translates into about 700,000 veterans looking for work.

In June, that number was 8.6 percent. In April, the first full month of the coronavirus pandemic in the United States, the number was 11.7 percent, the highest monthly rate recorded by the agency in at least the last 20 years.

Even with the recent improvements, the veteran's unemployment rate for last month was still more than double the level recorded in February (3.6 percent), the last full month before the pandemic forced the temporary and permanent closure of thousands of businesses across the country.

As recently as December, the rate was less than 3 percent.

Nationally, the unemployment rate dropped from 11.1 percent in June to 10.2 percent in July. That figure swelled to nearly 15 percent in April.



Unemployed Veterans: The struggles of trying to find employment still plagues nearly 700,000 veterans

About 6.5 million Americans have been unemployed for 15 weeks or more, according to BLS officials. The 11.1 percent rate translates into about 16 million job seekers.

Veterans from the Iraq and Afghanistan War era also saw their rate drop from 10.3 percent in June to 8.2 percent in July. Those younger veterans have typically lagged behind the veteran population as a whole in finding work and also trailed the country as a whole at several points in recent years. Earlier this week, a group of bipartisan lawmakers urged House leaders to include a new veterans retraining proposal in their next coronavirus relief package. They are noting that many industries with high rates of veteran employees have been hit hard by the ongoing health crisis.

“Before the COVID-19 pandemic, we had the lowest veteran unemployment rate in 20 years,” said House Veterans’ Affairs Committee Ranking Member Phil Roe, R-Tenn. “We owe it to our veterans to do everything we can do to get back there again.”

The proposal — the Veterans Economic Recovery Act of 2020 — passed out of committee late last month and would grant veterans who lost their jobs due to pandemic-related layoffs an extra year of GI Bill benefits for rapid retraining in new, “high demand” career fields. The program would only be open to 35,000 veterans. Those already using other veteran education benefits would not be eligible.

The idea has gained the backing of 17 veteran advocacy groups and several key members of the Senate, but passing the measure as stand-alone legislation could prove difficult given the shortened congressional schedule this year due to the election.

Congress is scheduled to break in the coming days for a summer recess, then again for most of October and November as lawmakers deal with their re-election campaigns.

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	
	July 2019	July 2020	July 2019	July 2020	July 2019	July 2020
Unemployed	316	699	262	591	54	108
Unemployment rate	3.4	7.9	3.2	7.5	5.0	10.7

The national unemployment rate is 10.2 percent (July 2020). Gulf War II veterans' unemployment rate is 8.2 percent.ⁱ Currently, the unemployment rate for Gulf War II women veterans is 7.9 percent (Down from 10.1 percent in May).

In July 2020, the veteran unemployment rate is 7.9%, down from 8.6% last month and 9.1% two months ago. The comparable non-veteran unemployment rate was 11.1% in June and 10.2% in July

TOPIC 2: CONFERENCE CALLS

On Monday, August 3, the National Veterans Employment & Education Division had a conversation with SVAC majority staffer, Kelsey Baron, on benefits package to marked up on Wednesday. Request for help with a section of the same (402) on allowing VA to contract out C&P exams. Also, conversations with Illinois and Texas State approving agencies were held to discuss what data should be used to provide meaningful oversight of GI Bill approved schools and training institutions. Further conversations with VES on oversight of Non-College Degree schools and challenges with unaccredited institutions.

On Monday, August 3, the National Veterans Employment & Education Division attended a phone conference hosted by the US Small Business Administration along and the NAA Chamber of Commerce, with SBA Chief of Staff William Manger and Congresswoman Judy Chu. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, many AAPI-owned small businesses and self-employed people are struggling to access critical resources and facts about funding to keep their businesses afloat right now. This segment of the population was hit, especially hard, averaging an astonishing increase of 6000% in unemployment during the pandemic. These issues are particularly challenging for

businesses with slim profit margins, and an owner's language skills can often impact access to financing as well as state and federal benefits.

