

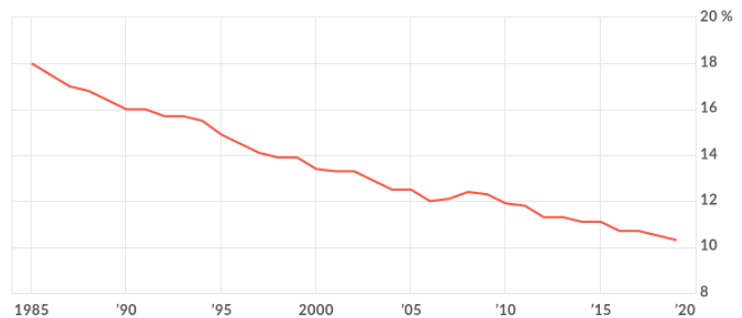
NATIONAL VETERANS EMPLOYMENT & EDUCATION COMMISSION

TOPIC 1: ECONOMY

In 2020, the number of wage and salary workers belonging to unions, at 14.3 million was down by 321,000, or 2.2 percent, from 2019. However, the decline in total wage and salary employment was 9.6 million (mostly among nonunion workers), or 6.7 percent. The disproportionately large decline in total wage and salary employment compared with the decline in the number of union members led to an increase in the union membership rate. In 1983, the first year for which comparable union data are available, the union membership rate was 20.1 percent and there were 17.7 million union workers.

Rate of U.S. unionization falls to record low

10.3% of all working Americans were union members in 2019



Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics

In 2020, 7.2 million employees in the public sector and 7.1 million workers in the private sector belonged to unions. Union membership decreased by 428,000 in the private sector and showed little change in the public sector. The union membership rate increased over the year in the public sector by 1.2 percentage points to 34.8 percent, reflecting a decline in total public-sector wage and salary employment (-391,000). Within the public sector, the union membership rate was highest in local government (41.7 percent), which employs many workers in heavily unionized occupations, such as police officers, firefighters, and teachers.

The unionization rate for private-sector workers increased by 0.1 percentage point to 6.3 percent in 2020, reflecting the net effect of declines in both the number of union members in the private sector and the steep drop in private-sector employment. Private-sector industries with high unionization rates included utilities (20.6 percent), transportation and warehousing (17.0 percent), and telecommunications (14.3 percent). Low unionization rates occurred in food services and drinking places (1.2 percent), finance (1.2 percent), and professional and technical services (1.3 percent).

Among occupational groups, the highest unionization rates in 2020 were in protective service occupations (36.6 percent) and in education, training, and library occupations (35.9 percent). Unionization rates were lowest in farming, fishing, and forestry occupations (2.6 percent); sales and related occupations (3.2 percent); and food preparation and serving related occupations (3.4 percent).

In 2020, the number of men who were union members decreased by 368,000, while the number of women who were union members was little changed. The union membership rate for women increased by 0.8 percentage point to 10.5 percent, and the rate for men was up by 0.2 percentage point to 11.0 percent. The large declines in nonunion employment among both men and women put upward pressure on their union membership rates. The gap between their rates has narrowed considerably since 1983 (the earliest year for which comparable data are available), when rates for men and women were 24.7 percent and 14.6 percent, respectively.

By age, union membership rates continued to be highest among workers ages 45 to 64. In 2020, 13.2 percent of workers ages 45 to 54 and 13.0 percent of those ages 55 to 64 were union members.

In 2020, 15.9 million wage and salary workers were represented by a union, 444,000 less than in 2019. The percentage of workers represented by a union was 12.1 percent, an increase of 0.5 percentage point from 2019, reflecting the disproportionately large decline in total wage and salary employment. Workers represented by a union include both union members (14.3 million) and workers who report no union affiliation but whose jobs are covered by a union contract (1.7 million).

