

## NATIONAL VETERANS EMPLOYMENT & EDUCATION COMMISSION

### TOPIC 1: ECONOMY

Jobless claims fell sharply to 730,000 last week, as the pandemic eased a little, and winter storms that swept across the country created disruptions.

According to a Wall Street Journal survey, economists had projected initial jobless claims to regular state programs, a proxy for layoffs, to hold nearly steady for the week ended Feb. 20.



The four-week moving average, which smooths out week-to-week fluctuations, was 833,000 in the week ended Feb. 13, within the roughly 750,000 to 850,000 range held since last October and above the pre-pandemic peak.

The recent data is broadly consistent with a labor market stuck near neutral this winter, while other economy readings have pointed to a pickup. Policymakers and investors closely watch jobless claims about the direction of the jobs market and overall economy. Still, winter storms that hit Texas and elsewhere could affect layoff trends in the short term. The storms, which caused widespread power outages and disruptions, could create temporary unemployment for some workers and may have made it difficult for people to file claims and for state governments to process them.

“With severe weather events, we typically see a short-term uptick in layoffs that corrects itself within a few weeks,” said Dave Gilbertson, vice president of Ultimate Kronos Group, a workplace software firm. “However, during a time when the economy is already struggling to accelerate, these temporary layoffs can delay the recovery in a devastating way.” UKG data showed the number of shifts worked by employees across the U.S. fell last week, led by a 58.5% decline in Mississippi and nearly 50% declines in Texas and Louisiana.

Employers added only a net 49,000 jobs in January after cutting 227,000 jobs in December, the Labor Department said. Those monthly readings marked a significant slowdown in hiring, compared with last summer when part of the economy reopened as state restrictions eased. Through January, the economy had recovered a little more than half of all jobs lost last spring.

There are signs this year that economic activity is poised to pick up as Covid-19 cases fall, more people become vaccinated, more government stimulus reaches households, and businesses and states lift restrictions. According to job search site Indeed.com, the number of job openings at the end of January exceeded year-earlier levels. Aided by a fresh round of stimulus, retail spending accelerated in January. On Friday, the Commerce Department is scheduled to release January household income and spending figures that show both rose during the month.

Economists project faster economic and job growth later this year, with those surveyed by The Wall Street Journal projecting employers to add 4.8 million jobs in 2021. “We know really fast job growth is coming as soon as some of these industries—hospitality, entertainment, and travel—can get going again,” said Andy Challenger, senior vice president at outplacement firm Challenger, Gray & Christmas. “But right now, we’re in the doldrums of this recovery.”

Winter weather likely caused some temporary layoffs among construction firms and small businesses in recent weeks, Mr. Challenger said. Among the larger entities that his company tracks, job-cut announcements are well down from earlier in the pandemic but are becoming more broad-based and include airlines, food manufacturers, government agencies, and media companies.

A recent extension of enhanced unemployment benefits and the temporary easing of job-search requirements could also be skewing recent claims data. At the end of last year, Congress and then-President Donald Trump approved a \$300 enhancement to unemployment benefits on top of regular state benefits, which paid an average of \$319.02 a week last year, according to the Labor Department. Earlier this year, President Biden issued an executive action clarifying that workers who decline a job out of safety concerns, including possible Covid-19 exposure, can remain on unemployment insurance.

The combination of the larger payments and more lenient enforcement of jobs-search requirements could encourage more workers to apply for benefits, in some cases, instead of seeking jobs. States also have seen a high number of fraudulent claims. Ohio this month reported a jump of more than 100,000 additional claims that the state said was likely attempted fraud.

In addition to regular state benefits, the Labor Department reports the number of people enrolled in two special pandemic programs: one for self-employed and gig workers and another for those who exhausted other forms of the benefits. The total number of ongoing claims filed for those two programs was nearly 12 million at the end of January. More than double the estimated number receiving ongoing benefits through regular state programs, which covers most U.S. workers.