On Tuesday, August 4, the National Veterans Employment & Education Division participated in NY SAA conversation on needed data for oversight and conversations with NASAA leadership on interaction with the VA. Conversation with SVAC on benefits package as well as conversations with TAL leadership on response to a request with help on legislation impacting veterans in rural areas needing C&P exams.

On Tuesday, August 4, the National Veterans Employment & Education Division, along with the Legislative Division, met with staff from Senator Lindsey Graham's office regarding several provisions he introduced to the second COVID-19 relief package currently moving through Congress. The American Legion has resolution backing to support the US Made Act, which would incentivize the manufacturing of PPE in America; however, some proposals did not go far enough to move the federal government to insource domestically made goods.

On Tuesday, August 4, the National Veterans Employment & Education Division reviewed the bill HR 4941 "Veteran Employment Transition Act" or the "VET Act." The bill would allow certain veterans' service organizations to contact veterans regarding benefits and to better inform veterans of employment opportunities. This bill is supported by Resolution No. 70: Improve Transition Assistance Program. Recommend a letter of support.

On Wednesday, August 5, the National Veterans Employment & Education Division had conversations with SVAC on 4625 and Benefits package. Mark up did not occur, and negotiations continue. Conversations with Delaware SAA on the impact of COVID on schools and veteran students.

On Thursday, August 6, the National Veterans Employment & Education Division spoke with Bob Gear, Director, Texas Veterans Commission. Discussed the possibility of collaborating with Fort Hood on our upcoming virtual career fair and future virtual events. This would be an excellent opportunity for The American Legion, last year (June 2019), and estimated 3,500 Soldiers, veterans, spouses, and their families attended their event.

On Thursday, August 6, the National Veterans Employment & Education Division entangled in the politics of COVID on the House side, and it appears that the bill will not be allowed as an amendment to the COVID package. The result will be that it will pass post recess in September. Conversations on how to help and suggestion for a Legion letter would not be critical but would be helpful. Also, conversations with the HVAC majority on For-Profit Conversion Bill and potential for moving that this Congress. Conversations with all Four Corners on Ashford's purchase by the University of Arizona and impact on higher education landscape; Also, the need for meaningful oversight of online learning. Call with NC VA Education staff on the impact of COVID and new legislation on NC schools.

On Thursday, August 6, the National Veterans Employment & Education Division discussed with House Veteran Affairs Committee's Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations and Senator Loeffler's staff regarding the Legion supported VA-SBA Act (HR 1615). Senator Loeffler is interested in submitting a Senate version of HR 1615 before the August recess.

On Friday, August 7, the National Veterans Employment & Education Division met with Education Counsel, Lumina, and NASAA Weekly Meeting on data calls, what data will be

requested for NCD schools, and how to determine high-risk schools. Conversations with HVAC and SVAC staffers on pending legislation and areas of concern.

On Friday, August 7, the National Veterans Employment & Education Division held a teleconference call with the Department of Texas, Texas Veterans & Workforce Commission, Fort Hood, and Fort Bliss. We discussed the upcoming virtual career fair, where we are expecting roughly 200 employers to participate.

TOPIC 3: 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.

(Tracked by Davy Leghorn)

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

HR 7445: To amend title 38, United States Code, to expand eligibility for home loans from the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to certain members of the reserve components of the Armed Forces. **This bill was submitted for the July 23, 2020 testimony.**

[Resolution No. 329: Support Home Loan Guaranty Program](#)

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

(Tracked by Ariel De Jesus/John Kamin)

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

S. 2594: To amend title 5, United States Code, to modify specific requirements concerning service and retirement for veterans' Preference for federal hiring.

(Tracked by Ariel De Jesus)

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

HR 1196, Jobs for Veterans Act of 2019: This bill allows an increased work opportunity tax credit for employers who hire veterans who have been certified as discharged or released from active duty in the Armed Forces after September 11, 2001, and who begin working for the employer after December 31, 2019, and before January 1, 2024. This increased credit is in addition to any work opportunity tax credit allowed to a veteran with a service-connected disability.

