

## NATIONAL VETERANS EMPLOYMENT & EDUCATION COMMISSION

### TOPIC 1: ECONOMY

A full US economic recovery depends on many factors, but one of the things Cris deRitis, deputy chief economist for Moody's Analytics, can say for certain is that the labor market structure is changing. He presented a general U.S. economic outlook for 2021 during the Dodge Construction Outlook 2021 Virtual Conference last week.

The US economy saw modest growth in GDP last year, up approximately 2.3%. However, there was a 10% drop in output at the beginning of the pandemic as states shut down.

"By May, June and July states were already reopening parts of the economy," said deRitis, explaining that there was a better understanding of the virus. "We had a favorable third quarter with substantive economic growth but it's still 40% below where we were at the start of the year. We're not in a recovered state in any stretch of the imagination."



deRitis and the Moody's team came up with COVID-19 economic exposure scores for different geographic locations in the US based on infections, demographics, commuting patterns, population density, industrial mix and income levels. The overall US score was set at zero. The scores created a U-shape, showing that the coastal areas and the Southern U.S. are more exposed. However, deRitis explained that the scores are a snapshot in time and show the risk levels in October 2020. He added that the highest risk areas won't necessarily be the ones growing slowly.

"They're more likely to accelerate. Las Vegas and Orlando, places with heavy hospitality, are likely to bounce back at a higher pace," he said.

Looking to 2021, deRitis expects two recovery phases: the pre-vaccine recovery phase in which there will be growth but consumers will still be cautious, and the post-vaccine recovery phase in which the vaccine will be widely distributed and people can expect to see accelerated growth.

"There are many challenges ahead but the future looks a bit brighter today with the vaccine news," he said. "... We're assuming the economy will still struggle for another quarter or two before the vaccine kicks in late first quarter or second quarter."

His forecast relies on four assumptions, though there could be unexpected events that impact the forecast. The four assumptions are the trajectory of the virus, fiscal stimulus, interest rates and asset prices.

*[Reported by Ariel De Jesus ]*

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	
	Oct 2019	Oct 2020	Oct 2019	Oct 2020	Oct 2019	Oct 2020
Unemployed	274	483	214	428	60	55
Unemployment rate	3.0	5.5	2.9	5.6	5.7	5.0

*The national unemployment rate is 6.9 percent (Oct 2020). Gulf War II veterans' unemployment rate is 6.2 percent.<sup>i</sup> Currently, the unemployment rate for Gulf War II women veterans is 3.4 percent (Down from 5.7 percent in September).*

In October 2020, the veteran unemployment rate was 5.9%, down from 6.8% last month. The comparable non-veteran unemployment rate was 6.8% in October.

## TOPIC 2: CONFERENCE CALLS

**On Monday, November 16,** the National Veterans Employment and Education Division spoke with Textron Industries; they would like to establish a veteran hiring initiative. Their goal is to hire 100 veterans in 2021. They are a small company with locations in North and South Carolina.

**On Monday, November 16,** the National Veterans Employment and Education Division attended the New Jersey Veteran Permanent Affordable Housing Consortium's 2<sup>nd</sup> Affordable Housing Symposium. It was attended by 99 developers, property managers, service providers and elected officials. Presenters came from the VA's National Directors of Supportive Services for Veteran Families programs, Housing and Urban Development - VA Supportive Housing program, Wilmington Medical Director, regional SSVF, developers, tax credit and voucher subject matter experts.

**On Monday, November 16,** the National Veterans Employment and Education Division joined the Southwest Business Resource Center for their 9<sup>th</sup> annual Veteran Small Business Summit which has been broken up into multiple virtual segments on account of COVID-19. This week's session featured Angela Shell, the Director of Procurement at the General Services Administration.

**On Monday, November 16,** the National Veterans Employment and Education Division continued conversations with Senate Veterans Affairs Committee (SVAC) and House Veterans Affairs Committee (HVAC) staffers on pending legislation (primarily HR 4625). Expectations are for an omnibus bill that will be passed next month. Travel to DC.

**On Monday, November 16,** the National Veterans Employment and Education Division conducted a conference call with the communications firm Friday regarding marketing plans for the Military Credentialing Advancement Report. A marketing timeline was developed for continual touchpoints

through February, culminating in a presentation at the George W. Bush institutes national stand-down.

***On Tuesday - Thursday, November 17-19,*** the National Veterans Employment and Education Division attended a 3 day Corporate Citizenship Conference and Awards: Business Solves, virtually hosted by the US Chamber of Commerce Foundation. The discussion focused on sharing insights on the benefits of second-chance employment for companies, supporting minority-owned business ecosystem and providing opportunities for all and also corporate-led accelerators, ventures, and rising founders to better understand corporate innovation programs and the ROI of these investments.