*[Reported by Ariel De Jesus]*

<b>HOUSEHOLD DATA</b>						
<b>Table A-5. Employment status of the civilian population 18 years and over by veteran status, period of service, and sex, not seasonally adjusted</b>						
[Numbers in thousands]						
<b>Employment status, veteran status, and period of service</b>	<b>Total</b>		<b>Men</b>		<b>Women</b>	
	<b>Jan 2020</b>	<b>Jan 2021</b>	<b>Jan 2020</b>	<b>Jan 2021</b>	<b>Jan 2020</b>	<b>Jan 2021</b>
<b>Unemployed</b>	319	500	282	461	36	38
<b>Unemployment rate</b>	3.5	5.5	3.5	5.8	3.2	3.3

*The national unemployment rate is 6.7 percent (January 2020). Gulf War II veterans' unemployment rate is 6.3 percent. Currently, Gulf War II women veterans' unemployment rate is 3.8 percent (down from 5.0 percent in November).*

In January 2021, the veteran unemployment rate was 4.9%. The comparable non-veteran unemployment rate was 6.3% in January.

## TOPIC 2: VIRTUAL MEETINGS & CONFERENCE CALLS

*On Monday, February 22*, the National Veterans Employment and Education Division Spoke with Noel Gonzalez, CEO of SkillMil Inc. We discussed possible opportunities for collaboration in assisting transitioning servicemembers and spouses in obtaining meaningful employment. SkillMil is a company that services servicemembers, veterans, and spouses only.

*On Monday, February 22*, the National Veterans Employment and Education Division had conversations with RBS Pilot SAAs and Project Manager Woodall on the pilot timeline and personnel staffing.

*On Monday, February 22*, the National Veterans Employment and Education Division had a discussion of forms needed and how best to sync those with VA and state requirements.

*On Monday, February 22*, the National Veterans Employment and Education Division prepped for meeting with NC Department of Veterans Affairs in Raleigh. Also, had discussions with RBS team on pilot.

*On Monday, February 22*, the National Veterans Employment and Education Division had a conversation with LA SAA director on the K9 school and issues with NCD training in GA.

*On Tuesday, February 23*, the National Veterans Employment and Education Division had a discussion with VA Deputy Director on pay issue with veterans at Harvard University and communication breakdown with VA and schools driving this issue.

*On Tuesday, February 23*, the National Veterans Employment and Education Division had a discussion with Texas SAA on RBS load in that state and preparation for DOD involvement in that school visit.

*On Tuesday, February 23*, the National Veterans Employment and Education Division attended an extended meeting with NC Department of Veterans Affairs on the State approving agency in NC and its role and placement.

*On Tuesday, February 23*, the National Veterans Employment and Education Division held conversations with CCME leadership on issue of school oversight.

*On Tuesday, February 23*, the National Veterans Employment and Education Division met with Lumina Foundation to discuss their participation in the MCAI Report launch. VE&E staff shared the presentation agenda, and coordinated messaging points with Lumina concerns over social equity solutions.

*On Wednesday, February 24*, the National Veterans Employment & Education Division attended a conference call with Hiring Our Heroes. The focus was on their upcoming career fairs in 2021.

*On Wednesday, February 24*, the National Veterans Employment & Education Division continued conversations with SAAs on bad actors in for profit sector and public sector and how do we manage oversight to address this issue.

***On Wednesday, February 24,*** the National Veterans Employment & Education Division had conversations with State VA leaders (ELR, ECCS) on state of veterans' education in the state.

***On Wednesday, February 24,*** the National Veterans Employment & Education Division met with university presidents and leaders on distance learning (Joe Wescott chair the subcommittee on online learning). Concerns with quality of online learning, new modalities, new initiatives in enrollment and administration, and the future of online learning in a post COVID-19 world.

***On Wednesday, February 24,*** the National Veterans Employment & Education Division had conversations with CCME leadership and TAL leadership on 90/10 and the commander's testimony.

***On Wednesday, February 24,*** the National Veterans Employment & Education Division had a conversation with Project Manager Woodall on RBSs and role of other oversight.