Among full-time wage and salary workers, union members had median usual weekly earnings of \$1,144 in 2020, while those who were not union members had median weekly earnings of \$958. In addition to coverage by a collective bargaining agreement, these earnings differences reflect a variety of influences, including variations in the distributions of union members and nonunion employees by occupation, industry, age, firm size, or geographic region, as well as pandemic-related labor market effects in 2020.

[Reported by John Kamin]

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	
	Dec 2019	Dec 2020	Dec 2019	Dec 2020	Dec 2019	Dec 2020
Unemployed	264	462	242	420	22	42
Unemployment rate	2.8	5.3	3.0	5.5	1.9	3.7

The national unemployment rate is 6.7 percent (Dec 2020). Gulf War II veterans' unemployment rate is 5.2 percent. Currently, the unemployment rate for Gulf War II women veterans is 5 percent.

TOPIC 2: CONFERENCE CALLS

On Monday, January 18, the National Veterans Employment and Education Division had conversations with VSO leaders and discussion of changes with new Biden Administration.

On Monday, January 18, the National Veterans Employment and Education Division review of plans for VACOE meetings and research on policy changes in PL116-315.

On Tuesday, January 19, the National Veterans Employment and Education Division had a meeting with Southeast Regional Council on Military Education; discussion of offers and board and also what schools are doing for veterans during the pandemic.

On Tuesday, January 19, the National Veterans Employment and Education Division, Veterans Education Success, and Arnold Ventures had a conference call to discuss next steps on the Hill for 90/10 and VA Secretary Hearing.

On Tuesday, January 19, the National Veterans Employment and Education Division had a discussion with RBS Project Manager on next steps for pilot state implementation of model and new process of oversight. Plans made for discussion with VA and continued partnership involving this project.

On Tuesday, January 19, the National Veterans Employment and Education Division had conversations on HE Reauthorization (not happening soon) and the issue of impeachment and confirmation hearings.

On Tuesday, January 19, the National Veterans Employment and Education Division had a discussion of technical fixes needed in the new public law 116-315. Other issues are VA IT needs and also continued conversations with DOD on Risk Based Survey Model and their possible adoption.

On Tuesday, January 19, the National Veterans Employment and Education Division attended its first check in with the Arnold Foundation and VES of 2021. The discussion focused on education advocacy in the Biden administration, and new efforts to close the 90-10 rule. Unfortunately, with the retirement of former Senate Health and Education Committee Chairman Lamar Alexander, there is more daylight between Republicans and Democrats over reauthorization of the Higher Education Act.

On Wednesday, January 20, the National Veterans Employment and Education Division worked on Policy Recommendations for the George W. Bush Institute and researched distant education issue for VACOE.

On Thursday, January 21, the National Veterans Employment and Education Division had a discussion with NASAA and Lumina team on “no cost extension” of RBS Grant through remainder of 2021 due to Covid Impact.

On Thursday, January 21, the National Veterans Employment and Education Division had further discussion of GWB Institute Stand To next month. (Still expect audience in excess of 400 people from across the higher education and Veterans benefits spectrum. Stand To is scheduled for February 18th, 1:00pm - 3:30pm. President Bush and Bob McDonald will be speaking. Joseph Wescott will be serving on a panel.)

On Thursday, January 21, the National Veterans Employment and Education Division attended its GI Bill Monthly Stakeholder meeting with the VA’s Education Service. VA’s Education Service has a heavy lift in 1Q 2021, with implementation of both the Colmery GI Bill and new education provisions passed by the Johnny Isakson and David P. Roe, M.D. Veterans Health Care and Benefits Improvement Act of 2020.

On Friday, January 22, the National Veterans Employment and Education Division had a meeting with NASAA/EducationCounsel/Lumina on RBS project rollout this month.

On Friday, January 22, the National Veterans Employment and Education Division had discussions with HVAC staffers and congressional. Worked on Distance Learning white paper and had a meeting with GWB working group for final presentation of recommendations.