***On Tuesday, November 17,*** the National Veterans Employment and Education Division hosted its second virtual career fair with a focus on North Carolina. There were 44 employers and 176 Job seekers. Attendees were a mixture of Active Duty, Retirees, Veterans, and spouses from across the country to include Japan.

***On Tuesday, November 17,*** the National Veterans Employment and Education Division met with Council on Colleges and Military Education (CCME) President Esmeralda Silva and DOD Special Advisor Mitch Ryan on 85/15 and Hill Visits.

***On Tuesday, November 17,*** the National Veterans Employment and Education Division met on the Hill with Congresswoman Virginia Fox (Ranking Member on Education Committee) and Congressman Jack Bergman (hopefully Ranking on HVAC) about oversight of approved GI Bill Schools (RBS surveys) and the 85/15 issue.

***On Tuesday, November 17,*** the National Veterans Employment and Education Division had a discussion of apprenticeship programs and the need to pass HR 7111 and 4625. Excellent substantive meetings.

***On Tuesday, November 17,*** the National Veterans Employment and Education Division had fifth meeting of the National RBS Advisory Council meeting. Additional, conversations with Lisa Lutz and Lauren Runco of COOL on the same.

***On Wednesday, November 18,*** the National Veterans Employment and Education Division attended a meeting with CCME and DOD leadership to plan a new panel for incoming congressional members and their staffs for post inauguration.

***On Wednesday, November 18,*** the National Veterans Employment and Education Division had a meeting with DOD Assistant Secretary on the oversight of DOD VOL ED schools. DOD is definitely interested in adopting the RBS model.

***On Wednesday, November 18,*** the National Veterans Employment and Education Division attended a meeting of the George W. Bush Higher Education Task Force. Also, conversation with Liz Belcaster and Esmeralda Silva on transition plans.

***On Thursday, November 19,*** the National Veterans Employment and Education Division had a meeting with RBS Project manager Woodall for back brief on National Association of State Veterans Affairs conference.

***On Thursday, November 19,*** the National Veterans Employment and Education Division met with Transition Case Study work Group for the George Bush Higher Education Task Force.

***On Thursday, November 19,*** the National Veterans Employment and Education Division had conversations on path forward on the 85/15 issue with NAVPA leadership.

***On Thursday, November 19,*** the National Veterans Employment and Education Division attended The Washington Centers upcoming interns meeting. We discussed the upcoming potential intern applicants.

***On Thursday, November 19,*** the National Veterans Employment and Education Division conducted a conference call with Veterans Education Success to discuss their 2021 education priorities. They indicated preferences for political appointments in the Veterans Benefits Administration, as well as preferences for appointments in the Department of Defense office of Personnel and Readiness.

***On Friday, November 20,*** the National Veterans Employment and Education Division participated in a phone conference with Charles Tulnacy, Director, Outreach Programs, Loc4kheed Martin. We discussed their recent restructure and future collaboration with hiring/retention and credentialing.

***On Friday, November 20,*** the National Veterans Employment and Education Division met with EDCounsel, NASAA and Lumina on the RBS model and rolling out the national pilot program this month.

***On Friday, November 20,*** the National Veterans Employment and Education Division attended a meeting with GWB Policy Work Group. Meeting with HVAC staffers on the 45625 and transition.

***On Friday, November 20,*** the National Veterans Employment and Education Division had another conversation with VA Education leadership in NC to discuss 85/15 issue.

## **GLOSSARY OF FREQUENTLY USED ABBREVIATIONS**

ACE: American Council on Education

ACP: American Corporate Partners, a veterans support organization

ATLAS: Accessing Telehealth through Local Area Stations, a VA telehealth initiative

BLS: Labor Department's Bureau of Labor Statistics

C&P: VA's Compensation and Pension exam

CAVC: Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims

COLA: Cost-of-living adjustment

CSAAVE: California State Approving Agency for Veterans Education

DIMO: Defense Security Cooperation Agency/Defense Institute for Medical Operations

DOD: Department of Defense

DOL-VETS: Department of Labor, Veterans Employment and Training Services

EdCounsel: Higher education consulting firm

EIDL program. SBA's Economic Injury Disaster Loans

EIDL: Economic Injury Disaster Loan

GAO: Government Accountability Office

GPD: VA's Grant and Per Diem Program for homeless veterans

GWB: George W. Bush Higher Education Policy Work Group

HEROES ACT of 2003: Higher Education Relief Opportunities for Students Act of 2003. Grants the Secretary of Education the authority to waive requirements that impede military borrowers' access to critical repayment protection during the war, military operation, or national emergency.