***On Thursday, February 25,*** the National Veterans Employment and Education Division attended a conference call with Jamie Varraso, Vice President, Premier Virtual, and Dean Kessel, Executive Director, Marketing for The American Legion. The discussion focused on possible marketing opportunities to reach more veterans. Premier Virtual is a virtual platform used to host events and is veteran-owned.

***On Thursday, February 25,*** the National Veterans Employment and Education Division had conversations with Project Director Woodall on planning trip to Houston Campus, RBS site visit their and DOD and CCME participation in same.

***On Thursday, February 25,*** the National Veterans Employment and Education Division held conversations reference SAAs in south Region and meeting with State VA personnel.

***On Thursday, February 25,*** the National Veterans Employment and Education Division discussed of potential questions from the committee and statement for the White House on the 13.5 billion for VA in the Covid package.

***On Friday, February 26,*** the National Veterans Employment and Education Division had a meeting with NASAA and EdCounsel on RBS project.

***On Friday, February 26,*** the National Veterans Employment and Education Division spoke with DoD Personnel and Readiness Force Training staff about Washington Conference participation. DoD staff confirmed their involvement, and their intent to brief on voluntary education and credentialing updates.

***On Friday, February 26,*** the National Veterans Employment and Education Division spoke with American Military University staff over 90-10 concerns. AMU staff shared that they would be forced to discontinue veteran enrollment if the budget reconciliation procedures eliminated the 90-10 loophole. VE&E staff shared this is the reason that efforts must continue to be made to pass the Protect VETS Act.

## **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 V.A. telehealth initiative  
BLS: Labor Department's Bureau of Labor Statistics  
C&P: V.A.'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: V.A.'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: V.A.'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: V.A.'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 V.A. 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 V.A. to ensure veterans participating in V.A. homeless programs have access to V.A. telehealth services.

(Tracked by Stephen Harger)

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

**H.R.492 -** To amend title 38, United States Code, to make permanent the Secretary of Veterans Affairs's authority to provide financial assistance for supportive services for very low-income veteran families in permanent housing.

(Tracked by Stephen Harger)

[Resolution No. 340: Support Permanent Authorization for the Supportive Services for Veteran Families \(SSVF\) Program](#)

**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 V.A. Medical Centers to allow homeless veterans to shelter on V.A. parking lots temporarily; Allows VA to provide reimbursements to social service providers receiving grants for the costs of services for minor children.

(Tracked by Stephen Harger)

[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 John Kamin)

[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 Stephen Harger)

[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 John Kamin)

**HR 4625:** To require education programs to be approved by the V.A. 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 G.I. Bill Comparison Tool ensures veterans, servicemembers, and their families are better informed when choosing what educational institution is best for them.

(Tracked by John Kamin)

**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 other purposes.

(Tracked by Ariel De Jesus)

**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 V.A. 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.

(Tracked by [Stephen Harger](#))

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

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

#### TOPIC 4: EMPLOYMENT

Arizona's veterans and service members have stepped up to support our communities and those in need during the pandemic. From supporting food banks to providing supplies to the Navajo Nation, ramping up vaccine administration in the Gila River Indian Community, and much more, Arizona's heroes are always there to help.

More than 500,000 service members, veterans, and their families call Arizona home. Governor Doug Ducey and the Arizona Department of Veterans' Services have worked to support and meet the needs of those who have done so much to protect our nation.



*Veterans helping veterans*

Here are a few ways Arizona is working to support those in uniform, veterans, and their loved ones:

#### **Protecting Mental Health**

Arizona launched the Be Connected program in 2017 to focus on early intervention by connecting Arizona service members, veterans, families, and helpers to information, support, and resources, such as peer support and behavioral health services.

The program now has 44 staff members after starting with just one, and it has led to:

More than 49,000 encounters to help Arizonans connect to community resources by phone, in-person or online, and

More than 5,600 community members being trained in Resource Navigation.

