

NATIONAL VETERANS EMPLOYMENT & EDUCATION COMMISSION

TOPIC 1: ECONOMY

US job growth slowed sharply in November, suggesting the labor-market recovery is losing steam amid a surge in coronavirus cases and new business restrictions.

Employers added 245,000 jobs last month, less than half the 610,000 jobs added in October, the Labor Department reported Friday. The unemployment rate edged down slightly to 6.7% in November from 6.9% a month earlier.

November marked the seventh consecutive month of job gains at a steadily cooling pace. The labor market has now regained slightly more than half of the 22 million jobs lost at the onset of the pandemic.

Employers boosted jobs in the transportation and warehousing sectors last month, likely reflecting holiday hiring for e-commerce roles. Employment declined in government and in the retail category that includes brick-and-mortar stores.



Overall, the US economy has recovered much of the ground lost earlier this year, even though the expansion has slowed since the third quarter's rapid rebound. US consumers boosted their spending in October for the sixth straight month, and new applications for unemployment benefits—a proxy for layoffs—fell last week after a recent jump.

The economy faces near-term challenges, including a new wave of virus infections that triggered some states and localities to impose new business restrictions. The onset of winter could deter spending and job creation in sectors like restaurants that have become more reliant on business outdoors.

Still, the labor-market recovery from the job destruction this spring has been more robust than most economists forecast. Many expect widespread vaccine distribution to lift the economy as businesses are allowed to reopen eventually. Consumers feel more comfortable traveling, going to the movies, and returning to other in-person activities involving proximity to other people.

“As infection rates go down, as the number of people vaccinated goes up, then we’ll start to see...business activity expand at a faster rate, and we will see the employment numbers pick up more strongly,” said David Berson, chief economist at Nationwide Mutual Insurance Co.

Aliana Heffernan of Rahway, NJ, age 28, began casually exploring job opportunities in mid-April after being furloughed from her marketing-specialist role at a New York City ad-tech firm. In June, her furlough turned permanent, and she kicked the pace of her job search into high gear, sending out dozens of applications each day. The search, she said, was “brutal.”

“It wasn’t hard to find positions that were a good fit. But most of the time, I would find great jobs and never hear a word,” said Ms. Heffernan. “In more than one instance, I interviewed on the phone and then was ghosted.”

The outlook brightened in late October when an advertising startup that she had interviewed with in early July got back to her with an offer. Ms. Heffernan reported for her first day on the job on Nov. 2. The new position, which is fully remote until further notice, is a step up from her previous job in terms of title, responsibilities, and compensation, she said.

Holiday hiring strengthened in November compared with a year earlier, according to job site Glassdoor. The demand for e-commerce jobs drove the gains.

“There’s still holiday hiring; it’s just not as we know it,” said Becky Frankiewicz, president of staffing firm ManpowerGroup North America. The company would be placing workers in jobs like cashier, clerk or salesperson inside retail stores in previous years, she said. But during this holiday season, openings are concentrated in roles like delivery driver and warehouse worker, she said.

More broadly, however, the Glassdoor job-openings data suggest hiring has slowed since October as states navigate a surge in virus cases. Openings in various industries, such as technology and food services, were down in November from a month earlier.

The number of weekly labor shifts among workers increased 0.1% in November, down from 0.8% growth in October, according to Ultimate Kronos Group, a workforce-management software company. Worker shifts fell month over month in the Midwest and Northeast, possibly reflecting new business restrictions in those regions as virus cases increase.

[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	307	552	252	492	55	60
Unemployment rate	3.4	6.3	3.1	6.4	5.1	5.3

The national unemployment rate is 6.7 percent (November 2020). Gulf War II veterans' unemployment rate is 6.9 percent. Currently, the unemployment rate for Gulf War II women veterans is 5.7 percent (up from 3.6 percent in October).

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 30, the National Veterans Employment and Education Division had a conversation with Solutions For Information Design (SOLID) reference DOD interest in the Risk-Based Model for university oversight that National Approving State Agency (NASAA) with AL involvement, has been working on. (Lisa Lutz and Lauren Runco believe DOD may adopt the model).