GLOSSARY OF FREQUENTLY USED ABBREVIATIONS

ACE: American Council on Education
ACP: American Corporate Partners, a veterans support organization
ATLAS: Accessing Telehealth through Local Area Stations, a V.A. telehealth initiative
BLS: Labor Department's Bureau of Labor Statistics
C&P: V.A.'s Compensation and Pension exam
CAVC: Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims
COLA: Cost-of-living adjustment
CSAAVE: California State Approving Agency for Veterans Education
DIMO: Defense Security Cooperation Agency/Defense Institute for Medical Operations
DOD: Department of Defense
DOL-VETS: Department of Labor, Veterans Employment and Training Services
EdCounsel: Higher education consulting firm
EIDL program. SBA's Economic Injury Disaster Loans
EIDL: Economic Injury Disaster Loan
GAO: Government Accountability Office
GPD: V.A.'s Grant and Per Diem Program for homeless veterans
GWB: George W. Bush Higher Education Policy Work Group
HEROES ACT of 2003: Higher Education Relief Opportunities for Students Act of 2003. Grants the Secretary of Education the authority to waive requirements that impede military borrowers' access to critical repayment protection during the war, military operation, or national emergency.
HVAC: House Veterans Affairs Committee
MCAI: American Legion's Military Credentialing Advancement Initiative
MSLP: The Federal Reserve's Main Street Lending Program
MSO: Military Support Organization
NAICU: National Association of Independent Colleges & Universities
NASAA: National Association of State Approving Agencies. Responsible for approving school funding for GI Bill
NAVPA: National Association of Veterans Program Administrators
NCA: V.A.'s National Cemetery Administration
NDAA: National Defense Authorization Act
NLD: American Legion's National Legislative Division
OPM: Office of Personnel Management
PPP: Paycheck Protection Program
RBS: Risk-Based Survey Model
RPIC: Rural Placemaking Innovation Challenge
S2S: Service to School, a veterans organization
SAA: State Approving Agency, responsible for approving school funding for GI Bill
SBA: Small Business Administration
STEM: Science, Technology, Engineering, Medical
SVA: Student Veterans of America, a veterans organization
SVAC Senate Veterans Affairs Committee
TAPS: Transition Assistance Program for Survivors, a nonprofit for Gold Star Families
TEAM Act: Senate Bill 4393, to improve the provision of health care for veterans who were exposed to toxic substances from burn pits
TFA: American Legion's Temporary Financial Assistance program
USAID: United States Agency for International Development
USDA: United States Department of Agriculture
USERRA: Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act
VA&R: American Legion's Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation Division

VACO: Veterans Affairs Central Office
VBA: V.A.'s Veterans Benefits Administration
VE&E: Veterans Employment and Education Division
VES: Veterans Education Success, a veterans organization
VSO: Veterans Service Organization

TOPIC 3a: TRACKING LEGISLATION

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

(Tracked by John Kamin)

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

Status: Currently on hold, has not been introduced

Homeless Veteran Coronavirus Response Act: The bill allows V.A. to use existing funds for a broader range of services; authorizes the Department to collaborate with outside organizations to facilitate shelters on its properties; loosens restrictions on Grant and Per Diem (GPD) payments, and requires V.A. to ensure veterans participating in V.A. homeless programs have access to V.A. telehealth services.

(Tracked by Teresa Lewis)

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

HR 6800, the Heroes Act: Allows VA to provide transport and purchase food, shelter, phones, clothing, blankets, and toiletry items for homeless veterans; Authorizes VA to set up temporary encampments on the grounds of V.A. Medical Centers to allow homeless veterans to shelter on V.A. parking lots temporarily; Allows VA to provide reimbursements to social service providers receiving grants for the costs of services for minor children.

(Tracked by Davy Leghorn)

[Resolution No. 324: Support Funding for Homeless Veterans](#)

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

(Tracked by Davy Leghorn)

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

Status: Passed at the 2016 National Convention.