Additional efforts to protect veterans' mental health include Veteran Benefits Counselors (VBC), which work with veterans to secure federal dollars through VA disability, compensation, and pension benefits. Governor Ducey's FY22 Executive Budget invests in six additional VBC positions, allowing the Arizona Department of Veterans' Services (ADVS) to add 10,500 appointments for veterans, service members, and families each fiscal year.

### **Expanding Job Opportunities**

Veterans across the state can use the ADVS Veteran Toolkit to access the resources and supplies needed to start working and connect with job opportunities. The Toolkit launched in 2017 and assists veterans with uniforms, work boots, tools, and more.

The Arizona Roadmap to Veteran Employment is a statewide effort that focuses on connecting service members, veterans, and their family members to employment opportunities, training, and resources. It was developed in partnership by ADVS, Arizona Coalition for Military Families, public and private sector partners, and shareholders.

In this legislative session, Representative Travis Grantham introduced House Bill (HB) 2243, and Senator Warren Petersen introduced Senate Bill (SB) 1149 to expand opportunities for Arizona's veterans, service members, and military spouses. The legislation requires a printed statement on all communications with a potential licensee that informs the applicant that they will be granted an occupational or professional license or certificate if the applicant has been licensed or certified in the same profession in another state for at least one year. The Governor signed SB 1149 into law on February 12, 2021.

Representative Joanne Osborne also introduced HB 2128, which requires that the occupational licensing fee be waived for any active duty military service member and the member's spouse or any veteran if the individual is applying for that specific license the first time.

### **Enhancing Financial Support**

Governor Ducey has been committed to increasing the amount of military retirement pay exempt from income tax. The Governor's executive budget proposal in 2018 included a provision to raise the allowable subtraction from \$2,500 to \$10,000. Through budget negotiations between the Executive and the Legislature, the allowable subtraction was raised to \$3,500 in the final budget. Senators David Gowan and Wendy Rogers introduced SB 1331 and SB 1359, respectively, to increase the maximum subtraction from Arizona gross income for veteran benefits, annuities, and pensions. The legislation will increase the maximum subtraction from \$3,500 to the full pension amount for taxable years beginning from and after December 31, 2020, including a retroactive date of January 1, 2021.

Additionally, Senator Sonny Borrelli introduced legislation to support further families of currently deployed service members and military and veteran families who faced hardships caused by their

deployment. SB 1443 will update the Military Family Relief Fund's eligibility criteria, which was established in 2007 to provide financial assistance to service members and military families.

### **Supporting State Veteran Homes**

Governor Ducey's Executive Budget invests in the Arizona State Veteran Homes, which provide skilled professional nursing and rehabilitative care for veterans and their spouses throughout the state.

#### **The budget includes:**

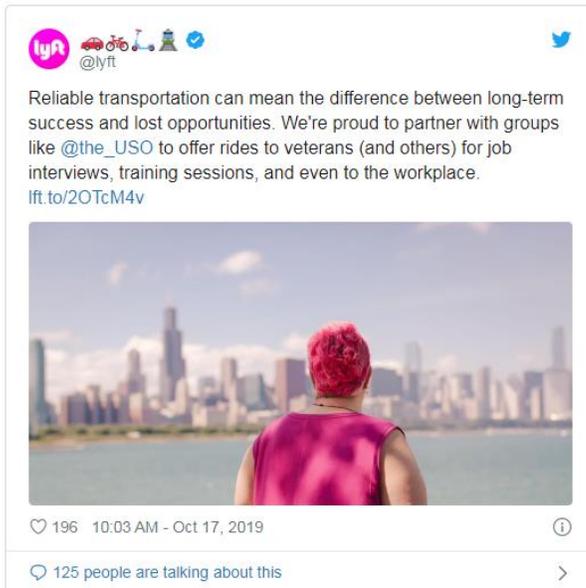
- An increase in funding for operating costs for the Arizona State Veteran Home in Tucson;
- An increase in funding for rehabilitative services in all four of the Department's State Homes for Veterans, allowing the Department to offer enhanced services to more veterans while protecting the health and safety of residents;
- An increase in funding for operating costs of the new veteran homes in Flagstaff and Yuma; and more.