HVAC: House Veterans Affairs Committee  
MCAI: American Legion's Military Credentialing Advancement Initiative  
MSLP: The Federal Reserve's Main Street Lending Program  
MSO: Military Support Organization  
NAICU: National Association of Independent Colleges & Universities  
NASAA: National Association of State Approving Agencies. Responsible for approving school funding for GI Bill  
NAVPA: National Association of Veterans Program Administrators  
NCA: VA's National Cemetery Administration  
NDAA: National Defense Authorization Act  
NLD: American Legion's National Legislative Division  
OPM: Office of Personnel Management  
PPP: Paycheck Protection Program  
RBS: Risk Based Survey Model  
RPIC: Rural Placemaking Innovation Challenge  
S2S: Service to School, a veterans organization  
SAA: State Approving Agency, responsible for approving school funding for GI Bill  
SBA: Small Business Administration  
STEM: Science, Technology, Engineering, Medical  
SVA: Student Veterans of America, a veterans organization  
SVAC Senate Veterans Affairs Committee  
TAPS: Transition Assistance Program for Survivors, a nonprofit for Gold Star Families  
TEAM Act: Senate Bill 4393, to improve the provision of health care for veterans who were exposed to toxic substances from burn pits  
TFA: American Legion's Temporary Financial Assistance program  
USAID: United States Agency for International Development  
USDA: United States Department of Agriculture  
USERRA: Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act  
VA&R: American Legion's Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation Division  
VACO: Veterans Affairs Central Office  
VBA: VA's Veterans Benefits Administration  
VE&E: Veterans Employment and Education Division  
VES: Veterans Education Success, a veterans organization  
VSO: Veterans Service Organization

### TOPIC 3a: TRACKING LEGISLATION

**GI Bill Repair Act of 2020:** To extend to black veterans of World War II, their surviving spouses, and direct descendants eligibility for specific housing and educational assistance programs administered by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs

(Tracked by John Kamin)

[Resolution No.: None on file](#)

**Status: Currently on hold, has not been introduced**

**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 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 1615:** The American Legion supports legislation that would streamline and improve the verification process for veteran-owned small businesses and veteran-owned small businesses.

(Tracked by Davy Leghorn)

**[Resolution No. 155: Support Verification Improvements for Veterans' Business](#)**

**Status: Passed at the 2016 National Convention.**

**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](#)**

**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 PPP loans' terms 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)

**[Resolution No.: Currently studying for appropriate resolution.](#)**

**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.

**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](#)

**S. 3745, 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](#)

### TOPIC 3b: ACTION TAKEN ON LEGISLATION

**Building Credit Access for Veterans Act:** A bill to require the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to carry out a pilot program to establish an automated process for obtaining alternative credit rating information and other purposes.

(Tracked by Ariel)

**Status: Draft Bill / Letter of Support submitted on October 13**

**HR 8426: Protecting Apprenticeship Training for Veterans Act:** Currently, veterans must meet a minimum number of apprenticeship hours to receive their Housing Allowance. Due to pandemic work shortages, veterans in those programs now face a reduction or suspension in their stipend. This would allow veteran apprentices who were laid off to roll over excess hours from a previous month to meet the hourly requirement.

(Tracked by John Kamin)

[Resolution: Resolution No. 25: Support and Expand Apprenticeship Opportunities for Servicemembers](#)

**Status: Letter of Support drafted**

**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 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 in the area.

(Tracked by Ariel De Jesus)

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



**Status: Letter of Support submitted**

**HR 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 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 Ariel/Raymond)

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

**Status: Pending Letter of Support**

**Draft Bill:** Veterans Educational Assistance Transparency and Accountability Improvement Act, improve the GI. Bill Comparison Tool ensures veterans, servicemembers, and their families are better informed when choosing what educational institution is best for them.

[Resolution No. 327: Support Further Assessment and Evaluation of Institutions of Higher Learning to Enable Veterans to Make Informed Education Choices](#)

**Status: Letter of Support submitted**

**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)

**Status: 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, 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)

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

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

**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 students' and schools' payments through the Post 9/11 GI Bill.

(Tracked by John Kamin)

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

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

**HR 7445:** To expand eligibility for home loans from the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to individual members of the Armed Forces reserve components.

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

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

## TOPIC 4: EMPLOYMENT

Major League Baseball today announced a financial grant to Sesame Workshop in support of “Sesame Street for Military Families,” which was established to support military and veteran



families with young children through all the milestones of their lives, including experiences and transitions unique to military life. With the funds, Sesame Workshop will expand its resource hub and build new materials under its COVID-response “Caring For Each Other” umbrella to address the military population uniquely. Sesame Workshop is the nonprofit behind Sesame Street®, which serves children in 150 countries with research-based media content, social impact programs, and formal education outreach.

