

NATIONAL VETERANS EMPLOYMENT & EDUCATION COMMISSION

TOPIC 1: ECONOMY

CHINA FALLS BEHIND U.S. IN GLOBAL IMAGE, SURVEY DATA SHOWS

Despite a positive appraisal of Beijing’s handling of the pandemic, people in most advanced economies hold overall negative views

China is falling behind the U.S. in global esteem, continuing to hover near all-time lows, despite improved marks for its handling of the pandemic, a new poll in 17 advanced economies found.

Asked which country they would prefer closer economic ties with, a growing majority of respondents across the populations named the U.S. over China, the survey by the Pew Research Center found. That reflects a rebound in America’s global image since the Trump administration gave way to the Biden administration, Pew found in another poll published in early June.

The findings of the survey of 18,850 people on four continents about China’s image, conducted from February to May, suggest that Beijing’s aggressive diplomacy abroad and authoritarian policies at home are shaping negative perceptions.

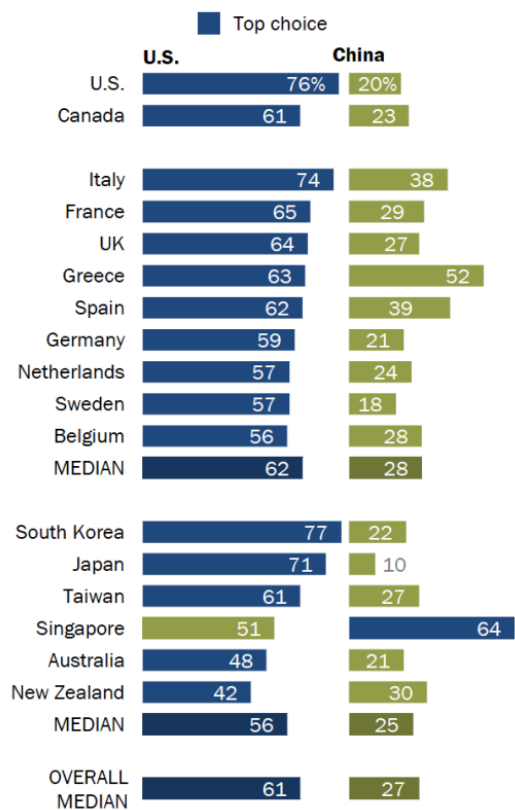
As China’s Communist Party prepares to celebrate the 100th anniversary of its founding on Thursday, the country is viewed unfavorably by around three-quarters or more of the people polled in Japan, Sweden, Australia, South Korea and the U.S., according to Pew.

Perceptions of China plummeted last year, partly driven by what a majority of respondents said was Beijing’s mishandling of the pandemic. This year, roughly half of respondents said China handled it well.

The most positive assessment of China’s Covid-19 response came from Europe. In countries such as Belgium, Spain and the Netherlands, approval was up by more than 15 percentage points from last year. Canada and the U.S. were more divided, and people in the Asia-Pacific region—with the exception of Singapore—tended to be negative.

More hold favorable views of the U.S. than of China

% who have a favorable view of ...



Source: Spring 2021 Global Attitudes Survey, Q4a,b.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

People can acknowledge the country's success in limiting infections while remaining skeptical of the efficacy of Chinese vaccines and associating the country with the origin of Covid-19, said Grzegorz Stec, an analyst at the Berlin-based Mercator Institute for China Studies, or Merics.

And though the pandemic might have accelerated the deterioration of China's image in democratic countries, there were long-term concerns before Covid-19, said Luke Patey, a senior researcher at the Danish Institute for International Studies.

In 15 of the 17 places surveyed, more than 80% of the respondents said that China doesn't respect its people's personal freedoms.

Mr. Patey pointed to Beijing's tightening grip on Hong Kong, its policies toward Uyghurs in Xinjiang, fears of a military confrontation over Taiwan, and its economic practices and diplomatic style.

"Chinese diplomats assert Beijing's position in local matters abroad, causing issues and giving people there the impression that China is trying to control their discourse," said Mr. Patey, who studies China's global ambitions and the international response to them.

With Covid-19 receding as people's primary lens for viewing China, more issues are being seen through the framework of democracy versus autocracy, said Mr. Stec of Merics.

Confidence in Chinese leader Xi Jinping to do the right thing regarding world affairs remains low in 16 of the 17 places surveyed. In contrast, belief in the U.S. president has risen since President Biden took over from former President Donald Trump. In Sweden, for example, 85% expressed confidence in Mr. Biden, as opposed to 15% in his predecessor.

"The fact that President Biden is liked will feed into China's worry that the U.S., Europe and some East Asian countries will get together and form an anti-China coalition," Mr. Stec said. In March, the U.S., Canada, the U.K. and the European Union placed coordinated sanctions on Chinese officials over Beijing's treatment of mainly Muslim Uyghurs.

In most places, an often wide majority of respondents said they preferred strong economic relations with Washington over Beijing. In South Korea, for instance, 75% favored the U.S.—up from 39% in 2015. In a 2020 poll by Pew, most European countries named China as the world's dominant economic power.

The U.S. is the world's largest economy, though China's is on track surpass it. The Centre for Economics and Business Research, a London-based research firm, now forecasts that will happen in 2028, five years earlier than its pre-pandemic projection of 2033.

While a large majority of people in the U.S., Australia and New Zealand favor giving priority to human rights even at the expense of economic ties, people in East Asia are split on the matter, the Pew survey found.

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	
	May 2020	May 2021	May 2020	May 2021	May 2020	May 2021
Unemployed	800	379	716	314	84	65
Unemployment rate	9.0	4.1	9.1	3.9	7.8	5.5

The national unemployment rate is 6.1 percent (May 2021). Gulf War II veterans' unemployment rate is 4.0 percent. Currently, Gulf War II women veterans' unemployment rate is 6.9 percent.

In April 2021, the veteran unemployment rate was **5.3%**. The comparable non-veteran unemployment rate was **6.0%** in April.