*[Reported by Ariel De Jesus]*

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

### **Homeless veteran program forms partnership for the new transportation program**

The Cherokee County Homeless Veteran Program has just finished a memorandum of understanding with the United Way 211 Program to provide access to a new pilot LYFT program that will provide veterans with rideshare capabilities to get to and from their jobs.



"Transportation continues to be a large issue for our homeless veterans, as well as those veterans that are disabled or veterans who do not have access to public transportation that would take them to and from their jobs," Cherokee County Homeless Veteran Program Director Jim Lindenmayer said in a news release. "Cherokee County, like many other rural counties, does not have the funds or infrastructure to support a countywide mass transit system as you would find in Atlanta with MARTA or Cobb County with CCT, and this lack of local governmental program requires creative thinking and making partnerships with other organizations that fill in gaps that we find in our ability to serve our veterans in need."

*One step closer to becoming homeless if you can't get to work*

Lindenmayer added that this program is designed to provide veterans in the job market and cannot afford a car or lack public transportation up to \$600 for job-related transportation.

The funded program from LYFT was initially announced in January to help veterans get into and remain in the job force. United Way 211 was one of the two organizations selected by LYFT to help roll out this program. The original program in Georgia focused on covering veterans in need from the eight counties centered on Atlanta and ended in June 2020, Lindenmayer said.

The Cherokee County Homeless Veteran Program was selected in 2020 to participate in the initial LYFT pilot program managed by United Way 211. This was met with success, and the program was invited to participate in this next pilot program.

**There are program requirements the program must abide by, which includes:**

Only six slots for veterans are available in this pilot program. Veterans must be honorably discharged and provide DD214 to verify their time in service and discharge type. The program is open to male and female veterans. All veteran candidates will be screened for job status before being selected for the program. The program supports travel to and from work, including any pre-job interviews, as well as any job-related medical testing required by employers. Initially, each candidate will be given \$300 for the program, with the ability to qualify for an additional \$300 for the \$600 total per-person grant. Candidates must have a smartphone and have the LYFT app loaded on their phones. Candidates must possess a credit card. Any non-job-related transportation costs are to be paid for by the veteran using LYFT. Rides must be within a 25-mile radius of Canton. The program is set to end on May 31.

If you are an employer of a veteran who needs transportation or a veteran who wants to be considered for this pilot program, contact Lindenmayer at 678-983-7590 or [jlindenmayer80@gmail.com](mailto:jlindenmayer80@gmail.com)

**The American Legion family is working hard to help our homeless veterans.**

The Grafton American Legion Auxiliary assembled 25 Buddy Baskets on Monday, Feb. 15, at the Grafton American Legion Post, donating them to the Milwaukee Homeless Veterans Initiative (MHVI).

Buddy Baskets are laundry baskets filled with common household goods given to homeless veterans as they move to transitional or permanent housing.

“These veterans are less likely to have basic household items such as light bulbs, laundry detergent, and toilet paper, plastic wear, etc. Buddy Baskets containers are filled with these sorts of items to help meet those needs for veterans and military families in these situations,” said Amy Luft, district president and member of the Grafton Unit.

The Buddy Basket project is part of the Veteran Affairs and Rehabilitation (VA&R) program of the American Legion Auxiliary set forth to help homeless veterans transition to new housing. The VA&R program is the largest of the American Legion Auxiliary programs and works to support the veterans who served our country and are now in need of assistance. Members spend hundreds and thousands of hours volunteering in the veterans' homes and medical centers all over the nation.

“For this project, we decided to partner with MHVI. Their mission is to help homeless, and at-risk veterans reach and maintain their highest levels of independence. They offer unique programs to fill the gaps and don’t duplicate what others do,” said Luft.

Each veteran receives one Buddy Basket as they are moving into their new housing. MHVI representatives indicated that approximately one veteran is successfully housed within Milwaukee and surrounding areas.

*[Reported by Ariel De Jesus]*

## TOPIC 6a: EDUCATION

The [Department of Veterans Affairs](#) is asking the Department of Justice to step in after it lost control of the domain "GIBill.com," a site that has previously been used by scammers.



