

NATIONAL VETERANS EMPLOYMENT & EDUCATION COMMISSION

TOPIC 1: ECONOMY

JOB OPENINGS ARE AT RECORD HIGHS. WHY AREN'T UNEMPLOYED AMERICANS FILLING THEM?

Millions of Americans say they can't find a job. Millions of employers say they can't find workers. A reason for this mismatch is that people are leaving cities or industries where businesses need them most.

More than nine million Americans said in May that they wanted jobs and couldn't find them. Companies said they had more than nine million jobs open that weren't filled, a record high.

As the economy reopens, the process of matching laid-off workers to jobs is proving to be slow and complicated, a contrast to the swift and decisive layoffs that followed the initial stage of the pandemic in early 2020.



*A help wanted sign in the window of a local grocery in Driggs, Idaho.
(Photo: Natalie Behring for The Wall Street Journal)*

The disconnect helps to explain why so many companies are complaining about having trouble filling open positions so early in a recovery. It also helps to explain why wages are rising briskly even when the unemployment rate, at 5.9% in June, is well above the pre-pandemic rate of 3.5%. The relatively high jobless rate suggests an excess of labor supply that in theory should hold wages down.

This has implications for policy makers: Sand in the wheels of the labor market could cause inflation pressures that spur Federal Reserve policy makers to pull back on low interest rate policies meant to support growth. In the longer-run, on the other hand, the slow matching process could have benefits, leaving workers in jobs they prefer and the economy more efficient.

Several factors are behind the development: Many workers moved during the pandemic and aren't where jobs are available; many have changed their preferences, for instance pursuing remote work, having discovered the benefits of life with no commute; the economy itself shifted, leading to jobs in industries such as warehousing that aren't in places where workers live or suit the skills they have; extended unemployment benefits and relief checks, meantime, are giving workers time to be choosy in their search for the next job.

"The labor market is a matching market where you need to choose something and be chosen by it," said Julia Pollak, a labor economist at ZipRecruiter Inc., an online employment marketplace.

"This is not a market for shoes and pizzas. It is a very complicated market."

A recent ZipRecruiter survey found 70% of job seekers who last worked in the leisure and hospitality industry say they are now looking for work in a different industry. In addition, 55% of job applicants want remote jobs. An April survey of U.S. workers who lost jobs in the pandemic, conducted by the Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas, found that 30.9% didn't want to return to their old jobs, up from 19.8% last July.

Economists call the phenomenon slowing the job market recovery "mismatch," a disconnect between the jobs open and the people looking for work. It was the subject of intense debate inside the Federal Reserve after the 2008-2009 recession. Some Fed officials believed the economy was suffering from a skills mismatch in the form of unemployed construction, real estate and manufacturing workers who weren't suited for jobs growing in other sectors such as education and health. There wasn't much the Fed could do about that - the argument went - and the central bank's low interest rate policies wouldn't repair the disconnect.

Some Fed officials are now echoing those sentiments. "Policy makers should be cognizant of a range of supply factors that may currently be weighing on employment," Dallas Fed President Robert Kaplan said in a research report on mismatch recently. "These factors may not be particularly susceptible to monetary policy."

The Fed's leader, Jerome Powell, for now is sticking to a view that these disruptions are temporary and low interest rates remain warranted.

'A TOUGH TIME COMING BACK'

Mismatch in the labor market is upending the usual relationship between unemployment and job openings. Normally, as unemployment rises, job openings fall because employers have an abundance of workers from which to choose. Falling unemployment, on the other hand, is associated with a large number of openings. Economists plot this relationship in a chart called the "Beveridge Curve," named after British economist William Beveridge who studied the difficulties of matching workers to jobs in the 1930s and 1940s.

What's unusual now is that unemployment and job openings are both so elevated at the same time and have been for months.

Robin Taylor, of Desert Hills, Ariz., is an example. He was organizing large corporate meetings for pharmaceutical drug launches before Covid-19 hit and shut down many in-person gatherings. Mr. Taylor, who had worked in the corporate events industry for 35 years, was laid off in March of 2020.

He has been sending out his résumé four to 10 times a week, but many jobs that would suit him, including project management, events coordination and production, aren't coming back yet, he said.

"Yes, Amazon has got drivers all over the place," said Mr. Taylor. "All of us are not trained for those jobs. So as far as I'm concerned, I'm having a tough time coming back."

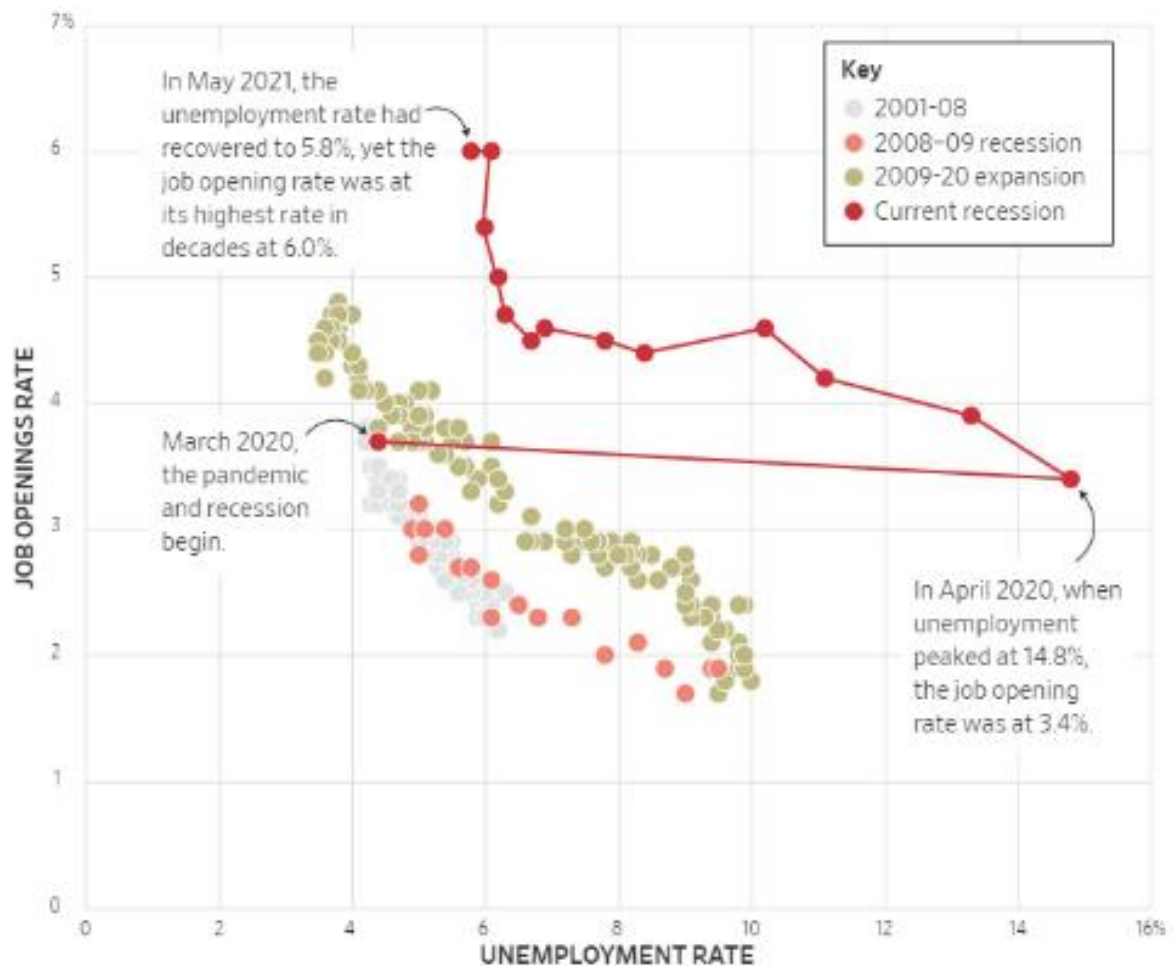
His predicament is what economists call a "skills" mismatch, work experience that doesn't line up with the needs of the marketplace.