On Monday, November 30, the National Veterans Employment and Education Division discussed with Legion leadership on Risk-Based Survey (RBS) model statement for inclusion in priorities and commander's testimony.

On Monday, November 30, the National Veterans Employment and Education Division had conversations with NASAA leadership to discuss the Risk-Based Survey pilot project. Also, they continued issues faced by state approving agencies and schools in the pandemic environment.

On Monday, November 30, the National Veterans Employment and Education Division had a conversation with SVAC on VA Omnibus and COVID package. Also, conversations with RBS Project Coordinator Woodall on a pilot rollout.

On Monday, November 30, the National Veterans Employment and Education Division sent emails to Departments reminding them that the deadline for VE&E's awards program is approaching (Jan 15, 2021).

On Tuesday, December 1, the National Veterans Employment and Education Division had conversations with VSOs (especially the National Association of Veterans Program Administrators (NAVPA)) on the 85/15 issue and path forward to correct.

On Tuesday, December 1, the National Veterans Employment and Education Division reviewed research on the history of 85/15 limitation and other VA restrictions. Also, I had a conversation with SVAC on 85/15.

On Tuesday, December 1, the National Veterans Employment and Education Division responded to an issue at Georgetown University where a compliance survey issue leads to a discussion of suspension of a division (suspension of ability to offer the GI Bill).

On Tuesday, December 1, the National Veterans Employment and Education Division had conversations with Council of College and Military Educators (CCME) President Silva and AL Director Sharpe on 85/15, RBS surveys, and a potential panel DC.

On Tuesday, December 1, the National Veterans Employment and Education Division had conversations with President George Bush Institute (GBI) on policy workgroup recommendations for the National Task Force on Higher Education.

On Tuesday, December 1, the National Veterans Employment and Education Division participated in a virtual conference call with Bob Gear, Director Texas Veterans Commission. We discussed the upcoming Virtual Career Fair and the possibility of extending the career fair to other nations where US companies are based and looking to hire veterans. This would extend opportunities for

those veterans and their spouses seeking employment overseas or those currently overseas looking to remain overseas.

On Tuesday, December 1, the National Veterans Employment and Education Division conducted a meeting with Lumina Foundation and SOLID Design to discuss report progress on the Military Credentialing Advancement Initiative. VE&E staff agreed to provide the report introduction by the end of the week.

On Wednesday, December 2, the National Veterans Employment and Education Division, NASAA, and EdCounsel had discussions on the RBS model and oversight with the National Governors Association (NGA) and Department of Defense (DoD).

On Wednesday, December 2, the National Veterans Employment and Education Division had conversations with GWB Institution on final virtual convening plans next week. Conversations with NASAA and AL leadership on HR 4625 and the VA Omnibus.

On Wednesday, December 2, the National Veterans Employment and Education Division had a conference call with VES leadership and State Approving Agency (SAA) approval authority in regulation and statute and reviewed the RBS model.

On Wednesday, December 2, the National Veterans Employment and Education Division had a call with Georgetown University, and the situation was addressed. (No suspension to occur.)

On Wednesday, December 2, the National Veterans Employment and Education Division attended the US Small Business Administration's (SBA) Interagency Taskforce (IATF). They conducted a briefing on the end-of-year recap of The American Legion's advocacy and programming for veterans entrepreneurs.

On Thursday, December 3, the National Veterans Employment and Education Division met with RBS Project manager Woodall on continued challenges with the VA partnership and how best to proceed with the RBS pilot rollout.

On Thursday, December 3, the National Veterans Employment and Education Division had further discussions of VA Omnibus with Senate Veterans Affairs Committee (SVAC) staff and other VSOs.

On Thursday, December 3, the National Veterans Employment and Education Division discussed with School leaders the challenges faced in the coming months as the pandemic continues.

On Thursday, December 3, the National Veterans Employment and Education Division met with NAVPA leadership on the 85/15 controversy and path forward.

On Thursday, December 3, the National Veterans Employment and Education Division joined the US Small Business Administration (SBA) for the Advisory Committee on Veterans Business Affairs (ACVBA). To receive the end of the year report from the agency regarding their progress on implementing the Mentor Protégé Program and review program and loan guaranty statistic for the year.