TOPIC 2: VIRTUAL MEETINGS & CONFERENCE CALLS

On Monday, June 28, the National Veterans Employment and Education Division attended a Zoom meeting with Pilot State Approving Agencies (SAAs) on the ongoing evaluation of information they are presently imputing into E-Force (the VA reporting system on audit finding), finalizing forms required, and time required to complete an Risk-Based Survey Model (RBS) and uploading forms to the VA on E-Force. We agreed that we would need to work on streamlining both the process and the paperwork. Even then, it will take additional funding to provide increased staff and resources to accomplish these in-depth reviews.

On Monday, June 28, the National Veterans Employment and Education Division had a discussion with National Association of State Approving Agencies (NASAA) Legislative Director, Wellman on shared priorities and opportunities along with the DC State Approving Agency (SAA).

On Monday, June 28, the National Veterans Employment and Education Division had a discussion with Veterans Education Success Chief of Staff Hubbard on Howard University suspension in DC; the GI Bill is suspended at that university until proper information is received at the State Approving (SAA). Talked with Veterans Education Success President on 90/10 and the negotiation of regulations process.

On Tuesday, June 29, the National Veterans Employment and Education Division attended the National Association of State Approving Agencies (NASAA) Executive Board meeting to present shared priorities and presented on Risk Based Survey requirements and project status. Concerns include VA's definition of compliance and whether they are willing to adopt the NASAA model; also, the need for increased funding to accomplish the RBS as required by law and as envisioned by the pilot project.

On Tuesday, June 29, the National Veterans Employment and Education Division hosted a “SkillBridge Roundtable” to discuss the Department of Education’s SkillBridge transition program with participating stakeholders and Veterans Employment and Education Commission leadership. Over 57 guests attended the zoom meeting, including former Sergeant Major of the Army Daniel A. Dailey and Department of Labor Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary James Rodriguez. Panelists reviewed successful SkillBridge transition programs to employment, and offered recommendations for overall improvement.

On Wednesday, June 30, the National Veterans Employment and Education Division attended a Subcommittee on Oversight & Investigations Virtual Hearing on Veterans Affairs and Small Businesses. Discussed VHA’s plan for the VA to transition their MSPV program to DMLSS, DLA and the War Stopper Program. Other topics were:

- DODs MSPV Program
- GAO
- VA’s & VHA’s Covid-19 Response
- Issues on:
 - No comprehensive supply chain strategy
 - VA’s 50-year-old inventory system
 - SDVOSBs

Ms. Deborah Kramer, Acting Assistant Under Secretary for Health for Support, Veterans Health Administration, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs discussed the issues caused by the pandemic that had a major impact on the VA’s ability to operate up to standards. Medical supplies such as N95 masks, exam gloves, and isolation gowns were some of the few hard to get items needed in VA facilities. Participation in DLA’s War Stopper Program helped the VA gain access to suppliers of these items. The GAO placed the VA on their high-risk list; expressed concerns that focused on cost of implementation, lack of comprehensive strategies, and time frame of the transition.

On Wednesday, June 30, the National Veterans Employment and Education Division had a conversation with Hill Staff, particularly Congressman Rho Khanna’s Legislative Director Saba on needed program changes to make sure veterans receive quality training that results in good paying jobs. Discussed about what changes should be made in online tech training (the Congressman represents the Silicon Valley) and how we might develop a program to enhance STEM training through apprenticeship/ On-the-Job-Training (OJT) with Silicon Valley companies. VE&E staff is working closely with Rho and Geo on this initiative and plan to meet at the end of July.

On Wednesday, June 30, the National Veterans Employment and Education Division attended a conference call with Veterans Education Success, Disabled American Veterans, Wounded Warrior Project and IAVA to discuss ideas for a letter to the White House requesting a Presidential Executive Order on veterans. Topics included improving veterans employment pipelines, veterans education oversight, and increasing suicide prevention awareness. VE&E staff expressed concern about a portion of the letter criticizing DOD’s SkillBridge program, and offered alternative language.

On Wednesday, June 30, the National Veterans Employment and Education Division had a conference call with the House Veterans Affairs Committee on their agenda after the fall recess. VE&E staff shared their concerns about National Guardsmen who have been denied the GI Bill because of their National Guard discharge status as well as the educational opportunities for 100% TPD veterans.

On Thursday, July 1, the National Veterans Employment and Education Division continued conversations with House Veterans Affairs Committee (HVAC) staffer on medical residencies and the future of pending legislation on enhancing approval requirements for GI Bill education and training programs.

On Thursday, July 1, the National Veterans Employment and Education Division attended a CFPB roundtable to review the current state of play with veterans housing complaints related to COVID-19 evictions.

On Thursday, July 1, the National Veterans Employment and Education Division attended a meeting with Lisa Lutz who is on the Institute for Credentialing Excellence (ICE) Government Affairs Committee to discuss for a possible National Credentialing Summit in which best practices are shared for credentialing and enhancing civilian career prospects for veterans, servicemembers and military spouses.

On Thursday, July 1, the National Veterans Employment and Education Division worked on legislative priorities shared by National Association of State Approving Agencies (NASAA) and the National Association of State Departments of Veterans Affairs (NASDVA).

On Thursday, July 1, the National Veterans Employment and Education Division attended a Bush Institute meeting and prepare for VA Committee on Education Independent Subcommittee meeting; Also, finalizing research paper on distance learning.

On Thursday, July 1, the National Veterans Employment and Education Division attended Veteran Education Succession On 90/10 Rule conference with Will Hubbard, Veterans Education Success and Barmak Nassirian, Higher Education Analyst to discuss the lasting impact and effectiveness of the 90/10 rule.

On Friday, July 2, the National Veterans Employment and Education Division met with Rep. Trent Kelly staff to discuss the issues Trent Kelly's office are working on for veterans. Some items considered were adding additional VBOCs to more states, VETS First program, Skillbridge being offered to National Guard and veterans, and National Guard members gaining access to Tricare while deployed.