Additional financial commitments by the Commissioner’s Office and MLB Clubs have directed several nonprofit organizations focused on supporting causes that benefit military veterans, active service members, and their families. This support includes extensions of existing MLB partnerships with The Mission Continues, Code of Support Foundation, American Corporate Partners, and SHIFT and funds distributed by MLB Clubs to local military-focused community organizations. In total, MLB has committed more than \$1 million to military-related causes in 2020-2021.



*Commitments by Baseball to Military Causes Through 2021  
Center on Career & Transition Services, Community  
Goodwill and Philanthropic Outreach*

The Commissioner’s Office will renew its overall commitment to the following organizations, all of which received previous funding in 2018-2019:

- **Code of Support Foundation:** The grant supports PATRIOTlink®, a search engine dedicated to connecting service members, veterans, caregivers, and their families to the resources they have earned through their service and sacrifice. Funding also provides for front-line Case Coordination services to link active duty military and veteran families in need to Peer Navigators trained to unlock benefits and services. Since 2018 with leading support from MLB, PATRIOTlink has grown to provide nearly 6,000 resources to more than 17,000 users annually. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, the Code of Support has experienced a 200% increase in requests for Case Coordination assistance. It has added thousands of new resources related to unemployment, financial and food insecurity, social connectivity, and virtual mental health support.
- **The Mission Continues:** The nonprofit is dedicated to bringing together veterans and innovative community organizations to create transformational change in under-resourced communities across the country. Through unique service opportunities and leadership programs in 50+ cities, veterans build new skills and networks that help them successfully reintegrate into life after their military careers while also making a long-term, sustainable impact nationwide.
- The grants will also support American Corporate Partners, helping returning veterans find their next careers through one-on-one mentoring, networking, and online career advice. More than 20,000 veterans have participated in ACP’s programs since its founding in 2008. As a partner, MLB will continue to engage front-office employees in ACP’s mentoring program, with employees from the Commissioner’s Office and MLB Network pairing with veteran mentees for a year-long commitment to advance the veteran’s goals for

professional development and career planning. Since 2019, nearly 75 MLB employees have participated in this program.

- To build upon the existing partnership with SHIFT, MLB will host a “Veteran Accelerator Program” beginning in January 2021 to support transitioning service members' personal and professional development. The 4-week program will be available to military members in the SHIFT network and provide exposure to the multitude of available careers within Baseball and the sports industry. SHIFT is a career advancement company that assists active service members and military veterans from all five branches of the US Armed Forces navigate career changes and connects them with open job positions.
- The Commissioner’s Office has distributed \$450,000 in grant funding to MLB Clubs in 2020 to support local nonprofit organizations through the “Military Community Grants” program. In its third year and with a total investment of more than \$1.3 million, localized support of the military by each Club through this program has been realized through charitable grants for events and programs that benefit service members, veterans, and military families. MLB directed Clubs to focus on one or more of the following pillars: quality of life (morale, welfare, and recreation), mental health & wellness, and transition services.

Earlier this week, Major League Baseball and the 2020 World Series Champion Los Angeles Dodgers unveiled the newly renovated All-Star Veterans Courtyard of the Volunteers of America Ballington Plaza Apartments in the Skid Row section of Downtown Los Angeles. The project, which was completed in partnership with The Mission Continues, took place at the Veterans Service Center, the first contact for homeless veterans in this community.

***Resolution No. 12: Accountability and Enhancement of Transition Assistance Program; Outcomes and Delivery for Today’s Digital Transitioning Servicemembers***

*[Reported by Ariel De Jesus]*

## **TOPIC 5: VETERAN HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS**

As the nation simultaneously grapples with the coronavirus and flu, VA Southern Nevada Healthcare System (VASNHS) is going mobile as a proactive measure to protect vulnerable Veterans. Between Nov. 9-13, a team of VA social workers, health technicians, nurses, and emergency management personnel visit various locations throughout downtown Las Vegas, testing eligible homeless and formerly homeless Veterans for COVID-19 and providing free flu shots. ‘We’ve been planning this for the last three months, and this is the first time we’ve ever done flu shots and COVID testing at our Grant and Per Diem and Health Care for Homeless Veterans Contract Residential Service sites,’ said Peter McCoy, VASNHS Community Resource and Referral Center coordinator. ‘Our goal is to test and vaccinate approximately 370 Veterans this week. ‘According to the VA, homeless Veterans are uniquely vulnerable to COVID-19, influenza, and other upper respiratory illnesses due to their living conditions, advanced average age, and a high rate of chronic health problems.