(Tracked by Ariel De Jesus/John Kamin)

[Resolution No. 354: Work Opportunity Tax Credit Program](#)

HR 7010, Paycheck Protection Program Flexibility Act of 2020: This bill significantly changes the terms of the PPP loans to be more advantageous to small businesses. Including more flexibility in applying the loan to other expenses besides payroll and benefits and extending the time frame for expending the loan.

(Tracked by Davy Leghorn)

HR 4625: To require education programs to be approved by the VA to abide by the Principles of Excellence to include a ban on deceptive or misleading recruiting, clear information about total

costs and program requirements, accommodation for deployments, ensuring a point of contact for veterans, and not being under a punitive action by an accreditor.

(Tracked by John Kamin)

[Resolution No. 318: Ensuring the Quality of Servicemember and Veteran Student's Education at Institutions of Higher Education](#)

HR 6957: To direct the Secretaries of Defense and Veterans Affairs to treat a period of full-time National Guard duty, performed in response to the national emergency declared on March 13, 2020, by the President concerning COVID-19, as not shorter than 90 days.

(Tracked by John Kamin)

Currently studying for appropriate resolution.

HR 4941 Veteran Employment Transition Act” or the “VET Act” was sponsored by Representative Andy Kim. The last action on the bill was in the House on 12/02/2019; it was referred to the Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity. The bill's goal is to improve the Transition Assistance Program. The bill would allow certain veterans' service organizations to contact veterans regarding benefits and to better inform veterans of employment opportunities. The Service groups would inform veterans of the benefits and employment opportunities with the Federal, State, and local governments. The groups inform veterans of events for in the area.

(Tracked by Raymond Lorminey/Ariel De Jesus)

[Resolution No. 70: Improve Transition Assistance Program](#)

H.R. 7003 is a bill sponsored by Rep. Takano, Mark D-CA-41 and was introduced 05/22/2020. The bill would authorize a pilot program in the Department of Defense to enhance efforts to provide job placement assistance and related employment services directly to members of the National Guard, Reserves, and veterans of the Armed Forces. The last action on the bill was 05/22/2020 and referred to the Committee on Armed Services.

(Tracked by Raymond Lorminey/Ariel De Jesus)

[Resolution No. 81: Transition Assistance Program Employment Workshops for National Guard and Reserve Members](#)

Coronavirus Emergency Borrower Defense (E-BD) Act: to require the Department of Education to grant full student loan discharges to three specific emergency categories of defrauded borrowers—specifically borrowers covered by:

- (1) Department of Education findings against Corinthian.
- (2) Department of Education findings against ITT Tech; and
- (3) State attorneys general group discharge applications made before the date of enactment.

(Tracked by John Kamin)

[Resolution No. 82: Preserve Veteran and Servicemember Rights to Gainful Employment and Borrower Defense Protections](#)

HR 7111: Veterans Economic Recovery Act of 2020: Require the Secretary of VA to carry out a rapid retraining program that provides eligible veterans up to 12 months of retraining assistance for in-demand occupations. These 12 months of benefits would be equivalent to payments made to students and schools through the Post 9/11 GI Bill.

(Tracked by John Kamin)

This bill was submitted for the July 23, 2020 testimony.

[Resolution No. 316: Support Employment of Veterans in the Public and Private Workforce](#)

Homeless Veteran Coronavirus Response Act: The bill allows VA to use existing funds for a broader range of services; authorizes the Department to collaborate with outside organizations to facilitate shelters on its properties; loosens restrictions on Grant and Per Diem (GPD) payments, and requires VA to ensure veterans participating in VA homeless programs have access to VA telehealth services.

(Tracked by Teresa Lewis)

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

HR 4920, Department of Veterans Affairs Contracting Preference Consistency Act of 2020: is a bill that would allow AbilityOne companies to keep their preferential treatment at the Department of Veteran Affairs after 2016 with some compromises. The Senate initially sent it back to the House after it was passed for changes. Those changes have been reconciled and the bill cleared its last hurdle before it is sent to the White House.