HR 2224: To direct the Secretary of Labor to prioritize services to homeless veterans with dependent children in carrying out homeless veterans' reintegration programs and for other purposes.

(Tracked by Ariel De Jesus/John Kamin)

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

HR 1196, Jobs for Veterans Act of 2019: This bill allows an increased work opportunity tax credit for employers who hire veterans who have been certified as discharged or released from active duty in the Armed Forces after September 11, 2001, and who begin working for the employer after December 31, 2019, and before January 1, 2024. This increased credit is in addition to any work opportunity tax credit allowed to a veteran with a service-connected disability.

(Tracked by Ariel De Jesus/John Kamin)

[Resolution No. 354: Work Opportunity Tax Credit Program](#)

HR 7010, Paycheck Protection Program Flexibility Act of 2020: This bill significantly changes the PPP loans' terms to be more advantageous to small businesses. Including more flexibility in applying the loan to other expenses besides payroll and benefits and extending the time frame for expending the loan.

(Tracked by Davy Leghorn)

HR 4625: To require education programs to be approved by the V.A. to abide by the Principles of Excellence to include a ban on deceptive or misleading recruiting, clear information about total costs and program requirements, accommodation for deployments, ensuring a point of contact for veterans, and not being under a punitive action by an accreditor.

(Tracked by John Kamin)

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

HR 6957: To direct the Secretaries of Defense and Veterans Affairs to treat a period of full-time National Guard duty, performed in response to the national emergency declared on March 13, 2020, by the President concerning COVID-19, as not shorter than 90 days.

(Tracked by John Kamin)

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

HR 4920 Department of Veterans Affairs Contracting Preference Consistency Act of 2020: is a bill that would allow AbilityOne companies to keep their preferential treatment at the Department of Veteran Affairs after 2016 with some compromises. The Senate initially sent it back to the House after it was passed for changes. Those changes have been reconciled, and the bill cleared its last hurdle before it is sent to the White House.

S. 2594: To amend title 5, United States Code, to modify specific requirements concerning service and retirement for veterans' Preference for federal hiring.

(Tracked by Ariel De Jesus)

[Resolution No. 317: Enforcing Veterans' Preference Hiring Practices in Federal Civil Service](#)

S. 3745, Coronavirus Emergency Borrower Defense (E-BD) Act: to require the Department of Education to grant full student loan discharges to three specific emergency categories of defrauded borrowers—specifically borrowers covered by:

- (1) Department of Education findings against Corinthian.
- (2) Department of Education findings against ITT Tech; and
- (3) State attorneys general group discharge applications made before the date of enactment.

(Tracked by John Kamin)

[Resolution No. 82: Preserve Veteran and Servicemember Rights to Gainful Employment and Borrower Defense Protections](#)

TOPIC 3b: ACTION TAKEN ON LEGISLATION

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

(Tracked by Ariel)

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

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

(Tracked by John Kamin)

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

Status: Letter of Support drafted

HR 4941: Veteran Employment Transition Act” or the “VET Act” was sponsored by Representative Andy Kim. The bill's last action was in the House on 12/02/2019; it was referred to the Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity. The bill's goal is to improve the Transition Assistance Program. The bill would allow certain veterans' service organizations to contact veterans regarding benefits and better inform veterans of employment opportunities. The Service groups would inform veterans of the benefits and employment opportunities with the Federal, State, and local governments. The groups inform veterans of events in the area.

(Tracked by Ariel De Jesus)

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

Status: Letter of Support submitted

HR 7003: is a bill sponsored by Rep. Takano, Mark D-CA-41, and was introduced 05/22/2020. The bill would authorize a pilot program in the Department of Defense to enhance efforts to provide job placement assistance and related employment services directly to the National Guard, Reserves, and veterans of the Armed Forces. The last action on the bill was 05/22/2020 and referred to the Committee on Armed Services.