Furthermore, recent Centers for Disease Control and Prevention research indicates high rates of asymptomatic carriers in congregate settings and shows that when a single homeless individual has tested positive in a congregate living environment, the rate of actual infection among residents is much higher. As such, the sites selected for the VA outreach are managed by the United States Veterans Initiative (US



VETS), the Salvation Army, and Help the USA, which provides either bed, transitional housing, or other resources to Veterans in Southern Nevada. US VETS was the first site for mobile testing and vaccinations and were previously a hotel before becoming a shelter for homeless veterans in 2001.

'This location is the heart of Las Vegas,' said Josephine Asiata, a social worker with VA and one of the outreach coordinators. 'It has proximity to the Strip, and there's a heavy presence of homeless veterans. 'This event helps with prevention and intervention of spreading the virus. It also allows an opportunity for veterans to get tested without having to leave the site of their temporary housing. 'For James Kelley, a homeless Veteran tested at US VETS, getting a COVID-19 test as a precaution. 'I've been tested before. If you know you have [the coronavirus], you can give it to somebody else.'

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

*[Reported by Ariel A De Jesus]*

## **TOPIC 6: CAREER FAIRS**

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

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

**The National staff, along with the Department of North Carolina, hosted a virtual career fair. The jobseekers, a mix of active duty, reserve, retirees, veterans, and military spouses, joined in from 19 states and the District of Columbia, as well as Japan**

[North Carolina Virtual Career Fair](#)

Newly discharged veterans claiming benefits totaled 11,905, a decrease of 271 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.*



## THE AMERICAN LEGION NORTH CAROLINA

# VIRTUAL CAREER FAIR

Employment Opportunities are Waiting for You. Register Now and Connect  
with Local and Nationwide Employers Looking to Hire.

Tuesday, November 17, 2020 ★ 10:00am-2:00pm (Eastern Time)



*[Reported by Ariel De Jesus]*

### TOPIC 7a: SMALL BUSINESS

The American Legion provided a letter of support for Georgia Senator Kelly Loeffler's proposed legislation to change the federal contracting process, a move that will help veterans better access federal contract opportunities. The Verification Alignment and Service-disabled Business Adjustment (VA-SBA) Act will streamline the federal contracting process for all veteran-owned small businesses and ensure that contracts reserved for service-disabled veterans are not fraudulently awarded to bad actors masquerading as veteran small businesses.

Senator Loeffler's bill has been added to the 2021 National Defense Authorization Act which will hasten its passage despite opposition from the Department of Veteran Affairs and Construction Industry Associations.



The *VA-SBA Act* moves the responsibility for ensuring that a veteran-owned small business or service-disabled veteran-owned small business is in fact a small business—for the purpose of federal contracts—from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to the Small Business Administration (SBA), aligning such verification with other small business contracting programs. The VA will ensure that a business owner is a veteran, while the SBA will ensure it is in fact a small business.



*A Certified Service Disabled Veteran Owned Small Business*

It also requires that service-disabled veteran-owned small businesses receive front-end certification to qualify for federal contracts set aside for those businesses. Currently, service-disabled veteran-owned small businesses have to be certified by the VA for contracts through the VA but can self-certify for all other federal contracts. This has created confusion for business owners and opens the door for waste, fraud and abuse by allowing small businesses not owned by service-disabled veterans to take contracts away from actual service-disabled veteran-owned small businesses.

The American Legion understands the need for verification of VOSBs and SDVOSBs. This bill is the culminating effort of what we began in aligning the federal regulatory definitions for SDVOSBs and pushing for the expansion of the Veterans First Program in federal contracting. The move of VA's small business verification functions to the SBA will end the current process of self-certification. This is beneficial for risk-averse contracting officers who will begin taking verified veteran firms seriously and will award more contracts to veteran businesses, knowing that their statuses are backed by Small Business Administration and the Department of Veterans' Affairs as reviewing authorities.

The American Legion supports Senator Loeffler's bill which is now House Sec. 831 of the FY21 National Defense Authorization Act, addressing Small Business Concerns; which is why we passed ***Resolution No. 155: Support Verification Improvements for Veterans' Business at the 2016 National Convention.***

*[Reported by Davy Leghorn]*

## **TOPIC 7b: SMALL BUSINESS**

On Wednesday, November 18, 2020., VE&E participated in the U.S. Chamber of Commerce webinar on "Maximizing Your Online Sales." They shared the following best practices:

- a. Be clear on your mission. It should be concise.
- b. Know your target audience and their platform.
- c. Do outreach.
- d. It takes time to get your return on investment, so be patient.
- e. Ask for help.