Draft Bill: Home loan benefits for National Guard to amend title 38, United States Code, to expand eligibility for home loans from the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to certain members of the reserve components of the Armed Forces.

(Tracked by John Kamin)

We submitted written testimony for the July 23, 2020 hearing.

[Resolution No. 329: Support Home Loan Guaranty Program](#)

Draft Bill: JSF - To amend title 38, United States Code, to clarify the scope of procedural rights of members of the uniformed services concerning their employment and reemployment rights, and for other purposes.

(Tracked by Davy Leghorn)

We submitted written testimony for the July 23, 2020 hearing.

Draft Bill: USERRA Protections for State Active Duty - To amend title 38, United States Code, to extend particular employment and reemployment rights to members of the National Guard who perform State active duty. Submitted written testimony to the Legislative Division.

(Tracked by Ariel De Jesus)

We submitted written testimony for the July 23, 2020 hearing.

[Resolution No. 315: Support Employment and Reemployment Rights of National Guard and Reservists Returning from Deployment](#)

TOPIC 4: EMPLOYMENT

The American Legion always has and will continue to advocate for the hiring of veterans within the federal government. Over the past couple of years, there have been attempts – some success to restructure the Office of Personnel Management. While the Legion does not involve how these federal agencies structure themselves, we are concerned with some of the programs that affect veterans. Veterans' Preference is one of those programs that may be affected. **Veterans' Preference would fall under the Executive Office of the President (EOP), therefore allowing the administration to implement veterans' preference as it sees fit.** The American Legion would continue to monitor this to ensure that Veterans' Preference does not get diluted from its real intent.

A recent string of reorganizations and the launch of a new human capital data group within the Office of Personnel Management are drawing skepticism among employees and its union.

OPM officially reorganized a few dozen of its employees earlier this week into a new Human Capital Data Management and Modernization Directorate, which the agency announced Tuesday afternoon.

But the American Federation of Government Employees, which represents parts of the OPM workforce, said it sees these moves as a back-door effort to advance the Trump administration's desired merger with the General Services Administration — and slowly strip away more responsibilities from the human resources agency.

OPM merged its federal data solutions group, a former component of the agency's Office of the Chief Information Officer, to the HR Line of Business, which is renamed as the new Human Capital Data Management and Modernization Directorate.

Some functions within OPM's Office of Strategy and Innovation, which is perhaps most known for administering the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey, were also redistributed. The office's data analysis group, for example, moved to the new human capital data directorate. The agency said the new directorate would allow OPM to manage federal human capital data better and "facilitate insightful decision-making" across the workforce.



"Standing up the Human Capital Data Management and Modernization Directorate provides agencies with greatly improved access to the human capital management data needed to support their missions for the American people by promoting IT modernization, data accountability and transparency and the workforce of the future," Michael Rigas, OPM's acting director, said Tuesday in a press release. A separate data strategic analysis group within the Office of Strategy and Innovation will move to the agency's employment services and strategic workforce planning office, according to OPM's notice to the union. The reorganizations were effective Aug. 2. In its July 24 notice to AFGE, the agency gave several reasons for the realignments.

Redistributing these functions, OPM said, will "consolidate critical technology needs," and "leverage federal and contractor support to the most critically needed areas related to federal employee data." The moves will also "eliminate the need for OCIO to serve as a human capital/HR policy expert regarding federal employee data," and instead shift those responsibilities to one group, which will handle all policy, standard-setting, collection and analysis activities for OPM's federal employee datasets, a system known as the Enterprise Human Resources Integration-Statistical Data Mart (EHRI-SDM).

Before, those functions were scattered across three OPM groups embedded within two agency support offices. In its notice to the union, OPM said these reorganizations should have a little direct impact on employees. "The reorganization will not result in a change of conditions of employment for bargaining unit employees and to the extent to which there is a change, any such change will be de minimis," Anne Mortensen, an OPM employee, and labor relations manager said in the July 24 memo to the union. "Employees will remain in the same position descriptions and under the same performance standards. As the new organizations commence their work, employees may receive some new assignments consistent with their current duties and consistent with their performance standards and position descriptions."