"As the owner of the registered trademark '[GI Bill](#),' VA has referred the matter to the Department of Justice to reclaim the GIBill.com domain in accordance with the Uniform Domain Name Dispute Resolution Policy," Joe Williams, a spokesman for the agency, said Wednesday.

The VA seemingly [lost the domain rights to GIBill.com last year](#), drawing

frustration from some lawmakers and veteran advocates. Now, some advocates are urging President Joe Biden's administration to reacquire the domain to protect beneficiaries from scammers and deceptive marketers.

Veterans Education Success, a nonpartisan veteran advocacy group, sent a letter to Biden last week urging him to take steps to expand GI Bill protections, including reclaiming the lost domain GIBill.com, which has in the past been used by the for-profit education industry to deceive veterans. The VA appeared to own the website at least as of May 20 last year, according to the Wayback Machine internet archive, which stores website screenshots. The department seems to have lost control of the domain last June. The URL does not currently forward to a website, and the domain is being withheld by an unidentified owner.

A decade ago, GIBill.com was owned by QuinStreet, an online marketing firm whose clients included a vast roster of for-profit schools. The firm used the website to masquerade as the VA, directing veterans to for-profit schools and falsely telling beneficiaries that students could get the most out of their [education benefits](#) at the schools it advertised.

A coalition of 20 attorneys general -- including then-Delaware AG Beau Biden, the president's late son -- filed a lawsuit to take the URL away from scammers, which led the VA to trademark the term "GI Bill" in 2012.

"We're acting to ensure that service members are not deceived by companies who are more interested in adding to their bottom line than in providing clear information to soldiers about the educational benefits they have earned while protecting us," Beau Biden said in a 2012 statement. That year, QuinStreet was forced to terminate the website and pay \$2.5 million in penalties over deceptive advertising practices that targeted student veterans.

Jack Conway, then the attorney general of Kentucky, said at the time that QuinStreet's use of GIBill.com was "the most egregious example" that he had seen of misinformation and greed directed at veterans. He said the investigation included a review of 8,000 emails to QuinStreet through the site, many of which came from veterans who believed they were communicating with VA officials. The marketing firm regularly redirected visitors to a small group of for-profit schools. Despite the VA holding the trademark, there are concerns the domain could fall into the wrong hands again.

Veterans Education Success, through a domain broker, offered up to \$5,000 to buy the domain to get it out of the wild and return it to the VA, but the anonymous owner turned it down.

GIBill.com could be used for other means, which could confuse veterans trying to find information and apply for benefits. However, the VA could potentially file a lawsuit if the domain was ever used to deceive beneficiaries again.

"The owner of the domain name cannot use the domain name in a way which would mislead the public to believe that it is owned, sponsored or affiliated with the Department of VA," said [Jeffrey Kobulnick of Brutzkus Gubner](#), an attorney who specializes in intellectual property. "If the domain is used with a problematic website or for deceptive purposes in the future, the VA would potentially file a lawsuit for trademark infringement and cybersquatting and seek to recover the domain name again."

Veterans have long been targets of deceptive and aggressive recruiting from for-profit schools, which are required to earn at least 10% of their revenue outside of Pell Grants or federal student loans. Because of a so-called "90/10 loophole," the GI Bill technically does not count as federal money, despite the scholarship being earned on military duty and delivered by the VA. All domain purchases have an end date. If one lapses and the owner doesn't renew ownership, there are companies that use algorithms to identify unregistered domains to acquire and sell on auction sites.

It is unclear how the VA initially lost the domain. Last year, the department blamed the Obama administration and didn't say it was trying to reacquire the site, despite evidence in Wayback suggesting the department had recently owned it.

When the VA secured the domain after the 2012 lawsuit, it used GIBill.com to redirect to the department's official website. All VA websites have ".gov" internet addresses.