(Tracked by Ariel/Raymond)

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

Status: Pending Letter of Support

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

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

Status: Letter of Support submitted

Draft Bill: JSF - To amend title 38, United States Code, to clarify the scope of procedural rights of members of the uniformed services concerning their employment and reemployment rights, and for other purposes.

(Tracked by Davy Leghorn)

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

Draft Bill: USERRA Protections for State Active Duty - To amend title 38, United States Code, extend particular employment and reemployment rights to members of the National Guard who perform State active duty. Submitted written testimony to the Legislative Division.

(Tracked by Ariel De Jesus)

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

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

HR 7111: Veterans Economic Recovery Act of 2020: Require the Secretary of V.A. to carry out a rapid retraining program that provides eligible veterans up to 12 months of retraining assistance for in-demand occupations. These 12 months of benefits would be equivalent to students' and schools' payments through the Post 9/11 GI Bill.

(Tracked by John Kamin)

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

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

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

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

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

TOPIC 4: VETERAN HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS

Authorities say Camelia Revels, a former case manager at HOPE Atlanta, and Katrise Jones, a property agent, stole more than \$100,000 from a nonprofit that helps Atlanta's homeless veterans. Revels and Jones plead guilty to a criminal information and were charged with conspiring to steal around \$124,000 in federal funds intended to help homeless veterans.



“The defendants betrayed the trust of veterans who came to them for help,” Acting U.S. Attorney Bobby L. Christine said. “The victims are men and women who sacrificed for their country and deserve more than being taken advantage of for personal greed.”

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development provide funds through a variety of programs, including the Supportive Services for Veterans program, in order to assist homeless veterans. SSVF monies are in turn provided as grants to various organizations, including HOPE Atlanta, a nonprofit dedicated to combatting homelessness.

According to the charges, Revels was employed at HOPE Atlanta as a case manager for the SSVF program from October 2013 to November 2015. As part of her duties, Revels was responsible for confirming a veteran's eligibility to participate in the SSVF program, assisting veterans in finding suitable housing, and preparing the SSVF vouchers to secure issuance of funds. Although Revels did not have final approval over SSVF vouchers, she provided all the relevant information to her supervisor, including the name of the vendor to whom the check would be issued on behalf of a veteran.

Among the vendors Revels provided to her supervisor as the payee were companies that were owned and operated by Jones, including Stratford Corporate Realty, Strategic Consultants, and Reserve at Bay Bridge. Jones was supposed to act as a “property agent,” who would assist the veterans find suitable housing. In other words, rather than listing the rental property as the payee, Revels provided one of Jones's companies.

In December 2014, HOPE Atlanta learned that Jones was not making rental payments on behalf of veterans who received SSVF funds and directed Revels to no longer work with her. Revels ignored this directive but continued her scheme with Jones. In particular, authorities say Revels did not disclose to HOPE Atlanta that the “vendors” receiving SSVF funds were various entities controlled and operated by Jones.

As part of the conspiracy, Revels and Jones in fact opened a joint bank account in the name of Strategic Consultants — one of Jones’s companies — in which stolen SSVF funds were deposited. The scheme lasted until November 2015 when HOPE Atlanta learned that Revels had continued to work with Jones and that Jones’s companies had continued to receive SSVF funds that were not being used to help homeless veterans.

Separately, Jones also stole HUD-VA Supportive Housing funds from the Marietta Housing Authority in August and September 2015. HUD-VASH is a collaborative program between HUD and VA that combines HUD rental assistance (Housing Choice Vouchers) with VA supportive services to help veterans and their families who are homeless.

To receive the VASH funds, an individual must represent that they are the owner of the property to be rented or a registered agent of the property owner. MHA also required the applicant to show that the mortgage payments for the property were up to date (or otherwise the owner held free and clear title to the property). MHA imposed these latter requirements to avoid placing veterans in properties that were subsequently foreclosed upon.

Jones falsely misrepresented to MHA that she was a registered agent of a large, legitimate property management company in order to participate in the VASH program. As a result of Jones’s misrepresentations to MHA, she received approximately \$3,000 on behalf of several veterans for rental payments but never made the payments.