A study by researchers Gianluca Violante at Princeton University and Aysegul Sahin at the University of Texas at Austin finds that the number of job vacancies exceeds the number of unemployed people with experience in wholesaling, food services, the entertainment sector, finance and healthcare.

A MYSTIFYING MISMATCH

The economic recovery from Covid-19 is proving to be slow and complicated. There are lots of job openings but millions of Americans say they can't find work.

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Note: Each dot represents a month starting January 2001. The job openings rate is the percentage of all jobs in the U.S. that are unfilled.
Source: Labor Department

Covid itself created skills mismatches, Mr. Violante said. “While the initial increase in mismatch subsided with the reopening of the economy, we are now seeing tightening in some sectors that might be leading to a second wave of mismatch,” he added.

Business skill requirements are shifting as the economy opens and firms hunt for talent.

Employers are easing skills requirements for many low-skilled jobs to find workers in a tight labor market, according to an analysis of job postings by labor-market analytics company Emsi Burning Glass. For instance, the share of hotel-desk clerk job postings requiring “guest-services” skills has dropped sharply since 2019.

At the same time, companies are ramping up requirements to fill high-skilled jobs. The share of aerospace-engineer job postings requiring knowledge of programming language Python and advanced software skills has increased at a rapid pace compared with two years ago, according to Emsi Burning Glass.

The pandemic-induced acceleration of automation and digitization is one factor driving the increase in skills requirements in postings for high-skilled workers, said Matt Sigelman, chief executive at Emsi Burning Glass. The fast-growing skills requirements for knowledge-economy jobs is “going to close out a lot of pathways into those jobs for people who don’t have those skills yet,” Mr. Sigelman said.

MOVING OUT



Because Forage is short of workers, it is cutting lunchtime service and asking staffers to work overtime. Chef Andrew Grasso, above, plates a meal.

(Photo: Natalie Behring for The Wall Street Journal)

Another form of mismatch is geographic. Job openings and available workers are in different places, in part because people moved during the pandemic, and in part because business boomed in unexpected locales.

One of those places is Driggs, Idaho, a cozy mountain town in the Teton Valley where people are flocking to get away.

Forage Bistro and Lounge, a Driggs restaurant serving up crab fritters, farmers market lasagna and beef tenderloin, can’t keep up with demand, said Lisa Hanley, the restaurant’s co-owner. The bistro needs to add

several employees to its staff of 17. Workers aren’t around to fill open roles in part because the small town doesn’t have the housing capacity.

“There’s all these places for people to vacation here, but there’s not the core community of people living here because they can’t find a place to live,” she said.

Short of workers, the bistro is cutting lunchtime service and asking staffers to work overtime. Servers used to work five to eight hour shifts but are now hustling for 10 hours at a time, Ms. Hanley said. To retain workers, Forage recently raised wages an average of 25% from a year earlier, the largest bump since Ms. Hanley became a co-owner in 2015.

Many people have made permanent moves to less dense places, expanding a trend that started before the pandemic.

A Wall Street Journal analysis of U.S. Postal Service change-of-address data shows people from dense urban cores moved to suburbs as well as smaller metros, and from suburbs of large metros to smaller metros, small towns and rural areas. Movement into big cities slowed. For example, people moved from New York City to the shores of Long Island, in addition to Ulster County, N.Y. and Allentown, Pa., the data show.

Stephan Whitaker, an economist at the Federal Reserve Bank of Cleveland, said he saw a connection between people moving and telework. People who can do their jobs remotely have been moving to places within 150 miles of work. “They still want to be able to easily get back to a physical place of employment, but they don’t expect to do it every day,” he said.

The shifts create demand for local services in small towns and suburbs that aren’t always equipped with the labor force to meet that demand. It also leaves workers from big city sandwich shops, coffee shops and other service providers with fewer opportunities.

Foot traffic across several Starbucks locations in the suburbs of New York City was, in aggregate, slightly above 2019 levels in May, according to an analysis by data company Earnest Research. By contrast, visits to Starbucks locations near downtown and midtown office buildings in New York City were down about 65% in May compared with two years earlier.

Another facet of this geographic reordering is regional. Job openings are elevated in the South and Midwest, where unemployment rates are low, according to Labor Department data. In the West and East, unemployment is high and job openings depressed. Shortages, in other words, are specific to certain parts of the country.

Mr. Whitaker said that was likely associated with the incidence of Covid-19 and state reopening policies. States that eased Covid-19 restrictions earliest have lower unemployment rates, meaning tighter labor market conditions, he noted. Some economists say high taxes also have driven people from states such as New York and California to low tax states including Texas and Florida.

A ROCKET AND A FEATHER

Other policies might be playing a role in driving labor market mismatch, most notably, federal jobless benefit programs and Covid-19 relief payments. Generous benefits might be slowing down the search of workers on the sideline. Among 24 states that have announced a June or July end to supplemental unemployment insurance benefits, the average unemployment rate in May was 4.4%. The rest of states and the District of Columbia set a later end to the program in September. The jobless rate on average in those states was 6.0% in May, though it had fallen more since January than in the states ending benefits early.

For companies looking to staff up, this is a large and expensive headache; for workers it might be a chance to find better jobs that suit them in the long run.

“People are taking their time to find better matches and that is being in part facilitated by the additional support, the unemployment insurance as well as the stimulus checks,” said Michael Hanson, an economist at J.P. Morgan. Better fits, he noted, could lead to higher wages and more worker productivity in the long-run. The slow matching process, in other words, might not be all bad.

Mr. Taylor, the out-of-work events planner, said he was drawing on unemployment benefits of \$400 per week, including \$300 in federal funds. He said the jobless benefits are helping support him financially while he searches for a job he hopes will be a good fit for his skill set and will allow him to resume his career.

Because of the abundance of job openings, labor market trends that usually happen in a mature expansion when unemployment is low—such as rising wages, people quitting jobs to look for others, companies complaining of worker shortages—are oddly happening at the beginning of this one. For instance, the percentage of workers voluntarily quitting their jobs in May, 2.5%, was near record levels.

The Flynn Restaurant Group, which operates Wendy's, Panera Bread, Taco Bell, Applebee's and Pizza Hut franchises in 44 states, is pushing bonuses of \$100 to \$250 to employees when they refer prospective workers who are hired. Delivery drivers are getting free pizza.