On Friday, July 2, the National Veterans Employment and Education Division attended a VA Homeless Advisory Committee Meeting. Some items discussed were:

- HUD-VA Supported Housing Programs (HUD VASH)
- HUD homeless assistance grants and continuum of care
- VA grant and per diem program
- TAP
- OIF/OEF workgroup
- HUD Vet. Resource center

The meeting had strong emphasis on the subcommittees work groups of OIF/ OEF veterans, benefits, and housing. Members of the committee were very receptive to The American Legion, and the insight on 'Operation Iraqi Freedom'/'Operation Enduring Freedom' (OIF/OEF) veterans and our Homeless Veteran Task Force. The American Legion was once again the only VSO to attend and was very warmly welcomed by the committee. We gained critical knowledge in the

current condition and the future plans of assisting homeless veterans to include prevention programs and transition assistance programs.

On Friday, July 2, the National Veterans Employment and Education Division contacted the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) to set up a meeting and discuss what challenges veterans and families using VA home loans are experiencing in a highly competitive housing market.

On Friday, July 2, the National Veterans Employment and Education Division is scheduling appointments with the Rep. Nydia Velazquez, Rep. Blaine Luetkemeyer, Sen. Ben Cardin, and Sen. Rand Paul to discuss veteran business centers across the country allowing veterans to use their GI Bill to set up businesses, access to capital especially for veterans in rural areas and US territories, discussing passed PPP program and VET First program with the VA desire to work with DLA.

On Friday, July 2, the National Veterans Employment and Education Division spoke with the Enlisted Association of the National Guard to learn about standard operating procedures relating to medical discharges at National Guard units. VE&E staff are concerned about instances where National Guard soldiers suffer injuries will on active duty, but later receive state National Guard discharges, thereby losing their federal education benefits.

GLOSSARY OF FREQUENTLY USED ABBREVIATIONS

ACE: American Council on Education

ACP: American Corporate Partners, a veteran's 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

CCME: Council of College and Military Educators

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

NDA: 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 veteran's 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 veteran's 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 veteran's organization
VSO: Veterans Service Organization

TOPIC 3a: TRACKING LEGISLATION

Recognizing Military Service in Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) Act: Would allow service members who pause their student loan payments while deployed or on extended active duty orders to count that period of time toward their PSLF progress – which is currently not allowed.

Status: Expected to be introduced within a month

H.R.1836 - Guard and Reserve GI Bill Parity Act of 2021: Would expand eligibility for the Post-9/11 GI Bill to count every day that a servicemember is paid and in uniform toward benefit eligibility in order to achieve GI Bill parity for National Guard and Reserve members.

Student Veterans Transparency and Protection Act: Would improve veterans' access to information about higher education and allow the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to restore benefits that veterans use at schools subject to civil enforcement.

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

[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.

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

H.R.492: To amend title 38, United States Code, 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.

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

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.

Status: Passed House Vote, received in the Senate, and referred to the Committee on Veterans Affairs. It did not pass by the end of the 116th Session, will need to be reintroduced.

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.

Status: Did not pass by the end of the 116th Session.

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.

[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.

Status: Became Public Law No: 116-142.

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.

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

Status: Became Public Law No: 116-315

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.

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

HR 4920, Department of Veterans Affairs Contracting Preference Consistency Act of 2020: This 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.

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.

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.

[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.

[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.

[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.

Status: Letter of Support submitted

H.R. 711, West Los Angeles VA Campus Improvement Act of 2021: This legislation would direct the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) West Los Angeles Medical Center campus to use revenues from leases and easements as a dedicated funding source to build additional housing for homeless veterans, offset the high costs of housing construction, and help fund the provision of supportive services for veterans in the community.

[Resolution No. 141: Department of Veterans Affairs Enhanced-Use Leasing](#)

Status: This bill was submitted for the April 21, 2021 testimony.

H.R. 2082, VA Supply Chain Resiliency Act: To make certain improvements relating to the supply chain of the Department of Veterans Affairs, and for other purposes.

[Resolution No. 13: Support “Buy American” Policy within the Federal Government to Create Opportunities for Veterans](#)

Status: This bill was submitted for the April 21, 2021 testimony.

TOPIC 4a: EMPLOYMENT

BIDEN APPROVES NEW ENVIRONMENTAL, DISCRIMINATION AND MENTAL HEALTH RULES

Reversing Trump-era policies, Biden signed bills on rural veteran health, lending and methane restrictions.

President Joe Biden on Wednesday signed three Congressional Review Act bills into law, reversing Trump-era policies that deregulated lending, health care and greenhouse gas emissions.

“Each of these bills reflects return to common sense and commitment to the common good,” Biden remarked.

The first bill the president signed on Wednesday evening aimed to restore federal limits on methane emissions in the gas and oil sector.

It reversed a rule published by the Environmental Protection Agency on Sept. 14, 2020, which had limited the agency’s ability to regulate the methane emissions of potentially polluting industries.

Biden then signed a joint resolution that voids a final rule published by the Office of the Comptroller of the Currency on Oct. 30, 2020.

Aiming to defend borrowers from loan sharks, the rule requires that to be considered a lender, a national bank or federal saving association must, “as of the date of origination of the loan, be named as the lender in the loan agreement, or fund the loan.”

Before signing the bill, Biden said it will serve to “protect consumers from predatory lenders.”

The president earlier on Wednesday signed-off on a bipartisan bill, aimed at expanding access to mental health care for veterans who live in rural areas, called the Sergeant Ketchum Rural Veterans’ Mental Health Act.

The bill was unanimously approved by the U.S. Senate on June 24 and named in memory of Iowa Sergeant Brandon Ketchum, who suffered post-traumatic stress disorder following his military service.



*President Joe Biden in the Roosevelt Room of the White House last Tuesday.
(Photo: Evan Vucci)*

“I am so proud that my first standalone bill signed into law this Congress is one that honors the service of an Iowa hero — Sergeant Brandon Ketchum — and recognizes the need to have our veterans’ backs when they return home, regardless of where they live,” Iowa Representative Cindy Axne said in a statement on Wednesday.