- f. Find a need and fill it.
- g. Understand the message you're trying to put out.

<https://www.uschamber.com/co/events/blueprint/co-blueprint-maximizing-your-online-sales>

On Wednesday, November 18, 2020., CO-- Blueprint: Maximizing Your Online Sales: Be clear on your mission. It should be concise. Know your target audience and their platform. Do outreach. It takes time to get your return on investment. Ask for help. Find a need and fill it. Fill a need. Understand the message you're trying to put out.

On Monday, November 16, 2020., the U.S. Small Business Administration announced that Economic Injury Disaster Loans are available to small businesses, small agricultural cooperatives, small businesses engaged in aquaculture and private nonprofit organizations located in Alcorn, Benton, Marshall and Tippah counties in Mississippi as a result of rain and flooding from Sept. 1, 2018 through Aug. 31, 2019.

The loan amount can be up to \$2 million with interest rates of 3.675 percent for small businesses and 2.5 percent for private nonprofit organizations, with terms up to 30 years. Applicants may apply online using the Electronic Loan Application (ELA) via SBA's secure website at [Disasterloan.sba.gov](https://www.sba.gov).

<https://www.sba.gov/article/2019/nov/06/tn-16178-sba-economic-injury-disaster-loans-available-mississippi-following-secretary-agriculture>

The EIDLs are also available in the following counties: Carroll, Chester, Crockett, Decatur, Fayette, Gibson, Hardeman, Hardin, Haywood, Henderson, Lauderdale Madison, McNairy, Shelby and Tipton in Tennessee.



*HUD awards millions to public housing*

<https://www.sba.gov/article/2019/nov/06/tn-16178-sba-working-capital-disaster-loans-available-tennessee-following-secretary-agriculture>

On Tuesday, November 17, 2020., the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) today made [\\$86.85 million available to public housing agencies \(PHAs\) in the form of Mainstream funding](#)

[vouchers](#) to assist non-elderly populations impacted by Coronavirus. Mainstream Vouchers aid non-elderly populations with disabilities in response to, and recovery from, COVID-19.

[https://www.hud.gov/press/press\\_releases\\_media\\_advisories/HUD\\_No\\_20\\_196](https://www.hud.gov/press/press_releases_media_advisories/HUD_No_20_196)

Governor Larry Hogan announced the \$250 million 'Maryland Strong: Economic Recovery Initiative,' which will provide funding from the Rainy Day Fund to directly assist restaurants, small businesses, local entertainment venues, arts organizations, and Main Streets across the state. The initiative doubles the state's total commitment to COVID-19 emergency economic relief for Marylanders to \$500 million. <https://governor.maryland.gov/2020/10/22/governor-hogan-announces-250-million-maryland-strong-economic-recovery-initiative/#:~:text=The%20governor's%20initiative%20will%20provide,small%20businesses%20across%20the%20state.>

*[Reported by Teresa Lewis]*

## **TOPIC 8: EDUCATION**

Since the inception of the Post-9/11 GI Bill's transferability option for active duty, because of bureaucratic red tape, many veterans have been continued to be denied their right to share with their children the college benefits they earned by serving extra years in the military. Recent outrages have resulted in Department of Defense backpedaling, most notably involving the acting secretary of the Navy erasing a \$20,000 debt for a student from Michigan who left DePaul University after her tuition payments suddenly were withdrawn.

Yet some veterans and their families are still being told they can't tap the college benefits that the Post-9/11 GI Bill entitles them to pass along to their children. "It was devastating," says Carl Hill, a disabled vet who was counting on his daughter being able to use his Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits for a two-year firefighter/paramedic program. "You're, like, how can this be real?" Some veterans didn't find out until their kids were applying to college that there was a problem in the calculation of their retirement dates and that, as a result, their children wouldn't get a penny. And this was after they stayed on in the military years longer to qualify.

Other vets were approved, and their kids went to college, only to have the government cut off payments for tuition, housing and other costs and try to get the money back from the student.

The federal Department of Veterans Affairs acknowledges that errors have resulted in the government withdrawing benefits and leaving a veteran's child suddenly facing an unexpected debt. But the VA says this happens only rarely.

But for veterans' families, "The consequences are huge," says Aniela Szymanski, senior director for legal affairs and military policy for Veterans Education Success, a not-for-profit that helps vets. For some vets, serving longer so they then could share their Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits with their children was their only plan to pay for college. They hadn't saved up or put money into a 529 plan. "They can't go back in time and make up for this error," Szymanski says.

Congress passed the Post-9/11 GI Bill to give veterans the equivalent of four years of free college. It later allowed them to share those educational benefits with their families in exchange for extending their military service — typically by four years.