'Yes, Amazon has got drivers all over the place,' said Mr. Taylor of Desert Hills, Ariz. 'All of us are not trained for those jobs. So as far as I'm concerned, I'm having a tough time coming back.'

(Photo: Ash Ponders for The Wall Street Journal)

People discovered in the pandemic that they like flexible hours and working from home, said Betsy Mercado, senior vice president of human resources at Flynn. "They are trying to figure out what job is going to provide them with the most income and the flexibility they need," she said.

"People have an ability now to really choose where they want to work."

One key question is whether these developments are temporary or long-lasting. Federal Reserve officials are expecting the jobless rate to fall faster than it has. By the fourth quarter, they expect it to reach 4.5%, more than a percentage point from where it was in June. Reaching that goal will be a stretch if the pace of job matching doesn't pick up.

If the jobless rate doesn't fall more, the Fed will have a riddle to solve: Should it keep its low-interest rate policies in place longer to spur economic growth and more aggressive hiring by firms, or should it raise rates to forestall inflation pressures in an economy beset by nagging bottlenecks, including those in labor markets.

Prospective workers could be forced to move more aggressively in the months ahead as jobless benefits expire. Because all states are slated to end supplemental benefits by early September, the next few months will be critical in shaping how aggressively people look for jobs.

Robert Hall, an economics professor at Stanford University, says the job matching process has progressed in two stages. Last year, millions of people were called back to their jobs from temporary layoffs and the unemployment rate descended quickly from 14.8% to 6.7%. This year, the progress has slowed markedly; the jobless rate fell from 6.3% in January to 5.9% in June.

Mr. Hall and Marianna Kudlyak at the Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco studied the past 10 recoveries and concluded that U.S. job recoveries have a common pattern. In normal times, they find, “unemployment rises like a rocket and falls like a feather.”

“The easy stuff has been accomplished,” Mr. Hall said in an interview. The rest of the job recovery, he concluded, is going to take some time.

| 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 | |
| | June 2020 | June 2021 | June 2020 | June 2021 | June 2020 | June 2021 |
| Unemployed | 776 | 437 | 675 | 375 | 101 | 62 |
| Unemployment rate | 8.6 | 4.8 | 8.5 | 4.7 | 9.6 | 5.5 |

The national unemployment rate is 5.5 percent (May 2021). Gulf War II veterans' unemployment rate is 5.2 percent. Currently, Gulf War II women veterans' unemployment rate is 9.5 percent.

In June 2021, the veteran unemployment rate was 4.8%. The comparable non-veteran unemployment rate was 5.9% in June.

TOPIC 2: VIRTUAL MEETINGS & CONFERENCE CALLS

On Monday, July 5, federally observed holiday, nothing to report.

On Tuesday, July 6, the National Veterans Employment and Education Division attended a four-corners congressional veterans affairs committee call about upcoming economic opportunity issues. VE&E staff reiterated its support of the Protect the GI Bill Act, and that it's position related to un-accredited ABA law schools had not changed.

On Tuesday, July 6, the National Veterans Employment and Education Division had a conversation with Universal Technology Institute (UTI) on approval of technical/vocational training and of online training for non-college degree programs.

On Tuesday, July 6, the National Veterans Employment and Education Division is working on hosting an Employment Innovation Taskforce Roundtable on July 15th, 2021: The roundtable aims to promote a positive and proactive approach to navigating the future employment and talent landscape through a discussion with Taskforce member companies that have addressed these challenges head-on, with an emphasis on the impact on veterans in addition to employment, focusing on their achievements addressing the post-COVID era of work.

On Wednesday, July 7, the National Veterans Employment and Education Division met with the National Association of State Approving Agencies (NASAA) Executive leadership on Risk Based Surveys; Also, met with NASAA Risk-Based-Survey (RBS) project manager on evaluation of program.

On Wednesday, July 7, the National Veterans Employment and Education Division met with Gordon Sund, LC for Rep. Blaine Luetkemeyer to discuss small business operations. Some items considered were:

- Expanding the number of VBOCs around the country
- GI Bill being used for business start-ups
- Veteran in rural areas and U.S. territories access to capital
- Broadband access for veterans
- VA acquisition program transition to DLA acquisition program and VETS First
- Lack of data on veteran businesses
- Lack of data of unemployment for veterans living in U.S. territories

On Wednesday, July 7, the National Veterans Employment and Education Division had a discussion with Will Hubbard, CEO of Veterans Education Success (VES) and other VSOs on the approval of non-accredited programs.

On Wednesday, July 7, the National Veterans Employment and Education Division had a conference call with the Government Accountability Office (GAO) staff to discuss the Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs (OFCCP) support for veterans. Specifically, VE&E staff shared its experience with the lack of communications with the office when it came to oversight of the Vietnam Era Veterans' Readjustment Assistance Act (VEVRAA).

On Wednesday, July 7, the National Veterans Employment and Education Division attended a conference call with the organization California Accredited Law Schools (CALS). CALS has lobbied for striking the provision within the Protect GI Bill that covers unaccredited ABA law schools and has successfully petitioned a California state resolution asking for the change. VE&E staff informed CALS that The American Legion's national policy positions are dictated by resolutions passed at Convention and by our National Executive Committee, not by state Departments.

On Thursday, July 8, the National Veterans Employment and Education Division met with Jennifer Worth, Senior Vice President, Workforce and Economic Development at American Association of Community Colleges to highlight potential areas to explore familiar or novel initiatives in future. Some items discussed were:

- Credentialing programs
- Veterans Training
- Licensing and certification SkillBridge
- Broadband in rural communities

On Thursday, July 8, the National Veterans Employment and Education Division continued conversations with the House Veterans Affairs Committee pending legislation on enhancing approval requirements for GI Bill education and training programs and 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 8, the National Veterans Employment and Education Division had a meeting with the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) about potential future collaborations. AACC was instrumental in providing inputs on our Future of Credentialing report and offered to continue collaborating on programmatic functions of the organization related to veterans hiring pipelines.

On Thursday, July 8, the National Veterans Employment and Education Division had conversations with Veterans Education Success on California Law schools and their attempt to roll back Isackson & Roe requirements.

On Friday, July 9, the National Veterans Employment and Education Division attended a conference call with GAO staff concerning military credentialing. GAO is conducting work in response to a congressional mandate in the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2021, which requires a study on the transferability of military certifications to civilian occupational licenses and certifications. VE&E staff shared their concern that a lack of a Department of Defense Instruction (DODI) is preventing the standardization of credentialing programs across military branches.

On Friday, July 9, the National Veterans Employment and Education Division continued evaluation of risk-based survey pilot visits and reports and further refining and enhancing this important model of oversight for GI Bill programs and institutions of training and learning.

On Friday, July 9, the National Veterans Employment and Education Division continued work on draft legislation for enhancing and improving GI Bill approval requirements for education and training programs.

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
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 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: 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

INSERTING AND REPLACING BUNKER LABS AND JPMORGAN CHASE COMMERCIAL BANKING LAUNCH MENTORSHIP PROGRAM FOR MILITARY-CONNECTED EXECUTIVES

Seeking nominations for first cohort of CEOcircle program which provides networking, mentorship and master classes for growing military-connected businesses.