According to investigators, Ketchum died by suicide after being denied access to mental health services through the Iowa City VA Medical Center.

The bill requires the VA to establish and maintain three new centers of the Rural Access Network for Growth Enhancement program during the fiscal year 2022 “in areas with interest from personnel and a need for additional mental health care for rural veterans.”

It also requires the Government Accountability Office to “conduct a study and report on whether the VA has sufficient resources to serve rural veterans who need mental health care that is more intensive than traditional outpatient therapy.”

One in five veterans returns home from combat with at least one serious mental health condition, according to the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Axne, a Democrat who sponsored the bill, added “Months ago, I promised Brandon’s mother, Bev, that I would fight to see this legislation through so that veterans like her son could get the mental health care they need when they return home — and I’m grateful to President Biden, Senators Tester and Moran, my Iowa colleagues, and all the others who helped make this law happen.”

The president on Wednesday also signed into law an official Congressional disapproval of a rule initially proposed by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission in October 2020.

The Trump-era rule had sought to update the commission’s conciliation procedures.

“This resolution will help ensure fairness for those who bring forth charges of unlawful workplace discrimination,” Democratic Rep. Bobby Scott of Virginia said ahead of a June 24 House vote to disapprove of the rule.

When the commission finds that an employer likely violated the anti-discrimination law, it is required under Title VII of the 1984 Civil Rights Act to engage in conciliation — or, reaching an out-of-court resolution — before filing a lawsuit.

“This conciliation process is meant to be an informal and confidential opportunity for parties to settle a charge of discrimination in lieu of going to court,” said Scott, adding, “Unfortunately, in the final weeks of the Trump administration, the EEOC issued a final rule that imposed onerous new requirements on the conciliation process.”

Warning that the commission’s rule change would tip the scales in favor of potentially discriminatory employers, Scott said it would have required the EEOC to “expose the identities of workers or groups of workers for whom relief is being sought unless they proactively request anonymity, and their witnesses.”

He added that the rule, if not condemned by Congress, could further drag out the process.

Biden’s signing of the resolution against the commission’s rule on Wednesday means the rule will not take effect.

The American Legion supports more service programs benefiting rural people in order to fulfill the Legion's commitment of service to the community, state and nation as found in our **Resolution No. 119: Support More Service Programs Benefiting the Rural Veteran**

TOPIC 4b: EMPLOYMENT

'MILITARY STATUS' ADDED TO PROTECTED CLASSES

A new law adds "military status" to the list of protected classes in Virginia.

Attorney General Mark Herring celebrated the signing of two bills, which amend several anti-discrimination statutes in Virginia. According to a release, the Office of Civil Rights can now enforce these anti-discrimination protections. Military status includes active duty servicemembers, veterans and dependents.



“Virginia veterans and servicemembers have dedicated their lives to keeping their country safe and the last thing they should ever have to worry about is being discriminated against because of their sacrifice,” said Herring. “The Commonwealth is home to one of the largest military and veteran populations in the country and must do all we can to support them, including protecting them from discrimination.”

The statutes that have been amended by this new law include the Virginia Human Rights Act, the Virginia Fair Housing Law, the Virginia Personnel Act, local human rights commissions, the Manufactured Home Lot Rental Act, and the Virginia Residential Landlord Tenant Act.

The release says Herring's Office of Civil Rights can now play a larger role in protecting servicemembers, veterans and defendants from discrimination in areas such as housing and employment.

Examples of potential discrimination include charging servicemembers a higher security deposit, requiring service members to waive federal housing protections that are covered by the Servicemember Civil Relief Act as a condition of getting a lease, denying employment to an applicant because they are a military spouse, not allowing servicemembers to have certain military-related equipment at their residence, refusing to rent to someone in the reserves because the landlord is concerned the tenant will be deployed, refusing to provide reasonable accommodations for veterans with PTSD, or stirring a "military wife" to a certain part of town where other military families live.

House Bill 2161 and Senate Bill 1410 were both passed during the 2021 General Assembly session. And during the 2020 session, legislators passed the Virginia Values Act, which enacted comprehensive anti-discrimination protections across the Commonwealth.

The American Legion has tirelessly advocated for employment protections for veterans and their families. This change in the Virginia law represents a step in the right direction as veterans and their spouses continue to face discrimination in employment and housing based on military status. The American Legion supports this new law change as outlined in our **Resolution No. 58: Support Legislation that Prohibits Discrimination Against Veterans in Federal Contracts**

TOPIC 5: EDUCATION

FLORIDA NATIONAL GUARD EDUCATION BENEFITS HANG IN BALANCE OF BUDGET TALKS

Soldiers and airmen of the Florida National Guard went months without state education benefits this year despite serving amid the busiest activation period since World War II.

According to the Florida National Guard (FLNG), the Educational Dollars for Duty (EDD) program stopped approving the applications of service members in April after funding for the state program ran out.

The program, a flagship benefit and recruitment tool, covers tuition and fees for eligible troops.

“When people work and they don’t get the education benefits that they’ve been promised, that, to me, is a serious problem,” said Volusia County Sen. Tom Wright, chairman of the Committee on Military and Veterans Affairs, Space, and Domestic Security.

In all, roughly 250 guard members were denied the benefit, according to the Florida National Guard. Moreover, the entire force remained without it until Thursday, when the new budget kicked in.

One guard member, who spoke under the condition of anonymity, lamented the situation as unforeseen.

The 20-year-old joined the military with the benefit in mind and described the situation as an “unkept promise.”



“I’m only taking one class now and I paid out of pocket,” the soldier said. “It’s all I can afford and financially, it set me back.”

Alternatively, others opted to delay their education.

“I expected to drop classes for hurricane duty or a pandemic mission at some point,” said another guard member. “I didn’t expect to not go to school because they’re out of money.”