On Thursday, December 3, the National Veterans Employment and Education Division met with the National Veterans Small Business Coalition to discuss priorities for the second COVID-19

relief package and wrap up discussions on reporting requirements and new members for the SBA's ACVBA in the new year.

On Thursday, December 3, the National Veterans Employment and Education Division met with Jamie Varraso, Vice President of Premier Virtual, regarding their platform's capabilities to be used in other countries. Jamie stated that they have licenses and servers that meet overseas compliances.

On Thursday, December 3, the National Veterans Employment and Education Division conducted a virtual meeting with the President of the National Association of Veteran Program Administrators to discuss the VA's new 85-15 rule. The VA has changed reporting requirements on veterans enrollment to include traditional students who have not paid their tuition by the 15th day of the semester, drastically distorting veteran enrollment numbers.

On Thursday, December 3, the National Veterans Employment and Education Division conducted a virtual meeting with House Veterans Affairs Committee (HVAC) staff on the upcoming December 8th hearing in which VE&E staff will be testifying. HVAC staff shared the necessity for this meeting to discuss COVID employment challenges, as the next possible availability for an employment hearing would be no earlier than April.

On Friday, December 4, the National Veterans Employment and Education Division and the GWB National Higher Education Task Force Policy Work Group are convening final preparation for the Task Force next week.

On Friday, December 4, the National Veterans Employment and Education Division attended a GWB Case Studies meeting on Veteran transition and success.

On Friday, December 4, the National Veterans Employment and Education Division met with NASAA/EducationCounsel/Lumina on the RBS project rollout. Additional work on the 85/15 issue and further research on distance education to finalize the paper.

On Friday, December 4, the National Veterans Employment and Education Division spoke with Michele Springs regarding their upcoming virtual events. They heard of the two successful virtual events the Legion held and would like to see how we can collaborate and cohost and event. More to follow.

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 bill's last action 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

The Dayton region is no stranger to a healthy and robust community of veterans and veteran-owned companies.

The Wright-Patterson Air Force Base is the largest single-site employer in Ohio with over 29,000 workers. Its total economic impact on the region is \$15.6 billion each year — when you include indirect and induced impacts such as the defense contracting community and other businesses that support those 29,000 workers.

The Dayton VA Medical Center also plays a large part in supporting the region's diverse veteran population. And that includes helping to find them employment.

The Dayton VA's vocational rehabilitation program includes employment support services such as building resumes and interview skills, counseling, and motivational interviewing to determine what field of work interests the veteran.



"There are not a lot of employers out there that aren't veteran supportive," said Kevin Fields, supervisory, vocational, rehabilitation counselor at the Dayton VA. "The response from employers has been so positive."

Fields said many of the veterans he serves look for jobs in logistics and security. The medical center helps around 400 veterans each year find jobs.

"We believe veterans have a unique perspective based on their service," Fields said. "They are more fulfilled, knowing how they can impact and help. A lot of veterans want to do something that makes a difference and helps people."

Fields said he typically works with veterans in the 50-plus age group, but the VA network serves anyone with a veteran status honorably discharged.

"It comes down to attitude; employers are interested in a good attitude," Fields said. "We take an individualized job approach with each veteran."

Fields said his office meets with employers regularly to find workforce solutions for them. He also helps close the gap on barriers veterans face, such as transportation and physical or mental disabilities.

Another program the VA uses to help veterans is its transitional work model. It mostly serves veterans who have gaps in their job history. Those veterans are paid a stipend to complete work around the Dayton VA for the housekeeping or grounds staff.

"To get in the swing of things again," Fields said.

Nationally, the VA system offers vocational readiness and employment programs. Veterans can apply online to get financial help in earning new certifications, degrees, or apprenticeships.

***Resolution No. 345: Support for Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Program
Hiring More Counselors and Employment Coordinators***

[Reported by Ariel De Jesus]

TOPIC 5: VETERAN HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS

The BDN Opinion section operates independently and does not set newsroom policies or contribute to reporting or editing articles elsewhere in the newspaper or on bangordailynews.com. David Tille is regional administrator of the Department of Housing and Urban Development in New England and a US Army veteran. Ending veteran homelessness in Maine is within our ability to achieve, and landlords play a crucial role in helping us cross the finish line.