Today Bunker Labs and JPMorgan Chase Commercial Banking announced that applications are open for the inaugural CEOcircle program for military-connected companies.

“Veteran-owned companies play a significant role in our economy, making up 9 percent of U.S. businesses and employing nearly 6 million Americans,” said Terry Hill, Managing Director at JPMorgan Chase Commercial Banking and former U.S. Army Captain. “We’re supporting the CEOcircle program to help

exceptional military-connected businesses continue to thrive and positively impact our communities.”

INAUGURAL CEOCIRCLE

The twelve-month program will provide military-connected businesses with targeted educational programming, peer-to-peer networking via monthly group meetings, and financial expertise gleaned from a ten-week mentorship with JPMorgan Chase advisors.

To be eligible for the CEOcircle program, businesses must:

- Have at least one military-connected senior executive,
- Operate within the Diversified Industries or Technology & Disruptive Commerce industries,
- And have achieved an annual revenue of \$5 million+, with high growth potential.
- Participation in the CEOcircle program is free of charge, as is the application, which is open through August 4, 2021.

Learn more and apply at <https://bunkerlabs.org/ceo-circle/>.

“We’re excited to work with JPMorgan Chase to bring new opportunities to more military-connected entrepreneurs,” said Blake Hogan, CEO of Bunker Labs. “Our learnings will enable us to grow and serve additional industries and business stages, while building on our continuum of support for military-connected founders.”

EMPOWERING VETERAN-OWNED BUSINESSES

Since its founding in 2014, Bunker Labs and JPMorgan Chase have fostered a long-standing relationship through their shared goal of empowering veteran-owned businesses. In 2019, JPMorgan Chase committed \$3 million to help Bunker Labs establish chapters in all 50 states, and in 2016 committed \$1.5 million to sponsor the Bunker Builds America tour.

Since establishing the Office of Military and Veterans Affairs in 2011, JPMorgan Chase has hired more than 16,000 veterans and facilitated more than 680,000 veteran hires through the Veteran Jobs Mission coalition; committed more than \$8 million to support veteran-owned small businesses; donated more than 1,000 mortgage-free homes to military families; and enrolled nearly 30,000 veterans and military spouses in the Onward to Opportunity program, a free career training, certification and employment course operated through the Institute for Veterans and Military Families at Syracuse University, which was co-founded and is supported by JPMorgan Chase. Learn more at: www.jpmorganchase.com/veterans

ABOUT BUNKER LABS

Bunker Labs is a national 501(c)3 nonprofit organization with the mission of ensuring that the military-connected community has the network, tools, and opportunities they need to start successful ventures. We accomplish our mission by inspiring members of the military community to see their entrepreneurial potential. We equip our program participants with practical tools, insights, experts, and resources to accelerate their success, and we connect entrepreneurs with a robust community and diverse, relevant networks.

ABOUT JPMORGAN CHASE COMMERCIAL BANKING

JPMorgan Chase Commercial Banking is a business of JPMorgan Chase & Co. (NYSE: JPM), a leading global financial services firm with assets of \$3.7 trillion and operations worldwide. Through its Middle Market Banking & Specialized Industries, Corporate Client Banking & Specialized Industries and Commercial Real Estate businesses, Commercial Banking serves emerging startups to midsize businesses and large corporations as well as government entities, not-for-profit organizations, and commercial real estate investors, developers and owners. Clients are supported through every stage of growth with specialized industry expertise and tailored financial solutions including credit and financing, treasury and payment services, international banking and more. Information about JPMorgan Chase Commercial Banking is available at www.jpmorganchase.com/commercial.

TOPIC 4b: EMPLOYMENT

MILITARY VETERAN PRIVATE EMPLOYER PREFERENCE BILL REACHES UNANIMOUS LEGISLATIVE SUPPORT

SB 665 widely expected to pass legislature, become law later this year.

A bill that would allow businesses to give a voluntary preference in hiring new military veteran employees gained more support this week before its upcoming vote in the Assembly Military and Veterans Affairs Committee later this month.

Authored by Senator Tom Umberg (D-Santa Ana), Senate Bill 665 would formally authorize private employers to establish and maintain a written veterans' preference



Senator Tom Umberg (Photo: Kevin Sanders for California Globe)

employment policy, to be applied uniformly to hiring decisions, to give a voluntary preference for hiring or retaining a veteran over another qualified applicant or employee. If approved, employers with such a veterans' preference employment policy would need to annually report to the Department of Fair Employment and Housing the number of veterans hired or retained under the policy, as well as demographic information about hired veterans.

SB 665, also known as the Voluntary Veterans' Preference Employment Policy Act, would also prohibit a veterans' preference employment policy from being established or applied for the purpose of discriminating against an employment applicant on the basis of a protected classification.

Senator Umberg, a retired Army Colonel, wrote the bill largely as a way to expand veteran hiring and to help ease the transition from between being in the military to a civilian career.

"We have a moral obligation to treat our veterans with dignity because they are willing to make the ultimate sacrifice to defend our Constitution," said the Senator after SB 665 passed the Assembly Labor and Employment Committee by a vote of 7-0 in June. "SB 665 honors and recognizes the sacrifices of our veterans. Transitioning from service to civilian workforce is not always easy. By offering a voluntary hiring preference for veterans to the private sector serves as a tool to help young men and women who served and assist in building a career."

Since being introduced in February, the bill has had little way in terms of opposition. To date, it has passed every Assembly and Senate committee it has been voted on unanimously, even passing the Senate 32-0. Bipartisan support, as well as support through dozens of local, state, and national veterans organizations, have ensured passage every vote.

This week, several Assembly members who had previously not committed or signaled a vote firmly changed course to support the bill following the months of support buildup changing their mind.

"Can you imagine someone voting against this bill? It is amazing that some here were even considering it," said "Dana" a State Capitol staffer to the Globe on Thursday. "But all it takes is a

talk with a veteran or two to realize that, even with favorable hiring policies and federal hirings largely favoring veterans, it is still hard to nail down a job and even keep a job. Two out of three vets leave a job within 2 years.”

“And if that wasn’t enough to convince people here, a lot of voters would not look kindly upon lawmakers who decided to vote against this bill to make some sort of point. But this week the tide really pushed those last remaining holdouts, with one even saying that you couldn’t ‘argue with the data’ that this bill would help vets.”

“So, pretty much any doubt about [SB 665] is now gone. Hearings and votes are just a formality at this point.”

If passed, California will become the 40th state to have legislation that allows for private employer veteran hiring and retention preference. SB 665 is expected to be heard in the Assembly Military and Veterans Affairs Committee later this month.

TOPIC 5a: EDUCATION

SAINT LEO UNIVERSITY PLANS THE NATION’S FIRST VETERAN STUDIES BACHELOR’S DEGREE PROGRAM

Veteran studies programs, like gender studies or ethnic studies, aim to focus on the people rather than military programs, strategy or logistics.



Saint Leo University to offer the country's first four-year degree in veterans' studies.

For almost as long as there have been wars, there have been people who study veterans. Until now, the work has been done by students of sociology and psychology and anthropology. But a specific degree program to study veterans is being launched this fall at Saint Leo University in central Florida. Believed to be the first in the country, the bachelor’s degree program in veteran studies is designed to break down and examine the veteran experience, from decision to enlist to service to discharge and beyond.