The EDD program operates on a \$3.1 million annual recurring appropriation. In 2020 and 2021, it received an additional \$1 million non-recurring appropriation, raising the program’s total to \$4.1 million — an amount servicemembers entirely expended this year and last.

Wright said demand for the program is outgrowing supply.

“The 4.1 (million) has always been enough money,” Wright explained. “But I think what’s happening is probably the guardsmen and women are probably, through word of mouth, discovering this program. And so, we ran about \$600,000 short.”

Indeed, EDD usage is increasing.

Since FY 2018, the number of service members utilizing the program has climbed by 15% each year, with STEM program usage — a more costly field of study — rising from 28% to 32%, according to the National Guard.

When told soldiers were without education benefits, Christina Pushaw, DeSantis' press secretary, noted the Republican Governor fully funded the program under his budget.

“The Florida National Guard indicated that the full release of funds would provide the resources necessary to process all the applications with no impact to students,” Pushaw said in an email.

The Florida National Guard, meanwhile, said some guard members may have alternative education benefits provided by the federal government.

“Florida Guardsmen who were planning to use EDD may also be able to take advantage of other educational funding sources, including Federal Tuition Assistance or the Post 9/11 G.I. Bill,” said Brown told Florida Politics in an email.

Still, not all Guardsmen may qualify for federal benefits.

Rather than a state education benefit, the Tuition Assistance program and Post 9/11 G.I. Bill are federally funded programs.

What's more, they cover various education expenses based on a soldier's unique circumstances.

For example, a Guardsmen who serves a year-long federal deployment is entitled to a lesser percentage of G.I Bill benefits than an active-duty soldier with several years of service.

To make up the difference, Guardsmen – who serve on a part time basis under the Governor's command – often couple the state education benefit with the federal programs.

Alternatively, some prefer to leave their G.I. Bill untouched and instead transfer it to their spouse or a child.

The state education benefit, one soldier suggested, is of paramount importance to his family — particularly in a world where a few hundred dollars can separate a student from a diploma.

“The GI bill isn't an option for me,” the guard member said. “That's for my kid's success.”

Notably, this isn't the first time Florida's troops went without.

According to the FLNG, the last time EDD paused benefits due to lack of funding was FY 2016-2017 under then-Gov. Rick Scott.

Financial impacts aside, underfunded benefits may strike a larger blow to the state's National Guard readiness.

Speaking to a Senate Subcommittee in January, the Florida National Guard's top-ranking general described the stated education benefit as an important tool in his toolbox.

Any cut or disruption, the general suggested, may undermine troop morale at a time when troop numbers are few and the mobilizations are many.

Adjutant General James Eifert's remarks came at a time when lawmakers warned of widespread budget cuts amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

"When you make that promise and they're entering school and paying their bills and then you say you don't have that money anymore, it's really a letdown," Eifert told Florida Politics in January before the budget unveil. "It's a pretty significant impact when you cut that program."

If left unaddressed by lawmakers, the likelihood that guard members will go without state education benefits is significant.

According to the Governor's Office, DeSantis' newly signed budget contains funds to boost troop numbers within the state.

"In order to recruit approximately 450 new service members, the Florida Leads budget includes up to \$50 million in ARP funding to build two new Florida National Guard armories in Immokalee and Zephyrhills," a media release says.

The push to build and expand comes as Florida's population outgrows the ranks of the Guard.

When compared to the state population, the Florida National Guard is the second smallest troop in the nation despite serving the fourth most disaster-prone state.

The expansion also comes as Guard units respond to emergencies more frequently. In the last year, Florida guardsmen served at home and abroad including local COVID-19 pandemic missions, natural disasters and the civil unrest in Washington, D.C.

Wright said he plans to use his chairmanship to seek more funds and assess the program's needs.

"We promised these people when they were recruited that this would be one of their benefits and now, we need to come through with the money," Wright said, later adding, "I don't perceive that to be a problem. "We've got such a dedicated Governor that's all about veterans, military, law enforcement."

According to the National Guard Bureau, more troops were domestically mobilized in 2020 than in any other year in American history.

Roughly 12,000 men and women staff the Florida Army National Guard and Air National Guard.

TOPIC 6a: VETERAN HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS

NEW PROTECTIONS FOR HOMEOWNERS WITH VA MORTGAGES, EFFECTIVE JULY 27

Many homeowners have received a forbearance on their VA mortgage payments during the COVID-19 pandemic, but the mortgage payments were deferred and not forgiven. See NCLC's Mortgage Servicing and Loan Modifications § 12.3.7.3. Homeowners who have recovered from COVID-19 hardships will soon be exiting the forbearance program, and then these homeowners



must address both the past deferred payments and the new monthly mortgage payments. This takes on added significance since the moratorium on foreclosure of VA mortgages is scheduled to expire on June 30, 2021, if the expiration date is not extended again.

The VA has just issued a final rule setting out a “partial claim” program that, effective July 27,

2021, allows homeowners to resume their new regular monthly mortgage payments without first having to pay the past mortgage payments that were forborne under the COVID-19 program. See 86 Fed. Reg. 28,692 (May 28, 2021). This final rule will provide homeowners significantly better protection than the VA had initially set out last December in its first proposal for a final rule. See 85 Fed. Reg. 79,142 (Dec. 9, 2020).

The final rule brings the VA’s partial claim program into alignment with other federally related programs dealing with those exiting COVID-19 related mortgage forbearances. For a description of these other forbearance exit programs see NCLC’s Mortgage Servicing and Loan Modifications §§ 12.3.4.3.2 (Fannie Mae), 12.3.5.2.2 (Freddie Mac), 12.3.6.4 (FHA), 12.3.8.4 (USDA).

Of special note, links to NCLC’s Mortgage Servicing and Loan Modifications § 12.3 for a limited time are all open to the public.

This article also lists homeowner options when a homeowner with a VA mortgage coming out of forbearance cannot afford the new, regular monthly charges. These VA options are examined in more detail at NCLC’s Mortgage Servicing and Loan Modifications § 9.2.2.