*[Reported by John Kamin]*

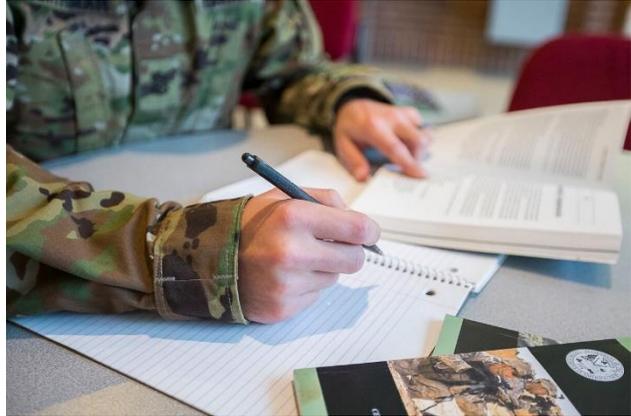
## **TOPIC 6b: EDUCATION**

### **ABOUT 1 IN 3 COLLEGES HAVE CUT FUNDING FOR VETERAN-SUPPORT PROGRAMS, SURVEY SAYS**

About 30 percent of colleges and universities have reduced funding for veteran-support programs during the past year, and some schools have eliminated their support offices entirely, according to a recent study.

The past year of coronavirus pandemic shutdowns and safety measures have created unprecedented challenges for veterans seeking college degrees, including problems related to funding and staffing, according to the study.

The problems for veterans seeking to use their military education benefits has been compounded by cutbacks at schools that have reduced funding and support for veterans support services, according to a survey of military-connected students by Operation College Promise and the Texas A&M University System.



*Service members, veterans and military retirees have a number of financial aid options they may be qualified for beyond military service-provided tuition assistance, according to Joint Base Myer-Henderson Hall Education Center officials. (Joint Base Myer-Henderson Hall PAO photo by Nell King)*

Nearly 40 percent of student respondents say they've seen a reduction in communication with school staff since the pandemic measures took hold last March.

In the 2019-2020 school year, about 80 percent of schools surveyed said they had a dedicated office for military support, but over the past year that fell to about 72 percent, according to the survey.

Schools that report having career counseling services for veterans fell from 66 in 2019-2020 to 58 this year, they survey found.

The cutbacks come at a time when many veterans are also struggling to find employment. The veterans unemployment rate ticked upward to 5.5 percent in January.

Overall, student veterans say the coronavirus pandemic has negatively impacted them in numerous ways. Nearly 60 reported a financial impact; about 32 percent noted an impact on employment. A majority, 52 percent, noted mental health problems, according to the survey.

The survey was conducted by Operation College Promise, a national policy, research, and education program based in Trenton, New Jersey, which supports veterans seeking to transition from the military to college.

The survey included responses from 75 colleges and universities and 230 military connected students.

## **TOPIC 7: SMALL BUSINESS**

### **FIXING THE POTENTIAL CRACKS IN THE SUPPLY CHAINS**

President Joe Biden wants his administration to identify and fixing the potential cracks in the supply chains that could cause shortages of critical items like chips inside cars, minerals in flat-screen televisions, batteries in electric vehicles and ingredients in life-saving medicines.

The President directed his team in an executive order on Wednesday to conduct a review to determine which products used by Americans in their everyday lives -- or that are necessary to keep the country safe -- could be vulnerable to disruptions.

And, perhaps more critically, he wants to find out how much of that supply is dependent on places such as China.

"We need to stop playing catch-up after the supply chain crisis hits. We need to prevent the supply chain crisis from hitting in the first place," Biden said at the White House before signing the order.

"In some cases," Biden added, "building resilience will mean increasing our production of certain types of elements here at home. In others it'll mean working more closely with our trusted friends and partners, nations that share our values so that our supply chains can't be used against us as leverage."



Already, US automakers have slowed production because of a shortage of semiconductor chips, which are mostly manufactured abroad, including in China. And shortages of medical equipment at the start of the coronavirus pandemic also exposed vulnerabilities in the United States' ability to manufacture supplies in a crisis, leaving front-line workers dependent on products from abroad.