AFGE, however, said these moves would have an impact on the employees and their daily work. The union said some employees would be placed in a working group with employees from the General Services Administration. Marlo Bryant-Cunningham, president of AFGE Local 32, said the employees might be working with the General Services Administration on the agency's New Pay initiative.

A GSA data strategist who spent part of his career at OPM may supervise the working group, Bryant-Cunningham said. OPM declined to answer specific questions about the realigned employees and their new roles, responsibilities, and any potential interaction with GSA. Its communication to the union is consistent with the terms of the OPM-AFGE collective bargaining agreement, the agency said. "All organizational changes are internal within OPM," an agency spokesperson said in an email to Federal News Network. "No OPM federal employees will be reporting to GSA or other external officials."

The reorganization affects at least 22 OPM bargaining unit employees, according to the agency's July 24 notice to the union. But Bryant-Cunningham said the agency's count doesn't include the vacant positions in these units. She estimated one of the impacted units had 10-to-12 open positions, though it's unclear if or when the agency will fill them, she said. The union submitted a demand to bargain on July 28, and the agency rejected it three days later. In denying AFGE's demand, OPM said it doesn't need to bargain because the parties' collective bargaining agreement addressed reorganization issues.

"Changes in organizational affiliation and supervisory structure alone do not constitute changes to conditions of employment to generate a duty to bargain," Mortensen wrote in OPM's response to the union. "Likewise, individual supervisory decisions relating to subjects such as work assignments, work schedules, and telework are not subject to bargaining and are not proper subjects for union involvement."

The American Legion Resolution:

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

[Reported by Ariel De Jesus]

TOPIC 5: VETERAN HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS

Congresswoman Luria announces her support for the Homeless Veterans Coronavirus Response Act (HR 7105), which would expand and strengthen the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) services for homeless veterans as we continue to combat the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Our nation faced a homeless veterans' crisis before COVID-19, and this pandemic has underscored the imperative to address this problem," said Congresswoman Luria. "The Homeless Veterans Coronavirus Response Act takes steps to ensure our homeless veterans are safe, secure, and healthy during this health and economic crisis. We must expand services and swiftly pass this bill to protect those who have bravely served our country."



"The coronavirus pandemic has exacerbated the crisis of veteran homelessness that we were already facing, and we must do more to get our nation's heroes off the streets," said Congressman Mike Levin (D-CA-49). "Our legislation takes commonsense steps to facilitate shelters, transitional housing, and other services for veterans and their families in the face of public health challenges. We must expand these services as soon as possible, and I'm proud that my friend Rep. Luria, a 20-year Navy veteran, is supporting this critical bipartisan legislation."

The Homeless Veterans Coronavirus Response Act would provide homeless veterans, including those dependents in per diem grants, with assistance with safety and survival, transportation to support stability and health care, provide access to telehealth services provided by VA, and communication equipment and service for connectivity purposes.

As a member of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, Congresswoman Luria has been fighting for veterans since she arrived in Congress. Most recently, the House passed Congresswoman Luria's bill, the Veterans' Compensation Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) Act of 2020 (HR 6168). It would put more money in the pockets of American veterans by increasing compensation rates for certain benefits from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). This COLA includes compensation, clothing allowance, and dependency and indemnity compensation (DIC) benefits. This bill would base increases in these benefits on the cost-of-living increase for Social Security recipients.

Congresswoman Elaine Luria represents Virginia's 2nd Congressional District. She serves on the House Armed Services Committee, where she is the Vice-Chair of the Seapower and Projection Forces Subcommittee, and the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, where she serves as Chair of the Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs Subcommittee.

Resolution No. 319: Expanding Veterans Employment and Homeless Services within the Department of Veterans Affairs

[Reported by Ariel De Jesus]

TOPIC 5a: VETERAN HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS

Endeavors, a San Antonio non-profit that connects vulnerable populations to a wide range of helpful services, works to prevent homelessness and rapidly re-house low-income Veterans and their families facing homelessness through their [Veteran Supportive Services Program](#). Endeavors

are helping Veterans during Covid-19 by providing a \$3.25 Million in rental assistance. More information is available at www.endeavors.org/SSVFcures.