VA Allows Further Deferral of Forborne Payments, Allowing Borrowers to Resume Their Regular Monthly Payments

The VA’s new program allows servicers to offer a “partial claim” option to VA-guaranteed borrowers to bring their loans current. The partial claim option is modeled after a long-standing FHA program. See NCLC’s Mortgage Servicing and Loan Modifications Chapter 8. The partial claim involves the mortgage servicer making a claim on the VA for a portion of the outstanding mortgage balance—in this case the portion equal to the forborne payments.

The borrower then owes the partial claim amount to the VA at 0% interest and only due at the end of the mortgage loan. There are no monthly payments required from the borrower to the VA for repayment of the partial claim. After the VA pays the partial claim, borrowers restart their pre-hardship mortgage payments to the mortgage servicer with the same monthly payment as before the forbearance.

The partial claim program is available for VA-guaranteed borrowers who are exiting COVID-19 forbearance plans and who were current or less than thirty days past due as of March 1, 2020. Borrowers must indicate to the mortgage servicer that they can resume their former monthly payment. The partial claim loan cannot exceed 30% of the loan’s unpaid principal balance.

The VA's Final Rule Is Significantly More Protective Than Their Original Proposal

The new VA rule going into effect July 27 is a distinct improvement over the VA's original December 9, 2020, proposal. In response to comments from a coalition of consumer advocates led by the National Consumer Law Center (NCLC) and also from the mortgage industry, the VA eliminated several problematic features from their original proposal.

The VA's original proposal required borrowers to repay the partial claim within 10 years but did not require any payments during the first five years of the term. As a result, borrowers still living in their homes would have faced a significant payment shock after the first five years of the partial claim loan. In addition, the VA proposed charging borrowers 1% interest and limiting the size of the partial claim to 15% of the borrower's unpaid balance. It also required a full financial documentation for borrowers wanting to access the partial claim, which would impose a significant barrier to borrowers actually accessing the program.

The VA eliminated all of these problematic loan features and instead provided a program in line with the FHA's partial claim program. See NCLC's Mortgage Servicing and Loan Modifications § 12.3.6.4. By making these changes, the VA increased the amount of assistance borrowers can receive and eliminated unnecessary barriers to accessing the programs. VA-guaranteed borrowers no longer face payment shock and additional interest payments.

New Options for VA Borrowers Unable to Afford Their Pre-Hardship Mortgage Payments

The new final rule delays any obligation to repay the past forborne mortgage payments, allowing homeowners to resume their normal monthly mortgage payment. The VA's new partial claim program does not help borrowers who now cannot afford to pay their new regular mortgage payments. These borrowers should consider the VA's pre-existing loan modification programs including:

- **Modification**, where a lender may modify the mortgage loan by changing one or more of the terms of the loan, including the interest rate or term, and then re-amortizing the balance due. See **NCLC's Mortgage Servicing and Loan Modifications §§ 9.2.2.4, 12.3.7.4.**
- **Refinancing**, where a borrower refinances a high-interest loan at a current, lower rate with the VA's interest rate reduction refinancing loan. The new loan could also be used to obtain a shorter term or a fixed interest rate or to fund energy efficiency improvements. See **NCLC's Mortgage Servicing and Loan Modifications § 9.2.2.9.**
- **Refunding**, where the VA buys the loan when it believes that the default can be cured through various relief measures and the lender is unable or unwilling to grant further relief. Other loss mitigation options may then be available to the homeowner. The VA, for example, may agree to reduce the interest rate well below the market rate. The VA infrequently offers this option. See **NCLC's Mortgage Servicing and Loan Modifications § 9.2.2.8.**
- **Compromise sale**, where the property is sold to a third party for an amount insufficient to pay off the loan and the servicer releases the lien and waives the deficiency in exchange for the sale proceeds. Relocation assistance of up to \$1500 is available to borrowers who complete a compromise sale. See **NCLC's Mortgage Servicing and Loan Modifications § 9.2.2.5.**
- **Deed in lieu of foreclosure** is a voluntary transfer of the property to the holder of the VA-guaranteed loan. Relocation assistance, also known as "cash for keys," of up to \$1500 is available to borrowers who successfully complete a deed in lieu of foreclosure. See **NCLC's Mortgage Servicing and Loan Modifications § 9.2.2.6.**

- **Assumption**, where the lender grants forbearance for a reasonable period of time to permit the sale or transfer of the property. If approved, this releases the borrower from any future liability to the VA, including liability for any loss resulting from the default of the purchaser or subsequent owner of the home. See **NCLC’s Mortgage Servicing and Loan Modifications § 9.2.2.7.**

As the moratorium on VA mortgage loans is expected to expire on June 30th, the VA strengthens protections to VA home loan users who deferred mortgage payments during the pandemic. Those who deferred will not be required to pay off the past mortgage debt in bulk but can start making regular payments. The American Legion reaffirms its strong support for the Department of Veterans Affairs Loan Guaranty Service and its programs and also supports any administrative and/or legislative efforts that will improve and strengthen the Loan Guaranty Service's ability to serve America's veterans as found in our **Resolution No. 329: Support Home Loan Guaranty Program**

TOPIC 6b: VETERAN HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS

OFFICE OF PUBLIC AND INTERGOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS

VA Secretary Denis McDonough statement on department’s extension of moratoriums on foreclosures and evictions, as well as new mortgage repayment assistance to help stabilize vulnerable households.

As the nation emerges from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, an estimated millions of Americans remain in need of mortgage and rental assistance.



To provide continued relief to the Veteran and service member community — the Department of Veterans Affairs is extending by an additional month — the foreclosure and eviction moratoriums through July 31.

Extending the COVID-19 moratoriums on foreclosures and evictions will allow households that may have fallen behind on their mortgages more time to recover. Ultimately the extension will help thousands of VA home loan borrowers stay in their homes, and provide those hard-hit by the pandemic, the time needed to get back on a regular monthly mortgage payment schedule.