At Saint Leo, about one third of the student population is connected to the military in some way, including actively enlisted members, veterans and their spouses and children. But Luke McLees,

director of Saint Leo's office of military affairs and services, said the program is open to and valuable for all students, regardless of their veteran status.

And it will differ from programs in military studies at colleges around the country, which focus on strategy, military systems and the history of warfare.

Will Hubbard, the interim chief policy officer at the advocacy group Veterans Education Success, said a veteran is different from someone actively serving, but it's impossible to decouple the two. He said veteran studies is more about the long-term impacts of war than the logistics of arming and deploying forces.

The students at Saint Leo will start with a course that takes a holistic look at the veteran experience, McLees said, and then move to a class that looks at "legendary warriors" from wars across time and geography outside the United States, and a course specifically focused on Native American veterans serving two sovereigns. For elective courses, he said, they will be able to choose from topics like conflict resolution, death and the meaning of life, the role of the military in the modern world, military psychology, human memory, social ethics, human behavior in crisis, political psychology and an array of other courses on specific wars.

The 39-credit curriculum is designed so that students can double major. Students also have the option of pursuing a 15-credit minor in veteran studies.

Karen Hannel, the chair of Saint Leo's interdisciplinary studies department, said she hopes more schools will consider adding four-year veteran studies programs.

For academics who haven't served in the military, Hannel said, "maybe this hasn't been part of their life, they've never thought to look through this lens, but when it's presented to them, I think they're suddenly going to start seeing stories, artwork, policies, things they have known for years, decades maybe, in a different light."

McLees hopes that, as more people become educated about the veteran experience, it will dispel stereotypes about veterans and help nonveterans understand the implications of military service.

Some scholars who have been studying veterans have published their work in the *Journal of Veterans Studies*, which was established in 2016 by Mariana Grohowski, who is also the editor. Grohowski, who has family connections to the military, has a Ph.D. in rhetoric and composition but has largely focused her research on the experiences of women veterans.

"We understand that a person has very many intersecting identities – race, culture, ethnicity, social class, education," Grohowski said. "And with veteran studies, we're trying to bring that veteran element to the forefront to try to understand how they're making their life."

As minor programs become more prevalent and the Saint Leo program begins this fall, Grohowski said she hopes scholars in the field and the people running the programs can establish the theoretical infrastructure to ensure there is some consistency among colleges.

The program at Saint Leo comes nearly a decade after the first veteran studies minors began appearing in course catalogues around the country, said Jim Craig, an associate dean at the University of Missouri-Saint Louis. He said he believes Missouri's program, first offered in 2014, was among the first in the country.

Craig said it's an effort to get more people thinking about veterans beyond "simply standing up at a baseball game and cheering."

"We'd like you to ask deeper questions—instead of 'thank you for your service,' how about 'tell me about your service,' or 'explain to me what you did,'" Craig said.

Craig said he modeled Missouri's program after that of Eastern Kentucky University, which had launched a year earlier.

"If you look at the history of women's studies programs on campuses, or Latino Studies on campuses, a lot of that is a groundswell of students saying 'I want to study this,' advocating, agitating in all sorts of ways. And, then the university responding with programs that start to develop around those degrees," Craig said. "There is not a groundswell of veteran students clamoring to say, 'I want to study my experience more deeply.' I think there should be, but there isn't."

Advocates hope the interdisciplinary nature of these programs means students will be well equipped to go into jobs in advocacy, social work, business consulting, disaster and recovery services, law or education, among others.

Though at Missouri the program is housed in the Department of Military and Veteran Studies, Craig said there is a distinct difference between the two. Military studies tends to focus on defense strategy, history and force readiness, whereas veteran studies focuses on the way these things affect people while they are coming in and out of their primary culture.

Hubbard of Veterans Education Success said he thinks of veterans as alumni of the military, whose experiences merit study.

The American Legion supports this due to **Resolution No. 22: The American Legion 21st Century Policy on Education** which encourages the support of education as it is a vital prerequisite to a democratic society.

TOPIC 5b: EDUCATION

COMMENTARY: INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER LEARNING MUST DOUBLE DOWN SUPPORT FOR STUDENT VETERANS



They had it all figured out: How to go to college while managing a pay cut, living off GI Bill benefits, and maybe taking a part-time job to support their families.

But it all began to go awry for many student veterans in the spring of 2020, thanks to the COVID-19 pandemic. The part-time job wasn't available anymore, and the kids couldn't go to school. All college courses moved online, threatening the housing allowance and future

tuition payments. The bills piled up, and there was nowhere to go for the peace and quiet needed to study. Hard decisions had to be made about whether to continue to pursue their degrees, and anxiety mounted.

COVID-19 wreaked havoc on veterans pursuing college degrees as well as the institutions educating them. While the end of the pandemic seems imminent, now is the time to double down our support, both for the veterans themselves and for the institutions that educate them – as many schools face budget crises and across-the-board cuts in programs, including those serving veterans. It is imperative that decision makers at institutions of higher learning understand the challenges facing the student veteran community to manage the support and services veterans need as well as the hard decisions that the institutions face after a year of financial upheaval.

Student veterans are typically nontraditional students – more likely to have families, more likely to be the first in their families to go to college, and more likely to have additional responsibilities outside the classroom. They come with a spirit of resilience, a dedication to their studies, and leadership skills that were honed during their military service. But the unique characteristics and attributes of student veterans also raise distinct challenges to academic success which require institutions to create and integrate appropriate services for them.

It's clear that the pandemic has taken a huge toll on student veterans. Operation College Promise, a national policy, research, and education program, surveyed 235 student veterans about the pandemic's effects and found 60 percent had increased financial challenges, 52 percent reported mental health problems, almost 40 percent noted declines in communication with school staff, and 35 percent experienced employment issues. Additionally, about 30 percent of the institutions questioned by Operation College Promise reported a budget decline likely to affect veteran- and military-support programs.

Effects like these don't vanish overnight and may never reverse without a mindful and lasting dedication to provide support and services to those who have already given so much.

The George W. Bush Presidential Center's Military Service Initiative convened a task force of experts on veterans and higher education to study the research on the effects of the pandemic and came up with these recommended solutions for institutions of higher learning:

First, provide flexible coursework and pathways to degree completion. Institutional decision makers should encourage the continuation of modified coursework and paths to degree completion for student veterans, even after the COVID-19 pandemic is over.

Second, develop and offer virtual/hybrid coursework that is high quality, equitable, and accessible for veterans. Institutions of higher learning should refine their virtual/hybrid coursework and develop standard measurement and quality evaluation processes with clear retention rate outcomes.

Third, continue funding veteran support programs. Schools should maintain their military support offices and student veteran programming, even in the face of budget cuts. Beyond any type of ethical imperative, it is in the business interest of the institutions of higher learning to do so.

While everyone is excited at the prospect of a return to normalcy, the effects of the pandemic year on the critical services that support student veterans – a population facing a unique set of challenges – will be felt for years to come.

Financial assistance, mental health care, academic assistance, and follow-on employment, specifically designed for the needs of the veteran community, are vital to keeping service members enrolled in degree-granting institutions and attaining their educational goals.