On Thursday, August 6, 2020, Senator Mitt Romney, R-Utah, was joined by Senators Jon Tester, D-Mont., and Angus King, I-Maine, to introduce the Rural Equal Aid Act, proposing giving some new COVID-19 relief to rural areas.



Senator Romney calls for the same breaks on Rural Development loans from the Agriculture Department as having been offered in previous aid packages for some Small Business Administration loans.

The previous Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act) required the Small Business Administration to pay the principal, interest, and any associated fees on some types of loans for six months to help small businesses to survive the

pandemic. The new bill would require the Agriculture Department to do the same for some Rural Development program loans.

Tester added, “This bipartisan legislation will help small businesses and family farms keep the lights on by providing critical resources to communities hit hardest by the pandemic.” <https://www.sltrib.com/news/politics/2020/08/06/mitt-romney-seeks-covid/>

[Reported by Teresa Lewis]

TOPIC 6: CAREER FAIRS

ALL IN-PERSON CAREER FAIRS SCHEDULED THROUGH SEPTEMBER HAVE BEEN CANCELLED, SUSPENDED, OR POSTPONED.

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

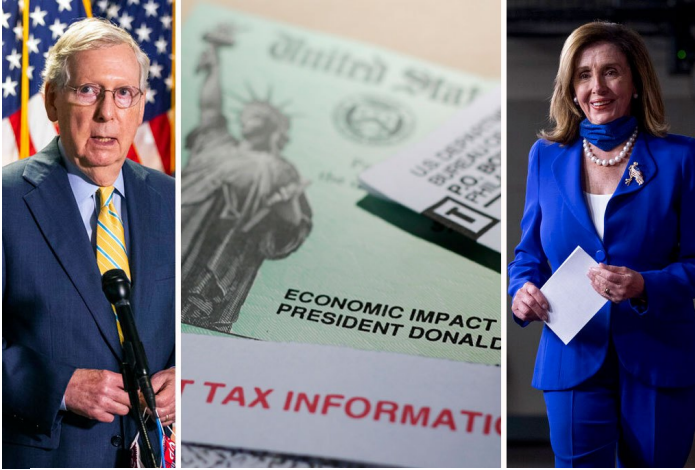
National, Department of Texas, and the Texas Veterans Commission will be hosting a Virtual Career Fair September 15th, 10 am – 4:00 pm CST

Newly discharged veterans claiming benefits totaled 13,707, a decrease of 345 from the prior week.

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

[Reported by Ariel De Jesus]

TOPIC 7: SMALL BUSINESS



Congress Continues To Negotiate Second Stimulus Package

The American Legion continues to track the second COVID-19 stimulus package currently being negotiated in Congress. Benefits in the new stimulus package are vital to veteran small businesses, unemployed veterans and our Legion posts and departments. Facing the August 8th deadline for Paycheck Protection Program applications, lawmakers are increasingly pessimistic about the chances of a quick agreement as negotiations over a fifth coronavirus relief bill go down to the wire.

Congress and the White House are barreling toward an end-of-the-day Friday deadline set by the main negotiators: House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.), Senate Minority Leader Charles Schumer (D-N.Y.), White House chief of staff Mark Meadows and Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin. Despite weeks of near-daily meetings, the four are struggling to overcome steep political headwinds and policy differences to reach an agreement and have little progress to show so far, raising the odds that they will blow past their self-imposed timeline.

In a sign that a breakthrough isn't imminent, senators were told Thursday they could go home, but to plan to come back if an agreement is struck. Asked if being allowed to leave town signaled that negotiators aren't optimistic about meeting their Friday deadline, Sen. Dick Durbin (Ill.), the No. 2 Senate Democrat, said, "it certainly does. I hope that they call us back immediately. Call me back tomorrow."