Hill, 44, now lives in Kalispell, Montana. He served 10 years in the Air Force and Air National Guard, then switched to the Navy, where, seven years in, his service — which included time in Iraq — had taken a toll. He had a brain injury, post-traumatic stress and back, shoulder and knee issues. He was treated at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center and eventually was medically retired in November 2019.

Before leaving the Navy, Hill put in to transfer his college benefits to his daughter. Hill's years of service and his medical retirement qualified him. But when his daughter tried to access that money for college, the VA said no. Hill says he was told he hadn't filed a medical form with an office handling GI Bill transfers — a requirement he says he never got word of because it was sent to an old email address.

He plans to appeal the decision with free legal services from Veterans Education Success.

Veterans advocates say the problems Hill and others typically face are essentially paperwork errors. Often, vets were told before they retired that they had met all of their service obligations, only to



learn later they were short a few months or even just days of qualifying to transfer their benefits. One reason for that confusion: Military service records sometimes show different dates, for example, for an initial contract and extensions. The GI Bill transfer date might not match the extension date. And serving in the reserves could complicate exactly how long they must serve to qualify.

Russell Dotson, a 22-year Navy vet from Flint, Michigan, whose daughter left DePaul after her benefits were withdrawn, found out he was 89 days short of qualifying. Because he was in the reserves, he could have finished the required time in service by completing only six more days of weekend drills. His daughter Paige Dotson suddenly found herself with \$20,000 of unexpected student debt and had to leave DePaul



*Paige Dotson got a \$20,000 debt waived and saw her benefits restored after Sen. Dick Durbin, D-Illinois, and others intervened.*

After the [Sun-Times reported last year on the Dotsons' situation](#), 11 members of Congress, led by [U.S. Sen. Dick Durbin](#), D-Illinois, and U.S. Rep. Dan Kildee, D-Michigan, convinced the acting Navy secretary to change Russ Dotson's retirement dates, waive his daughter's debt and reinstate the benefits for her and her brother.

Like Paige Dotson, Eric Juarez was a student at DePaul when his father's Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits were cut off in 2015 during the spring of his junior year. Juarez was told he had to repay more than \$70,000 to cover payments already made on his behalf.

His father Henry Juarez — who served in the Army, as a government contractor fixing military helicopters and also with the National Guard — had applied to transfer his benefits to his son. And, between 2012 and 2015, Eric Juarez received multiple letters from the VA authorizing the transfer. But, as Eric Juarez found out much later, his father's service didn't qualify him to transfer his benefits. That was a mistake that hadn't been noticed by the father, who was by then estranged from his son, nor by the VA.

His mother was dealing with cervical cancer, so Eric Juarez moved back to Texas to care for her until her death in 2016 while finishing his DePaul degree remotely. He took out a student loan, worked part time and helped with his younger sister. "I don't know how I got through it, honestly," he says. Juarez's volunteer lawyer from Kirkland & Ellis in Chicago is now arguing for a waiver of the \$70,000 debt to the government, saying the records error should have been caught and that it's unfair to go after the student.

Now 26, Eric Juarez works as a tech consultant but says the vast debt is holding him back. "I'm not homeless, but I'm on a mattress on the floor in my aunt's living room," he says. The Sun-Times spoke with more than a dozen families with stories of Post-9/11 GI Bill transfers being denied or paid but then clawed back.

The VA says it doesn't have data on how many families are denied benefits before a veteran's children begin school, but vets report being told by VA representatives that it's not uncommon. A spokeswoman says the Defense Department "periodically" gets complaints from veterans but says that, when service members sign up for a benefits transfer, they "must read and acknowledge multiple statements regarding their service obligation and consequences of using the transfer without completion of service obligation."

Even so, she says the armed forces “are implementing additional notifications” to help flag potential problems before people leave the military. A VA spokesman says that, during the 2019 budget year, the agency created debts against 22 dependents because vets hadn’t completed their additional service obligation — out of 127,354 beneficiaries who received transferred benefits.

In 2015, Tlesha Northern-Jackson of Forest Park was surprised with a debt of \$106,000 when the VA cut off the Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits transferred to her by her mother, who had served more than 20 years in the Army, retiring as a master sergeant. Northern-Jackson had used two semesters of her mother’s benefits for her undergraduate studies at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and was in her second year at John Marshall Law School when she got the news.

“I was truly devastated,” she says. “You don’t know what to do.” The VA said her mother was about seven months short despite her two decades of service, though she says her mom wasn’t told that before leaving the Army. “They did have counselors before retirement to say ‘Yeah, you’re good’ or ‘No, you’re not,’ ” Northern-Jackson says. “There wasn’t a problem.”