As we start to see the end of the pandemic in 2021, it's time to regroup, reassess, and restore ways to meet the needs of the veteran community. While we recognize the many budgetary challenges that continue to impact higher education, supporting the veteran population is not only the right thing to do, but will reflect on the institutions as veterans continue to become leaders across the country.

Our actions, or inactions, right now have the potential to repay – in some small way – our debt to the veteran community. Let's make them count.

Maj. Amy Bernard, USMC (Ret.) is the Senior Program Manager of Veteran Economic Opportunity at the George W. Bush Institute's Military Service Initiative.

The American Legion applauds and recognizes the solutions posited by the George W. Bush Presidential Center's military Service Initiative. In particular, the second solution falls in line with **Resolution No. 343: Support Student-Veterans Return-On-Investment Education Outcomes**, whereby higher education institutions provide clear measurement standards document metrics that demonstrate continuous improvement vital to transparency and accountability.

TOPIC 6a: VETERAN HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS

VA AWARDS \$418 MILLION IN GRANTS TO HELP VETERANS AND FAMILIES AT RISK OF HOMELESSNESS

The Department of Veterans Affairs awarded \$418 million in grants to more than 260 non-profit organizations in June, allowing low-income Veteran families around the nation to access services under the Supportive Services for Veteran Families program.

SSVF grantees are authorized to use the funds to rapidly re-house Veterans who become homeless or to prevent Veterans from becoming homeless.

“As a result of VA's Supportive Services for Veteran Families program and other housing assistance efforts, Veteran homelessness has been cut in half since the launch of 2010's Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness,” said VA Secretary Denis McDonough. “Since then, hundreds of thousands of Veterans and their families have been placed into permanent housing or prevented from falling into homelessness by VA's homelessness programs and targeted housing vouchers provided by the Department of Housing and Urban Development.”



SSVF grantees are in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Guam, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Through partnerships with VA and community programs, SSVF provides eligible Veteran families with outreach, case management and assistance obtaining VA and other benefits, which can include health care, financial planning, childcare, legal and fiduciary payee assistance, transportation, housing counseling and other services.

Helping Veterans in need of permanent housing remains a critical priority for VA. In fiscal year 2020, VA served 112,070 participants, including 77,590 Veterans and 19,919 children through the SSVF program.

This year's grant recipients successfully competed under a Notice of Fund Availability published November 19, 2020. The funding will support SSVF services from October 1, 2021 through September 30, 2022.

Learn more about the [SSVF program](#).

The American Legion supports Congress permanently funding the Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) Program as found in our **Resolution No. 340: Support Permanent Authorization for the Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) Program.**

TOPIC 6b: VETERAN HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS

DEPARTMENT OF NEW JERSEY HOSTING MOBILE STAND DOWNS FOR HOMELESS VETERANS



*Department Commanders: VFW Luddie Austin,
Legion Dan Dunn, and DAV Leonard Long
(Photo: The American Legion Post 25, Milltown,
Courtesy of Bernie Kofoet)*

Other Stand Down providers (Cherry Hill and Newark) cancelled their events last Fall because of COVID, but the Department of New Jersey adapted and overcame. The Department of N.J. fully knew that our homeless and at risk brothers and sisters still needed our assistance whatever the societal excuse.

When we realized this dreaded virus was not going away, especially the restrictions, The Department of N.J. designed two other methodologies to get the job done. The first was a hybrid of a Mobile scenario devised by Pat Carney, Wilmington VA Outreach Manager and Department of NJ VA Liaison, and the “pop-up” type event used by our partner Community Hope in the northern counties.

The Mobile scenario is simple – we go to the vets vs. them coming to our indoor Atlantic City facility. The Department of N.J. planned and conducted five of these events serving 223 at risk and homeless veterans; and yes women with children. The Department of N.J. had 240 service providers and volunteers to serve their immediate and ongoing needs. These regional events were conducted in southern and central counties.

The second methodology was intentionally designed for more localized veterans in need, with events conducted in three northern counties. The Department of N.J. served 88 veterans with 130

caring volunteers and service providers. The Department of N.J. now serves the homeless needs for the entire state, as no other provider or VA.

The Department of N.J. are truly grateful for the enduring and long-lasting, dedicated partners they have had since their Stand Down genesis in 2017. They include the NJ Departments of the VFW and DAV, our backbone the Wilmington VA, American Red Cross, Camden Catholic Charities, DMAVA, the NJ Casino Control Commission and State Parole, the City of Atlantic City, and The American Legion Family.

Most of these “heroes”, except for the more local organizations, have also joined us for our northern Local events. This does not include the 15 – 20 veteran-related service providers who also make things happen at every event. VANJ has now joined with us for our last two Local Stand Downs.

There is no other Department of the 55 in The American Legion who directly manage and conduct homeless veteran Stand Downs, to this extent, with this volume and with the amount of work effort required. This surely has been substantiated by The Department of N.J. 4 of 5 consecutive years for receiving National’s first place Homeless Outreach Award! More to come, but The Department of N.J. is going back to their birthplace at the Atlantic City All Wars Memorial Building (yes indoors!) on September 8, wherein we probably will serve 175 veterans!



Atlantic County Commander: Pat Tatum, Jordan Carlson NJ DAV Homeless Chair & Gladys Krasicki, NJ clothing buyer.

TOPIC 6b: VETERAN HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS

VA SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM PAYS TUITION AND SALARY WHILE YOU'RE IN SCHOOL

The VA National Education for Employees Program (VANEED) covers education costs and offers a replacement salary while recipients are in school.

At VA, we support your career goals and offer numerous education support programs and scholarships to help you on your way to achieving them. One of these is the [VA National Education for Employees Program](#) (VANEED), which covers not only some of your education costs but also pays your replacement salary while you attend school full-time.

Isaac N. Womack, a registered nurse with the [VA Portland Health Care System](#), used his VANEED scholarship to complete nursing school at the University of Portland.

“This generous scholarship enabled me to attend a program that was otherwise out of my financial reach – it paid a majority share of my tuition. It also matched my regular income, allowing me to focus on schoolwork and other professional pursuits rather than spending time at a job,” Womack said.

During his time in nursing school, Womack helped create and manage Oregon Health & Science University’s 3D Printing Prosthetics Lab, which brings prosthetic devices to underserved families across the U.S.

He also helped start an internship program, giving college students from across the U.S. and Canada the chance to spend a summer at the lab, design a solution for a patient, and personally deliver it to the patient.

The VANEED scholarship also freed Womack to focus exclusively on his studies, leading to a senior clinical capstone at Portland VA Medical Center and ultimately a job offer there.

“That extra time that I had to study allowed me to get the most out of my educational experience,” Womack said. “I am proud to be a part of this team and help bring the highest quality of care to Veterans.”

VANEED SCHOLARSHIP

Part- and full-time VA employees who are enrolled in school can receive a full salary and additional tax-free funds toward the cost of higher education, including tuition, registration fees and books. The program is designed to accelerate completion of a degree in an approved academic program for Title 38 or hybrid Title 38 occupations, including:

- Physicians.
- Dentists.
- Chiropractors.
- Podiatrists.
- Optometrists.
- Registered and licensed practical nurses.
- Physician’s assistants.
- Respiratory, physical and occupational therapists.
- Pharmacists.