As a regional administrator of the US Department of Housing and Urban Development's New England Region, and a fellow veteran, I am firmly committed to ensuring that every person who has served our country has a supportive place to live and succeed. HUD is working with the Department of Veterans Affairs to provide rental assistance to 238 veterans in Maine through the HUD-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing program. That program provides housing and intensive wrap-around services that address homelessness's root causes and serve their needs. Because of the combination of housing and services, the HUD-VASH program has effectively decreased homelessness for tens of thousands of veterans nationwide.



One way this program benefits landlords is by providing guaranteed income with reliable monthly rental payments through the local housing authority. It provides fair market rent for units and the support of an entire team that can support both landlords and veterans to ensure housing stability.

Like so many across the country, veterans face rising rents, competition for fewer housing units, and other challenges heightened by the pandemic. This pandemic highlights the importance of programs like HUD-VASH that ensure homes for people who diligently served our country.

And the program is working. Earl, a veteran and HUD-VASH recipient, told HUD that this voucher fundamentally changed his life. "From the time I came out of the service in 1979 up to 2018, I had never lived on my own," Earl said. "To be able to walk into my spot -- my apartment -- was an amazing feeling."

If you are a landlord interested in renting to a veteran with a HUD-VASH voucher, you can sign up on the free and user-friendly listing service, Padmission, at maine.padmission.com/login. Landlords with questions about Padmission can contact David Lambert, housing liaison with Preble Street's Veterans Housing Services, at dlambert@preblestreet.org

Sometimes, veterans aren't even aware of the wealth of support available to them. That's why it is vital that we proactively educate these men and women about their options.

If you know of a Maine veteran who is homeless or at risk of becoming homeless, the best way to help is to dial the Maine hotline at 2-1-1, or you can contact the National Call Center for Homeless Veterans at 1-877-4AID-VET.

Let's make it our legacy to honor our veterans by ensuring that any homeless veteran and seeking shelter is never forced to sleep on the streets. Please do your part to end homelessness among our veterans.

Resolution No. 332: Support Funding for the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and Veterans Affairs (VA) Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) Homeless Program

[Reported by Ariel 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.

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 veterans' economic well-being, including issues relating to veterans' education, employment, home loans, vocational rehabilitation, homelessness, and small business.

Reported by Ariel De Jesus]

TOPIC 7a: SMALL BUSINESS

The American Legion's Veterans Employment and Education Division continues to track the progress of a new COVID-19 relief package. Bilateral talks resumed this week over the possibility



of a second draw on the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) and forgiveness. This is important for many American Legion Posts and Departments that have taken advantage of the PPP before August 1st, who may become eligible for a second draw going into the winter.

President Trump on Thursday said he would sign a coronavirus relief package

if Congress can broker a deal in the final weeks of the year after months of gridlock. "I want it to happen, and I believe they're getting very close to a deal," Trump said in the Oval Office. Asked if he will support a deal, Trump replied, "I will."

Congress failed to pass a broad relief bill for months as Senate Democrats stalled and drove up the price tag of the possibility of a second relief package with the inclusion of aid for state and local governments, among other sticking points. But pressure has picked up for lawmakers to act as the Trump administration winds down and as the nation is gripped by another severe surge in COVID-19 infections, hospitalizations, and deaths.

A bipartisan, bicameral group of lawmakers released a framework this week for a \$908 billion bill and are expected to release text by Monday.

That bill includes more funding for the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP), a \$300 per week beefed-up unemployment payment, and more money for state and local governments. The measure also included short-term federal liability protections, a sticking point for Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.).

Senate Minority Leader Charles Schumer (D-N.Y.) and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) on Wednesday embraced the \$908 billion bipartisan proposals as a starting place for negotiations.

"We believe with good faith negotiations we could agree," Schumer said Thursday.