After a two-year fight, the debt was reduced but still is more than \$24,000. She is appealing the decision with help from a *pro bono* lawyer. “I’m an attorney myself, and it’s a daunting task,” Northern-Jackson says. She says a VA representative told her she wasn’t alone: “He was, like, ‘You’d be surprised how many calls I get each day about this issue.’”

Dave McDaniels of Murfreesboro, Tennessee, is a retired staff sergeant who served 22 years in the Air Force and Army National Guard, with deployments to Kosovo and Cuba. He says he signed up to transfer his Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits to his son in 2009 — and found out in 2014 it hadn’t gone through. So he reapplied, asking that the transfer be backdated, and says he was told that correction would be made.

It wasn’t. So his records reflected that he retired too soon to qualify. Still, the VA approved his son Cody receiving his education benefits for a computer science program at a community college. Later, it rescinded that authorization, handing Cody McDaniels a \$30,000 bill. And it has been garnishing the son’s \$10-an-hour wages. “They’re, like, ‘There’s nothing we can do. You retired too early,’ ” Dave McDaniels says, though he has a document from his commander saying he’d fulfilled his obligations.

Last year, legislation was introduced in Congress that would guarantee that anyone who serves at least 10 years could transfer their education benefit at any time, even after retirement. But the proposed Post-9/11 GI Bill Transferability Entitlement Act — whose bipartisan sponsors include U.S. Rep. Adam Kinzinger, R-Illinois, hasn’t gotten out of committee.

“We must keep these promises to our veterans and their families and alleviate any barriers that exist from them receiving the benefits they deserve,” says Kinzinger, an Air Force vet who is a lieutenant colonel in the Air National Guard.

Charlie Maher, a retired Navy submarine commander who now lives in Rhode Island, can attest to those barriers. Maher has a clear memory of logging on to the Navy’s IT system in January 2011 to transfer his Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits to his kids.

He wishes he would have made a printout because, four years later, after his son Felipe had successfully used the benefits to pay for his freshman year at Penn State, “Lo and behold, I get a letter from the government,” Maher says. “Apparently, it didn’t go through. The Navy claims it has

no record of this.” The government cut off the money and demanded \$35,000 back. The Mahers were counting on the Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits the father earned with his 23 years in the Navy. He appealed but was denied because he lacked proof he’d applied to transfer his benefits. “I didn’t have a leg to stand on to dispute it, so I just kind of gave up,” he says.

Szymanski, with Veterans Education Success, says many of these problems could be fixed without Congress if the Defense Department would issue waivers for anyone who meant to transfer their benefits but whose service record fell short by less than a year.

Regarding service members still in the military, she says problems could be avoided if the branches updated their personnel systems and raised a red flag for anyone in danger of retiring too early. U.S. Sen. Tammy Duckworth, D-Illinois, who once piloted Army helicopters in combat zones and has been an advocate for veterans, says the VA recently initiated new information-sharing to help improve verifications with the Defense Department.

“Our country made a promise to veterans, and we must help ensure that no veteran — or child of a veteran — has their Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits taken away because of an error in a complicated system,” Duckworth says. The Defense Department says families can try to correct problems through each service branch’s military records correction board.

That seemed easy enough to John Capizzi. The retired Navy commander from Scottsdale, Arizona, planned to split his Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits between his two high school-age daughters. But the VA told Capizzi — who had 20 years on active duty, capping his career by serving an adviser to the Joint Chiefs of Staff in Washington — he retired six months too early to be able to transfer the benefits.

“Extremely shocking,” is how Capizzi, who once flew the FA-18 Super Hornet and now flies jets in and out of Chicago as a commercial airline pilot, describes hearing the news. “It was probably one of the most emotional days that I had. I just felt like I had let them down.” The records correction board initially turned him down. Its reasoning: The Navy is supposed to go over each person’s electronic record with them before they retire, so it had to presume that review took place.

Capizzi was adamant it hadn’t. Luckily, he’d saved emails with the name of the woman who conducted his exit program, and she confirmed that it didn’t include a records review for GI Bill transfer issues. He also found others who attended the same session who backed him up. After he took that information to the Navy board, it agreed last month to change his retirement dates and reinstate the benefits for his daughters.

“Thank goodness I had email addresses from long ago,” he says. Capizzi says he worries, though, that other vets won’t find out until their kids get older that there’s a glitch with their records. He says a VA specialist told him they get half a dozen calls a week from families who have gotten an unwelcome surprise. “They think they had this paid for,” he says. “And now guess what? They aren’t going to college.”

*[Reported from the Chicago Sun Times]*

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