Recipients have up to three years to complete their education and must agree to serve three years in a VA career for which they trained after program completion or licensure.

The maximum funding is \$41,160.42 for the equivalent of three years of full-time coursework, up to 90 credit hours for undergraduate coursework or 54 for graduate-level coursework.

WORK AT VA

If you’re looking for an employer that supports your desire to learn and grow, look no further than VA. We’re here to help you move into the next phase of your career.

- READ more about the [VANEED program](#).
- EXPLORE our other [education support benefits](#).
- SEARCH for an [open position](#) near you.

TOPIC 6c: VETERAN HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS

MANY MILITARY FAMILIES, CAUGHT IN A HOUSING CRUNCH, ARE SUFFERING THIS PCS SEASON

Service members and their families across the country are feeling the sting of the hot housing market as they move to new duty stations.

Many are paying out of pocket for longer stays in temporary lodging, waiting longer for on-base housing and paying hundreds of dollars more per month for rentals than their housing allowance covers, if they can even find a rental.

For many who want to purchase a home, it means offering tens of thousands of dollars above the asking price and bidding against multiple buyers in a fiercely competitive market — and often losing out to higher bidders.

Last week, a family moving from Bahrain to Kitsap, Washington, bid \$61,000 over the asking price for a house and didn't even come close to getting their offer accepted. They were trying to buy a house after unsuccessful attempts to find a rental, they wrote in response to a Military Times callout for service members' experiences in finding housing this summer.

Their situation now: "We arrive in Washington in four weeks, with three kids and a dog, and so far we have no idea where we'll go," they wrote.

According to the National Association of Realtors, the median price for existing homes increased by 23.6 percent nationwide in May, compared to last year, and properties typically sold in 17 days. Many military families are seeing properties going a lot faster than that. But there's also been a shortage of inventory. And rising home prices are pushing would-be buyers to rentals, which in turn is pushing up the cost of rent. Service members describe bidding wars between tenants.

Service members across the country, from Washington state to Fort Bragg, North Carolina, shared their tales of woe.

"I honestly don't know what to do at this point," wrote one soldier. His family hasn't made their permanent change of station move yet and have decided to push back the pickup of their household goods "with the hope of finding something before we end up homeless," he wrote.

He's on orders to Fort Campbell, Kentucky, and they've been looking for a rental for more than two months.

"The rental market is so badly inflated that tiny houses are going for far more than [Basic Allowance for Housing] rates, and good properties disappear in hours, not days. ... This has been our worst move in over 18 years, and we do not have any hopes of it getting better."

A number of service members told Military Times they're being forced to pay hundreds of dollars more in rent per month than their housing allowance covers. One spouse of a Navy E-5 said she and her husband struggled to find housing for their family of five when he got orders to Everett Naval Station, Washington.

"My husband will be deploying, and we had to settle on a place and now pay \$600 out of pocket" for rent each month, she said. They were also turned down by some landlords because they don't earn three times the monthly rent, she said. "I have always known the mission is first when it comes to military life, but my husband should not have to worry about his wife and kids not living comfortably."

A soldier moving to Fort Bragg hasn't been able to get housing on post, and needed to get settled in to get his daughter registered for school. He found a rental in the civilian community, but had to pay for the month of July even though they won't move in until August.

“I was lucky to get a house, as it had 20 applicants within the first two hours,” he wrote. “The house is also \$600 over BAH, not including utilities. I also had to sign a multiyear lease or I would have lost to other bidders.”

Most people don’t consider that their writing skills could be a factor when they’re vying for a rental property, but one field grade officer said the landlord required him to provide photos of himself and write an essay to compete against five other applicants. The property near Los Angeles Air Force Base was listed for less than 24 hours before it attracted those applicants.

“I consider myself lucky for finding a rental property that is only \$400 over my BAH,” he wrote.

Service members raised a number of issues that are exacerbating the problem, including policies at some installations that preclude them from getting on a housing waiting list until they have arrived at their duty station. They see some of their colleagues going to bases where the policies are different, allowing families to get on the waiting list before leaving their current duty station, which has allowed them to get into housing earlier.

IS HELP ON THE WAY?

Service and Defense Department officials are aware of the struggles finding housing.

“We’re not in a good situation, and we’re very concerned about all of our service members that are PCSing at a time like this,” said Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force JoAnne S. Bass during a June 28 Facebook “Coffee Talk” Q&A with airmen.

In some locations there’s not enough base housing, and service members are having to find housing in the civilian community.

“In many cases the rent is extremely high, or if they try to buy a house, we’re hearing stories of \$20,000, \$30,000, \$70,000 over the asking price. We’ll never be able to compete, nor would we want our service members in that situation,” Bass said.

Officials are pursuing various options, said Bass and Air Force Lt. Gen. Brian Kelly, deputy chief of staff for manpower, personnel and services, during the discussion. That includes faster-than-normal adjustments to BAH, adjustments in PCS dates, and adjustments in authorities for temporary lodging expenses.

Normally, changes in the BAH rates go into effect on Jan. 1 each year, and DoD is researching and determining those rates now for 2022.

“What we’ve all said is, that will be good, that will help us on 1 January, but what about all of our airmen that are moving this summer?” Kelly said.



*Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force JoAnne S. Bass and Lt. Gen. Brian Kelly, deputy chief of staff for manpower, personnel and services, talked about the dire housing situation during a June 28 Facebook live Q&A with airmen.
(Photo: Air Force via Facebook)*

“If we have certain areas that need to be accelerated earlier than January 2022, we can identify those. Commanders out there know this. We’ve given this to the [major commands] so they can identify an area, and we can ask [DoD officials] to accelerate their look at BAH so it happens early. Now it’s already past due, but we need to be doing it now.”

One soldier moving to Fort Detrick, Maryland, from South Korea, said he is having to buy a house when he would rather rent. “The BAH rate went down \$3 a month from two years ago, and the rents went up 20 percent,” he wrote. All the rental houses he and his wife have looked at “that would even fulfill my family’s basic needs are over BAH by \$200 to \$400 or would result in a 45-minute commute,” he said.

Kelly said in areas where there are just no available rental properties or the housing prices are exorbitant, officials can look at adjusting PCS moves. It’s too late in the cycle for many service members, and officials wouldn’t disrupt those who are already in the process. But perhaps those who haven’t started the process yet, or are scheduled to move in September or October, can be delayed if necessary to accommodate the housing market, he said.

Army officials are aware that soldiers may be experiencing problems this moving season because of the nationwide housing shortage and current housing market. The service has created a “Summer Surge” planning cell to anticipate issues and develop mitigating strategies, officials told Military Times.

“Soldiers are encouraged to contact their installation housing managers, who may be able to leverage established relationships with local property-management companies and landlords to advocate for soldiers and families or capitalize on rental partnership programs that give first preference to military members,” officials said. “In some cases, Army housing managers can work with on-post privatized Army lodging managers to set room rates at soldiers’ BAH rates when they are experiencing longer waiting times to procure rental housing.”

Navy Housing Service centers continue to promote Homes.mil, an official DoD website that helps service members and their families find housing, Navy officials said, in response to Military Times questions. It helps housing professionals, property managers and service members find and share information about rental listings, and is a secure site for landlords and property managers who want to market their properties to service members stationed at a nearby base.