Though the Senate will technically be in session next week, members were not told when they should expect to return. The House left Washington last week, with House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer (D-Md.) planning to give his members a similar 24-hour heads up.

Nonetheless, the decision puts lawmakers in a politically awkward public relations quagmire of mostly leaving Washington, DC, even as coronavirus cases climb across the country, and the virus continues to devastate the nation's economy.

A seasonally adjusted 1.2 million new people applied for unemployment benefits in the week ending Aug. 1, according to Labor Department data released Thursday. More than 31 million Americans remained on the jobless rolls through mid-July, and the July jobs report, which will be released Friday, is expected to show a sharp slowdown.

Despite both sides saying they would like to be able to reach an agreement, the talks face significant policy and political hurdles that make getting a deal on another coronavirus bill significantly harder than the previous four.

Republicans proposed a \$1 trillion package that roughly 20 GOP senators, by Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell's (R-Ky.) estimate, do not support. Democrats, who have been

significantly more unified, are lined up behind the \$3.4 trillion bill that passed the House primarily along party lines in May.

After a more than three hour meeting on Thursday night, both the administration officials and Democrats warned that they were "far apart" on an agreement and hadn't committed to meeting again on Friday. It's the latest setback for the prospects of a deal after Pelosi and McConnell, in press conferences and floor speeches painted a picture of negotiations that remain far off from even an agreement in principle. Democrats believe Republicans waited far too long to put together their package and start negotiations.

Republicans are also profoundly divided about what they would accept in a package, with McConnell and the administration sending, at times, mixed signals. Trump is warning that he could take executive action over the weekend on areas like unemployment insurance, eviction moratoriums, student loans, and a payroll tax cut if negotiators aren't able to get a deal.

Democratic leadership, during a joint press conference, dug in on their push to continue the \$600 per week federal unemployment benefit, which expired last week. Republicans have called continuing it a non-starter but haven't agreed on what it should be replaced with, a division that Democrats believe gives them leverage.

Pelosi had told reporters after a round of negotiations on Wednesday that she thought they would get a deal, comparing it to there being a "light at the end of the tunnel." But tipping her hand to the likelihood that they will miss the Friday deadline.

[Reported by Davy Lehorn]

TOPIC 7a: SMALL BUSINESS

SMALL BUSINESS & ENTREPRENEURSHIP

On July 28, 2020, the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) Office of Inspector General (OIG) issued Management Alert Report Number 20-16, entitled "Serious Concerns of Potential Fraud in Economic Injury Disaster Loan (EIDL) Program On the Response to COVID-19."

SBA INSPECTOR GENERAL MANAGEMENT ALERT

Serious Concerns of Potential Fraud in Economic
Injury Disaster Loan Program Pertaining to the
Response to COVID-19

REPORT NUMBER 20-16 | JULY 28, 2020



SBA OIG has been inundated with contacts to investigative field offices from financial institutions across the nation and the complaint Hotline. They received complaints of more than 5,000 instances of suspected fraud from financial institutions receiving economic injury loan deposits.

Additionally, SBA OIG found indications of deficiencies with internal controls related to disaster assistance for the COVID-19

pandemic. Their review of SBA's initial disaster assistance response identified \$250 million in economic injury loans, and advance grants are given to potentially ineligible recipients. They also found approximately \$45.6 million in potentially duplicate payments.

On July 29, 2020, House Small Business Committee Chairwoman Nydia M. Velázquez (D-NY) released a statement in response, stating that “raised red flags regarding the management of the EIDL program . . . must be addressed immediately.” EIDL has been a vital lifeline for small businesses throughout this crisis, distributing billions of dollars in emergency loans and advance grants. As the pandemic stretches on, EIDL will be essential to supplying the long-term working capital necessary to help Main Street businesses stay afloat. <https://smallbusiness.house.gov/news/documentsingle.aspx?DocumentID=3387>

In the FY 2021 Budget Estimates to Congress, the Federal Communications Commission is planning to make available up to \$20.4 billion in the Rural Digital Opportunity Fund to bring fixed broadband to unserved rural areas. It has announced a plan to make available up to \$9 billion in the 5G Fund to support the deployment of mobile broadband in unserved areas.