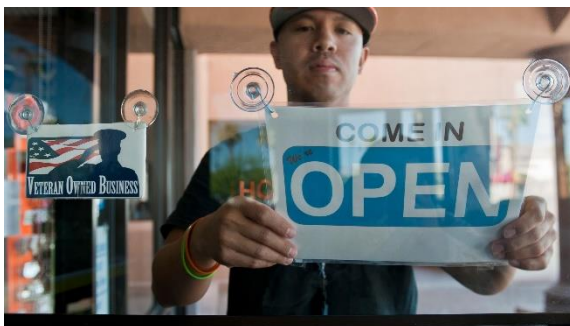
McConnell, speaking from the Senate floor Thursday, said he believed a deal on coronavirus relief was within reach, despite the unwillingness of both sides to compromise on a bipartisan proposal released earlier in the week.

[Reported by Davy Leghorn]

TOPIC 7b: SMALL BUSINESS

Division of Veterans Employment and Education Rural Area Initiatives

Twenty million veterans live in the United States. They live in every state and in nearly every county across the nation. About 5 million veterans lived in areas designated as rural by the U.S.



Census Bureau during the 2011–2015 period. About 10 percent of all rural civilian adults are veterans, but in some rural counties that figure can reach as high as 25 percent.

Veterans have much to contribute to rural communities. Veterans returning home from active duty, as well as those who move to rural communities as newcomers, add to the population base and increase the demand for goods and services. Veterans tend to have more education on average and can benefit their communities by contributing their leadership, technical, and entrepreneurial skills.

Fostering military veteran entrepreneurship has a powerful effect on veterans, their families, and local economies. When military veterans start businesses, they are more likely to hire other veterans, their families attain more wealth than veteran families who do not start businesses, and

they become resources who other aspiring veteran entrepreneurs can turn to in their own entrepreneurial journeys.

According to the most recent census, there are over 2.45 million veteran-owned businesses in the U.S. economy, contributing to more than \$1.2 trillion in total business sales annually. The rate of veteran small business entrepreneurship has trended downward at the highest rate since the Vietnam era. Many of these small businesses struggle in their first years of start-up and can utilize assistance in getting established. One of the ways the American Legion is fostering veteran entrepreneurship is through the Division of Veterans Employment and Education initiative on improving veterans access to capital, as well as, other business services, to start and grow their business.

Transitioning service members and veterans need ready access to business assistance services, resource networks, capital and market opportunities to ensure success. Empowering and regenerating America's veteran entrepreneurs is one way to help reverse our declining trends in veteran entrepreneurship while also facilitating the economic revitalization of small towns and rural America.

Residents of rural areas have been more likely than residents of other areas to work for their own businesses, but, in recent decades, the share of the self-employed living in rural areas has fallen. For these reasons, VE & E is currently identifying federal, state and local resources throughout the United States that can be accessed by veterans, such as business loan guarantees and counseling services. We are also updating our on-line small business training videos that are accessible from anywhere in the country. We hosted a small business round-table with financial stakeholders, such as lenders, the U.S. Small Business Administration, the U.S. Departments of Agriculture and the Treasury, Syracuse University and trade associations, to identify available resources for veterans. We are also aligning those resources with our local American Legion posts throughout the country.

Given the potential advantages veteran-owned small businesses offer, fostering their growth and development in rural communities will also have a positive impact throughout the country.

[Reported by Teresa Lewis]

TOPIC 8a: EDUCATION

A [recent brief](#) from the American Talent Initiative urges colleges to enroll more students who are military service veterans. Some of the report's findings indicate that the COVID pandemic has had an adverse impact on student veterans.

The initiative is a collective of colleges and universities committed to expanding access for more vulnerable students. Its goal is to, by 2025, enroll and graduate 50,000 more lower-income students at colleges that have a six-year graduation rate of at least 70 percent.

This includes student veterans, very few of whom attend colleges with high graduation rates.



Many in higher education are more concerned than ever about this student population due to the

COVID-19 pandemic. Student veterans are likely to start their education at community colleges, said Emily Schwartz, program manager at Ithaca S+R and one of the authors of the brief.

Community college enrollment is down by nearly 10 percent, which doesn't bode well. At the same time, enrollment at for-profit colleges remains steady. Historically, these colleges recruit student veterans during economic downturns, according to Schwartz.

"Protecting student veterans from those predatory practices is something that's going to be really important," she said.