In addition to the multiple ways VA already helps borrowers avoid foreclosure, the department is implementing a short-term mortgage repayment assistance program via the [VA Partial Claim Payment program](#), to bring certain borrowers current on their mortgage as they resume regular mortgage payments. VAPCP will be available for COVID-19 impacted borrowers to help them remain in their home and continue to enjoy the benefits of homeownership.

Once the moratoriums end, VA will take additional steps to prevent foreclosures on VA-backed mortgages until borrowers are reviewed for COVID-19 home retention options that are affordable. VA will announce additional steps in July to offer borrowers payment reduction options that will enable more homeowners to stay in their homes. Additionally, VA will also continue to allow

homeowners who have not taken advantage of forbearance to date to enter into COVID-related forbearance through Sept. 30 of this year.

The [VHA Homeless Programs Office](#) offers a wide range of resources and services for Veterans facing housing crises, having helped more than 850,000 Veterans and their families exit homelessness or remain in stable housing since 2010.

The VHA Homeless Programs Office Supportive Services for Veteran Families program gives homeless prevention assistance and has taken a proactive approach to reach Veterans at risk of homelessness during the pandemic. The SSVF program's [Shallow Subsidy](#) intervention initiative will also assist by providing a modest subsidy for two years to extremely low-income Veterans who are at risk of homelessness.

Veterans who are homeless or at imminent risk of becoming homeless can **call or visit their [local VA Medical Center](#)** or contact the National Call Center for Homeless Veterans at 1-877-4AID VET 877-424-3838 for help.

The White House, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, and the Departments of Agriculture and Housing and Urban Development also have resources for homeowners and renters needing help.

The VA updated the rules for the COVID-VAPCP to align with that of other pandemic mortgage loan assistance programs. Under the new rules, zero interest will be charged for partial claims (loans that pay off late mortgage payment debt), the max limit of partial claim doubled from 15% to 30% of principal, and the deadline for repayment has been eliminated. The effects of the new rule will begin July 27, 2021. The American Legion supports any administrative and/or legislative initiative that will give preference to America's veterans and their families in obtaining housing as stated in our **Resolution No. 331: Support Housing Preference for Low-Income Veterans in the Department of Housing and Urban Development**

TOPIC 6c: VETERAN HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS

TESTER ROLLS OUT COMPREHENSIVE BILL TO PERMANENTLY EXPAND PANDEMIC SUPPORT TO HOMELESS VETERANS

Chairman's Building Solutions for Veterans Experiencing Homelessness Act to cut red tape on resources to support unhoused veterans post-pandemic.

Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee Chairman Jon Tester is introducing legislation to make permanent critical pandemic-relief resources that have become essential to providing the most effective care and support to unhoused veterans and their families. This legislation will be considered tomorrow during a Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee hearing.

The Chairman's Building Solutions for Veterans Experiencing Homelessness Act of 2021 would permanently cut red tape on grants provided by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) for organizations assisting veterans experiencing homelessness—extending provisions under Tester's Grant Regulation Adjustment during the Coronavirus Emergency for Homeless Veterans (GRACE) Act of 2020. This bill would also ensure that organizations have the necessary funding to continue supporting veterans and avoid derailing their pre-pandemic progress toward effectively ending veteran homelessness. And it would expand veterans' access to critical resources to help

them get quickly back on their feet, including increased access to transportation, case management services, job training benefits, and improved transitional housing for aging veterans.



Senate Veteran's Affairs Committee Ranking Member Jon Tester, D-Mont., makes his opening statements at a hearing on Capitol Hill

(Photo: Joe Gromelski/Stars and Stripes)

“While the country is turning a corner in combating the COVID-19 pandemic, we’ve still got a long ways to go in tackling veteran homelessness,” said Chairman Tester. “That’s why I’m introducing legislation to keep pandemic-related safety nets in place that have become an essential lifeline in connecting more veterans with permanent and affordable housing through VA. This bill builds on our recent efforts to aggressively combat veteran homelessness, bringing us one step closer to ensuring every person who’s served this country has a safe place to call home.”

Among its many provisions, the Building Solutions for Veterans Experiencing Homelessness Act of 2021 will:

- Permanently remove barriers on funding for construction of housing for veterans experiencing homelessness;
- Provide organizations nationwide with the funding and flexibility to provide adequate services to unhoused veterans;
- Allow VA to supply ending-homelessness organizations with the education and support to best serve our nation’s veterans;
- Direct VA to evaluate and act on flexibilities and funding to combat the affordable housing shortage crisis;
- Provide all veterans with access to case management services to connect them with the benefits and resources they earned;
- Establish a five-year pilot grant program for community substance use recovery programs for unhoused veterans with preference given to programs assisting veterans who face barriers in accessing those services from VA;
- Increase and extend funding connecting veterans with long-term, meaningful jobs;
- Expand public transportation for veterans to access mental health care, medical treatment, job services, and other essential needs;
- Ensure aging veterans are not left on the street while they await placement in long-term care; and
- Request a true assessment by GAO of the challenges veterans and their advocates face in securing them permanent housing.

The Senator’s bill received strong backing from various Veterans Service Organizations nationwide and in Montana.

“We commend Chairman Tester for introducing the Building Solutions for Veterans Experiencing Homelessness Act of 2021,” said Kathryn Monet, CEO of the National Coalition for Homeless Veterans (NCHV). “This bill will allow organizations sheltering homeless veterans to continue to do so, safely and in accordance with CDC guidelines. It will also make key enhancements to Federal Programs by enhancing access to health care navigators, encouraging VA to offer more training to grantees, and permitting service providers the flexibility to maintain critical program adaptations. On behalf of NCHV and all of our members across the nation, thank you for your leadership and for proactively proposing legislative change to chart a better course for veterans experiencing and at-risk of homelessness.”