Now, Biden wants his administration to conduct a 100-day review to identify gaps in domestic manufacturing and find places where critical products are reliant on countries that are either unfriendly or could become so.

The review will focus on four areas to determine where the vulnerabilities lie: semiconductors (or computer chips); large capacity batteries, like those used in electric vehicles; pharmaceuticals and drug ingredients; and rare earth metals that are used in everything from flat screens to advanced weapons.

The executive order he signed Wednesday also directed a review in six sectors to identify potential supply chain weakness. They include defense, public health, information technology, transportation, energy and food production.

An administration official, previewing the action, said the review was intended to get the United States "out of the business of reacting" to shortages and to instead "get into the business of getting ahead" of potential disruptions.

"We're not simply planning to order up reports. We're planning to take actions to close gaps," the official said.

And while the order did not specifically name China, and officials insisted it should be viewed more broadly, the urgency in ensuring critical products and supplies are not beholden to Beijing is clear.

"We really do see this as a resilient supply chain executive order, not a China executive order," the official said, "though clearly one of the vulnerabilities we have in supply chains is the potential for strategic competitor nations to try to use control of supply chains against us."

Gen. John Hyten, vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said Tuesday that Covid-19 revealed "huge vulnerabilities" in the US supply chain.

"I'll just say without going into any classified detail that the supply chain is weak, and we have to take a hard look at that, because without that kind of supply chain, we cannot move nimbly, quickly, we cannot stay ahead of the threats that will continue to morph, and we're going to have a hard time building affordable capabilities in order to do that," Hyten said.

"We just do not have a robust resilient supply chain right now. We have to take a hard look at that," he added.

On Wednesday, Biden met with a bipartisan group of lawmakers to discuss the semiconductor issue specifically.

Emerging afterward, he said it was one of the best meetings he's had since taking office. "It was like the old days; people were actually on the same page," Biden said.

As the pandemic dampened demand for new cars, automakers cut their orders for chips. But increased demand for computers and cell phones meant the chips went into those products, leaving a shortage when auto production ramped back up.

That is the type of vulnerability the administration hopes to identify and work to avoid in the future.

"We've been mapping and analyzing the chip shortage to understand what got us to this," an official said, calling the semiconductor shortage a lesson for the supply chain issue more broadly. As a candidate and now as President, Biden has prioritized returning jobs to the United States and placed an emphasis on manufacturing.

Officials said his executive order fit within those ideals, but acknowledged that not all supply chains could be returned entirely to the United States. Instead, they said they wanted to find areas where the US is overly dependent on a single country or supplier that could cause havoc if the supply is interrupted.

On rare earths, an official acknowledged the US would not necessarily be able to mine minerals only found abroad -- including, in many cases, in China. Instead, the review might identify ways to lessen dependence on a single source, including by recycling or finding additional countries from which to source materials.

The administration could use a mix of incentives to return supply chains to the United States, along with limits on imports, including the potential for new tariffs, officials said.

### **Resolution No. 13: Support "Buy American" Policy within the Federal Government to Create Opportunities for Veterans**

#### **Congress has passed several domestic sourcing laws, including:**

- The Buy American Act of 1933, which generally requires federal agencies including DOD – to purchase domestic end products and use domestic construction materials on contracts exceeding the micro-purchase threshold performed in the United States

- The Berry Amendment (10 U.S.C § 2533a), which requires textiles, clothing, food, and hand or measuring tools purchased by the DOD to be grown, reprocessed, reused or produced wholly in the United States.
- The Specialty Metals Clause (10 U.S.C § 2533b), which requires that any specialty metals, defined as certain metal alloys, contained in any aircraft, missile and space system, ship, tank and automotive item, weapon system, ammunition, or any components thereof, purchased by DOD be melted or produced in the United States.

## **TOPIC 8: CAREER FAIRS**

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

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

Newly discharged veterans claiming benefits totaled 9,071, an increase of 742 from the prior week.

*The American Legion's National Veterans Employment & Education Commission's Mission 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]*

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**Week Ending: 2/26/2021**