Trace Urdan, managing director at Tyton Partners, said this concern is premature. Just because for-profit colleges are doing well relative to other institutions doesn't mean they are engaging in predatory behavior, he said. Colleges also have to jump through additional hoops to adhere to regulatory frameworks specifically for student veterans.

"I am not of the opinion that veterans are in particular danger relative to other student groups," Urdan said. "I think they have more folks looking out for them."

It's too soon to know how enrollment of student veterans is going. Institutional members of the American Talent Initiative have told Schwartz anecdotally that they have been encouraged by the resilience of student veterans, and thus their enrollment patterns, so far.

But these students are still likely to face barriers due to the pandemic. They're a diverse population, and more likely to be people of color, first-generation students and have children, Schwartz said. All these populations have been hard hit by COVID-19 in various ways.

They've also faced stress over the legislation that governs their funding for education. The GI Bill, which covers much of the costs for veterans' education and training programs, is complex and adds another layer of stress for student veterans, Schwartz said.

For example, student veterans receiving housing stipends must be taking courses in person. In the spring, Congress passed legislation so that students forced to study online due to the pandemic would continue receiving the full stipends.

That legislation has been extended through December 2021, with the hopes that life will have returned to some state of normal by that time.

The eligibility guidance for spending CARES Act student emergency funds was also confusing, Schwartz said. The guidance said only students who are eligible for Title IV, or federal student aid, funding could receive the grants. Many student veterans are eligible for that aid, she said, but they don't fill out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid required to receive it because the GI Bill often covers their costs.

Institutions also need to take steps to help these students, Schwartz said. Enrollment continues to be an issue in many places, and broadening the pipeline to better recruit and serve student veterans could help, she said.

"The GI Bill is a generous source of funding," she said. "Student veterans are a way that institutions can diversify their student populations with relatively less of a financial impact."

The first step, as explained in the initiative's report, is to make the case for recruiting student veterans. Colleges need to understand the data on student veterans and educate the rest of the campus community. Then they need to define their commitments and communicate their supports clearly to student veterans, Schwartz said.

Not only do student veterans help diversify campuses and come with strong federal aid packages, but they also tend to do well academically and have strong outcomes after graduation, according to Schwartz's report. The average grade point average for all student veterans is 3.34, compared to 2.94 for nonveteran students. The unemployment rate for veterans is lower than that of the average population, and the median earnings for veterans with degrees are higher than those of nonveterans with degrees, the report states.

Both access and community building have changed due to the pandemic. In the past, the university would send recruiters to community colleges near military bases, Rodgers said. Now it's hosting virtual events. Recently, the university hosted a virtual transfer fair specifically for student veterans. More than 100 colleges joined the fair to talk with them. There were about 700 virtual visits among all the colleges, he said.

Building community in a virtual era is harder. Students have started new support groups, and the university is hosting virtual workshops on different issues, Rodgers said. But it's difficult to replace the experience of staff making connections by bumping into students on campus or coming across students in distress.

Texas A&M University has also been hosting virtual events for its 1,250 current and former military students, said Jerry Smith, director of the Veteran Resource and Support Center at the university and a retired U.S. Marine Corps colonel. Most of the student veterans on his campus are older, and many are married with kids. The isolation is making it difficult to help them transition to college.

"They always do their best when they can connect with other veterans who can help with the transition," he said.

Texas A&M has been flexible, hosting events online and connecting smaller cohorts remotely, Smith said. This has worked better for some student veterans who have other priorities, and a hybrid mix of virtual and in-person activities will likely continue after the pandemic is over. But engagement and participation is still Smith's No. 1 concern -- even above mental health. The university has hosted virtual career fairs and switched many services, like tutoring, to a remote setting. While all that is helpful, it can't truly replace face-to-face interaction.

"My concern is there's going to be a lot of missed opportunities that could impact them for a lifetime," he said.

Attendance at the virtual career fairs has been mixed but not awful, and participation at virtual veteran camp that serves as an orientation and welcome event at the start of the semester went up by about 20 percentage points. But attendance is not the metric Smith cares about.

"The quality of the interaction virtually is less," he said. "The metric is not the attendance, but the number who are attending and getting a quality interaction."