“The COVID 19 pandemic exposed the many holes that struggling veterans can fall through,” said Steve Peck, President and CEO of US Vets. “I commend Chairman Tester for working to fill in the gaps in VA’s homelessness programs, to make sure that we have a stronger safety net for our most vulnerable veterans.”

“The Building Solutions for Veterans Experiencing Homelessness Act is integral to moving forward beyond the pandemic, as pandemic-relief measures have proved successful in combatting veteran homelessness,” said Jill Bonny, Poverello Center’s Director of Programs and Veteran Services. “The increased accessibility provided by these changes will help get partnering organizations back on track to effectively end veteran homelessness in the country. These measures will not only streamline case management care for veterans, they’ll also addresses systemic causes of homelessness such as employment, access to mental health and substance-use disorder services, and affordable housing. We are excited that Senator Tester is working on these issues—he has been a fierce advocate for Veterans in Montana and across the country. The veterans experiencing homelessness we serve depend on these efforts.”

“The Building Solutions for Veterans Experiencing Homelessness Act of 2021 gives the VA the tools it needs to address some of the most significant barriers to serving homeless veterans,” said Chuck Helget, Executive Director of the California Association of Veteran Service Agencies. “The provisions dealing with high-cost markets and older veterans will have an immediate impact for our members, which serve hundreds of veterans across the state experiencing homelessness each day.”

Earlier this year, Tester held a roundtable discussion with committee members, stakeholders, and veterans’ advocates to solicit feedback on crafting solutions to effectively end veteran homelessness nationwide.

TOPIC 7a: SMALL BUSINESS

SBA ANNOUNCES EXTENSION OF \$100 MILLION GRANT ‘COMMUNITY NAVIGATOR PILOT’ PROGRAM PROPOSALS TO JULY 23, 2021

Grant program to strengthen outreach to businesses in underserved communities enacted through the American Rescue Plan

The [U.S. Small Business Administration](#) announced the extended application date for its new Community Navigator Pilot Program. SBA will now accept proposal submissions through July 23, 2021 and anticipates making award decisions by September 2021. This new initiative, established by the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021, will leverage a community navigator approach to reach our nation’s smallest businesses, with a priority focus on those owned by socially and economically disadvantaged individuals, as well as women and veterans. The Biden-Harris Administration has made delivering equitable relief to

hard-hit small businesses a top priority and will continue to take steps to ensure equitable distribution of relief.

“As SBA Administrator Isabella Casillas Guzman reinforces, we have to meet small businesses where they are. This program is designed to empower a hyperlocal approach through a national network of community navigators who are on the ground truly connecting, empathizing, and tailoring solutions for our small businesses during critical recovery,” said **SBA Associate Administrator for the Office for Entrepreneurial Development [Mark Madrid](#)**. “This bold effort underscores our agency’s commitment to advance equity and bolster an ecosystem in which small businesses continue to apply for the diverse suite of SBA resources, services, and/or programs throughout various stages of business recovery, growth, scale, and/or maturity.”



The Community Navigator Program will have a significant impact in revitalizing small businesses through a Hub and Spoke “Navigator” featuring a lead “Hub” – at the center of a network of “Spoke” organizations that deploy trusted community advocates to work with small businesses during recovery. These networks leverage the business development expertise of the central hub organization and the community credibility of spoke organizations to better connect critical resources with small businesses, with the priority focus on those owned by women, veterans, and socially and economically disadvantaged individuals.

“Inclusion and access continue to be among the most important priorities for aiding small business through recovery. Our underrepresented, women and Native American businesses need our support now to grow and strengthen our economy. Community Navigators is about connecting and rebuilding community to ensure more American small businesses survive and thrive,” said **SBA Assistant Administrator for the Office of Women’s Business Ownership [Natalie Madeira Cofield](#)**.

Competitive grant awards will range from \$1 million to \$5 million for a two-year performance period. Applicants have until July 23, 2021 to submit their applications at grants.gov, [Funding Opportunity Number CNP-2021-01](#). Performance periods are projected to commence in September 2021. Those eligible to apply must meet and demonstrate abilities to support requirements of this funding opportunity.

For more information on the Community Navigators Initiative, please visit www.sba.gov/navigators.

TOPIC 7b: SMALL BUSINESS

SMALL BUSINESS INNOVATION FUND REOPENS JUNE 25

Eligible small businesses can apply for \$10,000, \$20,000 or \$40,000 innovation grants through July 9th.

A fourth round of the Center City Small Business Innovation Fund is launching as businesses face new economic realities due to Covid-19. Nearly \$1 million in funding will be available for small businesses in and around uptown Charlotte when applications reopen on Friday, June 25, at noon.



Though vaccines are widely available and Covid restrictions have lifted, business owners have shared stories of worker shortages, supply chain disruptions and other struggles in their recovery efforts.

Eligible small businesses can apply for \$10,000, \$20,000 or \$40,000 grants to focus on innovative projects that create unique experiences for neighborhoods, distinctive products or services and/or exceptional community engagement. Once again, the fund will prioritize minority-, women- and veteran-owned businesses.

Submissions will close at noon on July 9, with award announcements expected in late August.

As the pandemic emerged, the fund launched with an initial investment of \$2 million by Honeywell and in partnership with the Foundation For The Carolinas. According to Center City Partners, 116 small businesses have been awarded roughly \$3.6 million through the first three rounds of the program — 87% of them are minority-, women- and/or veteran-owned.

Businesses applying in round 4, must meet the following requirements:

- are headquartered in the Charlotte region.
- have an existing storefront within two miles of Trade and Tryon Streets, or be expanding business, services or products within the area.
- employed 50 or fewer workers (full-time or part-time) as of March 1, 2021.

Any business that previously applied will need to submit a new application. Funds cannot be used for day-to-day operating expenses such as payroll, utilities, rent or mortgage. For more information, visit charlottecentercity.org/innovationfundapplication.

TOPIC 8: CAREER FAIRS

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

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

The 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.

Joseph C. Sharpe, Jr., Director
Veterans Employment & Education Division
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Week Ending: 7/02/2021