CMSAF Bass said officials are also examining authorities related to Temporary Lodging Expense, which is generally allowed for up to 10 days of hotel expenses. Service members wrote of being in temporary lodging for two months or more. One soldier said his family arrived at Fort Hood, Texas, from South Korea on May 10, and moved on post June 14. "Staying in the hotel for that long bankrupted me. The worst part is, there is not exception to policy for TLE, and I will be reimbursed for 10 days."

He said they were originally planning to buy a house, but the market was too expensive. When they looked for rentals, "the homes in the area are again far over my BAH and out of budget for a decent home in a good area," he wrote. "Most areas that I could afford had higher crime rates and very poor school ratings for all levels."

Like this soldier, other service members stationed overseas who have orders to return to the U.S. have been facing particular difficulty finding housing. One senior NCO, a single parent moving from South Korea to Colorado Springs this week, is still on the wait list for housing, and has spent more than four months looking for a home to rent or buy.

"Any house I like I get outbid by \$50K over asking price," she wrote. "It's super frustrating. The market is ridiculous and our BAH, in this area at least, doesn't cover a lot. The less desired areas have homes, but then I'm sacrificing safety/security for myself and my child."

A Navy family moving from Hawaii to Virginia Beach were facing a six-month wait in March for on-base housing, and rentals in the area were higher than their BAH. They turned to buying a house, and put in offers on six houses, including \$30,000 over asking price, for example.

"Running out of options and time, we went with a new construction in a sketchy area. A man was murdered down the street from us just the other night," she wrote. They wanted to secure housing "because my husband was going to be in Mississippi for a while and, with being dual military, I needed to head back to work as well and didn't want the extra stress of being in a hotel room with two dogs and two toddlers."

The BAH rates need to be carefully reviewed to increase the quality of life for service members and their families in areas where the out of pocket costs are not realistic, service members said.

"Service members were forced to move to their locations. It should be seamless and as stress-free as possible and cost of housing or quality of housing should not be a concern, ever," wrote one senior military member making a move from Virginia Beach to Oak Harbor, Washington. "At the end of the day, service members and families have way too many other things to worry about."

TOPIC 7a: SMALL BUSINESS

SBA AWARDS HUMBOLDT STATE UNIVERSITY OVER \$258,000 TO LAUNCH A VETERANS BUSINESS OUTREACH CENTER

The U.S. Small Business Administration awarded over \$258,000 in funding to Humboldt State University to provide training and counseling as a Veterans Business Outreach Center (VBOC) serving veteran small business owners in Northern California (to include all counties north of Santa Barbara, Ventura, Los Angeles, and San Bernardino counties).

The funding opportunity, offered by [SBA's Office of Veterans Business Development](#), has an initial project period of 10 months with up to four additional one-year option periods, subject to the availability of funds. The initial project period is effective on July 1, 2021 and ends on April 30, 2022.

“Veterans Business Outreach Centers create a vital support system for military and veteran entrepreneurs nationwide, which is a key part of the SBA’s mission. It is an honor to welcome Humboldt State University into the VBOC network,” said Larry Stubblefield, Associate Administrator for SBA’s Office of Veterans Business Development. “We look forward to working together to empower veteran-owned small businesses in Northern California and provide much-needed resources for our nation’s heroes to succeed after their military career.”



VBOCs are the SBA’s one-stop shop for providing training to service members, veterans and military spouses. The centers play a critical role in planning and executing the Boots to Business entrepreneurship training program, which is part of the Department of Defense’s Transition Assistance Program. VBOCs also provide counseling, technical and financial skill development, comprehensive business assessments, and mentoring services to veterans, transitioning and active-duty service members, Reserve, National Guard, and military spouses interested in small business ownership.

Located in Arcata, California, Humboldt State University is part of the 23-campus California State University System and was recently ranked as a military -friendly school by G.I. Jobs Magazine. The University is home to the HSU Veterans Enrollment and Transition Services, which provides academic and career support to the school’s military and veteran community. As a VBOC, the University will provide training, counseling, and resource partner referrals to transitioning service members, veterans, National Guard and Reserve members, and spouses on campus and across the region.

To learn more about the VBOC program and to find your local center visit www.sba.gov/vboc. For more information on the SBA’s programs for veterans, visit www.sba.gov/veterans.

About Veteran Business Outreach Centers

The Veterans Business Outreach Center Program is an Office of Veterans Business Development initiative that oversees [Veterans Business Outreach Centers \(VBOC\)](#) across the country. This small business program features a number of [success stories](#) and offers business plan workshops, concept assessments, mentorship, and training for eligible veterans. [Find your nearest center.](#)

TOPIC 7b: SMALL BUSINESS

GLENN YOUNGKIN RELEASES PLAN TO AID VIRGINIA MILITARY VETERANS

Republican gubernatorial nominee Glenn Youngkin is touting a plan to assist Virginia military veterans make the transition to civilian life once their time serving their country is done.

“Today I’m releasing a series of policy proposals to honor the sacrifice of our military veterans, and to make this Commonwealth the best place for our military heroes to pursue the next chapter of their lives,” Youngkin said Thursday at an event in Virginia Beach.



Glenn Youngkin. Photo: Twitter

“These policies are rooted in my commitment to compete with neighboring states when it comes to veterans benefits and tax treatment, to connect veterans more seamlessly to the many services that they have access to, to create paths for careers worthy of their skills in all fields, but especially in those fields like law enforcement, teaching, and healthcare, where their leadership and training can benefit so many Virginians including our children. So, we must take certain steps to compete. We have to compete in order to keep our great veterans here, to stay and work and retire in Virginia.”

“We can reimagine the way we provide services so that they are easier to access. And we can eliminate bureaucratic impediments to careers, that fit your skillset and make the transition to civilian life so much easier. And we will do all of this to make Virginia the best place for service personnel looking to write the next chapter of their lives,” Youngkin said.

Details

- Accelerate processing by waiving administrative fees for permits and applications for small business start-ups for qualifying veterans. This will reduce barriers to entrepreneurship and allow more to enter the marketplace.
- Eliminate tax on military retirement pay.
- Expand the existing Child Care Subsidy Program, this will allow active-duty primary caregivers to apply for the program prior to separation and ensure there is no gap in childcare coverage in the first 90 days after transition.
- Ensure veterans are receiving the benefits they’ve earned by increasing the number of Veteran Service Officers.
- Develop a gold-standard digital hub to streamline access and foster collaboration across agencies, sectors, and businesses.
- Critical positions will be filled at the Virginia Department of Veterans Services while unnecessary positions will be eliminated to free-up dollars and resources.
- Eliminate bureaucracy and successfully migrate qualified veterans to opportunities in law enforcement, teaching, and healthcare careers by reducing bureaucratic burden and creating bridge programs.

- Establish an equivalence of Training for military police and law enforcement, build on the existing Military Medics and Corpsman Program, and develop an approved RN program that allows military medics to enter the program as second semester students.
- Foster private-public partnerships with organizations that prioritize and provide peer and mentorship-related programs for transitioning veterans.

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.

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Week Ending: 7/09/2021