That said, Smith believes that student veterans are resilient and, if given the proper resources, they will rise to the challenges of the pandemic.

Student veterans are also facing many of the same financial and resource-related issues as nontraditional students. They are more likely than a traditional student to have children, and thus need to balance caring for their kids at home and their own schoolwork. They may have lost jobs and thus are dealing with food or housing insecurity.

Texas A&M won't have official data until February, but anecdotally, at least half of the system's campuses believe their student veteran enrollment has increased, Smith said. He believes the official enrollment numbers will just hold steady, as students may leave college due to their competing priorities.

Statistics show the potential for enrollment growth, though. By 2021, it's estimated that there will be 5.1 million post-Sept. 11 veterans. About 68 percent won't have a bachelor's degree, Smith said. For those veterans, it may seem like a good time to enroll.

"But it is 2020, and it's hard to make a bet about anything," he said.

The American Legion's Veterans Employment & Education Division is responsible for ensuring that U.S. veterans have the opportunity to provide, with honor and dignity, the economic necessities of life for themselves and their families. With the challenges faced by student veterans in the age of COVID, the Division will continue to investigate policy and best practice solutions to better serve these veterans on their education path to meaningful employment.

[Reported by John Kamin]

TOPIC 8b: EDUCATION

Protecting our Veterans: New Risk Based Survey Model and Assessment Program

Over the past 20 years, numerous schools have closed without warning, leaving student veterans without degrees and few options. But by implementing a new risk-based review system, State approving agencies(SAAs) will for the first time target their reviews to the riskiest schools most likely to leave veterans worse off, help students finish their studies if their school may be at risk of closure, and push schools to improve or risk losing GI Bill dollars if they continually fail to offer



veterans a meaningful path to economic advancement. Most important is that this new system is built on public data and designed so that SAAs, and other state and federal agencies, can evaluate program risk regardless of sector. This means that this model is a critical proof point for how government can protect not just veterans, and by extension, all students.

To design the process, the National Association of State Approving Agencies and EDCounsel worked together on a major national project, funded by the Lumina Foundation. They convened a national Risk Based Advisory Council, composed of 22 members, including the American Legion, who represent a diverse set of interests and perspectives across higher education and the veteran's

community. During the project, NASAA and their partners have integrated feedback from dozens of policy experts, researchers, advocates, and practitioners; worked closely with several SAAs to understand their capacity and perspectives on risk; and researched examples and precedents in other contexts, such as predicting housing foreclosure risk, financial oversight of publicly traded companies, and others.

The risk-based review process is a system that separates low-risk schools from high-risk schools using quantitative publicly available measures of risk and then prioritizes further data requests and site visits to those schools showing the highest levels of risk. The system uses publicly available data to automate the process of ranking programs in a state from most to least risky. This allows SAAs to conduct risk-based reviews focused on those programs most likely to present risk to student veterans and taxpayers. A risk-based review is premised on the idea that some schools pose less risk than others and limited SAA resources should be focused on schools that pose a greater level of risk. But because SAAs do not have unlimited capacity to execute a deep and focused review of every single educational program in their state each year, a national model and process has been designed that allows SAAs to initially assess the risk of all of the GI-Bill eligible programs in approved institutions.

This month, NASAA will begin a pilot of this system with six State Approving agencies located across the nation. For the first time SAAs will systematically be conducting reviews examining specific areas of risk relating to finances, enrollment, student outcomes, and other success measures beyond solely keeping track of GI Bill payments. Meaningful metrics will be audited and tracked, such as graduation rates, increase in tuition and fees, advertising and accreditation. The model will be revised based on the pilot, ending this spring, and then rolled out nationally in all states in the fall of 2021. This new risk based survey model and assessment process will truly have a transformative impact on the way we evaluate approved GI bill programs in the nation for the foreseeable future. And could become a national model, as both the Department of Defense and other state and federal agencies are interested in this new risk based review. The objective is to not only ensure compliance with federal and state regulations, but to make sure that veterans have access to high quality programs. The ultimate aim is successful transition and gainful employment, ensuring a pathway to a better future for veterans and their families.

[Reported by Joe Wescott]

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