On June 30, 2020, [The Federal Communications Commission](#) (FCC) has [updated](#) the areas allowed to benefit from the [Rural Digital Opportunity Fund](#), which includes 5,392,530 unserved locations deemed eligible for the \$16 billion Phase I Auction, the first leg of the plan. <https://lawstreetmedia.com/tech/fcc-updates-areas-eligible-for-rural-digital-opportunity-fund/>

Lowe’s Companies, Inc. to give \$55 million in grants to small businesses during COVID-19. In response to the overwhelming need to help support small businesses across the country, [Lowe’s Companies, Inc.](#) is announcing it is increasing its minority small business grants from \$25 million to \$30 million. It is donating an additional \$25 million to its small business grant program with the Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC), doubling the amount already committed.

The additional funds will focus on rural communities, which have been hard hit by the pandemic. The total \$55 million commitment makes Lowe’s the largest donor to LISC’s Small Business Relief & Recovery Program and COVID Rapid Relief & Resiliency Fund. <https://www.theatlantavoices.com/articles/lowes-to-give-55-million-in-grants-to-small-businesses-during-covid-19/>

The American Legion applauds the efforts of the FCC’s initiative to bring digital opportunities to rural areas and small towns to bring economic opportunities to those rural areas that have been left behind in the digital divide and affect nearly two million veterans residing in those areas.

[Reported by Teresa Lewis]

TOPIC 8: EDUCATION

A surge in technical and coding boot camp training has forced the Air Force to cut back on how many credentialing programs it pays for.

A recent update to Air Force Instruction 36-2670 outlined the cutbacks to the Air Force Credentialing Opportunities On-Line (COOL) program, which will no longer fund preparatory classes, boot camps, and coursework.

Military members who participate in the COOL program can leave the service with professional credentials that help them get jobs that require prior experience, professional or technical credentials, or certification in various skills. Credentials help to translate military training and experience into something civilian employers can easily recognize. That can help you get hired, get a better job, or be promoted sooner. Many credentials can also give you better chances for advancement while in the military.

The Air Force, along with all other branches of the military, offers credentialing options, including online testing, classroom training, and granting credentials based on military occupational specialty. In many cases, service members may have their credentialing testing or training paid for by the military. In cases where the military doesn't fund the training, troops may use their GI Bill to pay for it.

"Boot camp expenditures increased to more than 50% of the program's budget," said Hildegard Buan, Air Force chief of Voluntary Education. "Unfortunately, these increased expenditures couldn't be sustained and required us to review and adjust our policies.

"The AF COOL program is a top-rated program among our enlisted force," she added. "We wanted to keep this program open for our enlisted members, and, to do so, we had to make some tough decisions on policy changes. The money saved through these adjustments will ensure we can continue to offer more Airmen and Space Professionals the opportunities to earn credentials."

The AF COOL program provides opportunities for enlisted members of the Air Force and Space Force to earn industry-recognized professional certifications and licenses to enhance an individual's active-duty specialty and to help with transition preparations for the civilian job market following active-duty service.

Under AF COOL, uniformed members receive funding for credentials associated with their primary Air Force specialty code; one credential related to an awarded academic degree; one credential unrelated to their primary AFSC; and a leadership and management credential for E-7s and above. Additionally, the program continues to provide funding for exams and study materials up to \$500 per credential goal.

American Legion Resolution No. 338: *Support Licensure and Certification of Servicemembers, Veterans and Spouses* resolves that the Department of Defense take appropriate steps to ensure that servicemembers be trained, tested, evaluated and have the opportunity to obtain any credential (i.e., licensure, certification, certificate, degree, etc.) that may be required in the local civilian workforce. The Veterans Employment & Education Division is working to determine more specific reasons that led to the Air Force failing to provide the appropriate funding for its credentialing program.



[Reported by John Kamin]

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