Sentencing for Camelia Revels, 50, of Hiram, Georgia, is scheduled for April 6, at 10 a.m. Sentencing for Katrise Jones, 47, of Lexington, South Carolina, is scheduled for April 15, at 9:30 a.m. Both sentencings will be held before U.S. District Judge Mark H. Cohen.

[Reported by John Kamin]

TOPIC 5: CAREER FAIRS

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

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

Newly discharged veterans claiming benefits totaled 9,143, a decrease of 2,011 from the prior week.

The Department of Georgia participated in a career fair on December 10th, having 101 stop by their booth, and engaging with 16 job seekers.



THE AMERICAN LEGION
DEPARTMENT of TEXAS
VIRTUAL CAREER FAIR

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

Tuesday, February 9, 2021 ★ 10:00am-2:00pm (Central Time)



Job Seeker Registration

Employer Registration

The Mission of The American Legion's National Veterans Employment & Education Commission is to take actions that affect veterans' economic well-being, including issues relating to veterans' education, employment, home loans, vocational rehabilitation, homelessness, and small business.

[Reported by Ariel De Jesus]

TOPIC 6: SMALL BUSINESS

The American Legion continues to track programmatic changes to the COVID-19 stimulus package passed in March of 2020. The Paycheck Protection Program was vital to veteran small businesses as well as many of our Legion Posts and Departments, who have taken advantage of the loan. The banking industry is pressuring the federal government to be more lenient and simplify the forgiveness process for small businesses and non-profits.

Today, the U.S. Small Business Administration announced that it has approved approximately 60,000 PPP loan applications submitted by nearly 3,000 lenders, for over \$5 billion, between the program's re-opening on Monday, Jan. 11, at 9 a.m. ET through to Sunday, Jan. 17. Last week, the PPP provided dedicated access to community financial institutions that specialize in serving underserved communities, including minority-women-, and veteran-owned small businesses from Monday through Thursday, joined

Friday by smaller lenders. As of today, Jan. 19, the Paycheck Protection Program is open to all participating lenders.

“The SBA continues to help small businesses across the nation access vital funds through the Paycheck Protection Program. Data from our first week, which first allowed hundreds of



community financial institutions to submit applications, then opened wider to small banks, demonstrate that we have helped tens of thousands of businesses,” said [SBA Administrator Jovita Carranza.](#)

“The PPP is off to another great start helping our nation’s economy. With PPP re-opening today for all First and Second Draw loan applications, the SBA remains committed to

keeping small business workers on payroll and their doors open during this challenging time. Moreover, the SBA over-performed operationally, issuing guidance and rules in advance and in alignment with the new law’s requirements,” Carranza added.

First Draw PPP loans are for those borrowers who have not received a PPP loan before August 8, 2020. The first two PPP rounds open between March and August 2020 were a historic success helping 5.2 million small businesses keep 51 million American workers employed.

Second Draw PPP loans are for eligible small businesses with 300 employees or less and that previously received a First Draw PPP loan. These borrowers will have to use or had used the full amount of their First Draw loan only for authorized uses and demonstrate at least a 25% reduction in gross receipts between comparable quarters in 2019 and 2020. The maximum amount of a Second Draw PPP loan is \$2 million.

The Paycheck Protection Program remains open for First and Second Draw PPP loans until March 31, 2021, as set forth in the Economic Aid Act, or until Congressionally-appropriated funding is exhausted.

[Reported by John Kamin]

TOPIC 7: EDUCATION

Signed by President Trump on January 5, 2021, Johnny Isakson and David P. Roe, M.D. Veterans Health Care and Benefits Improvement Act of 2020, also known as Public Law 116-315, is a far-reaching act which provides greater benefits for veterans across the spectrum, both health, education and employment. I am pleased to report that VE&E staff, particularly Dr. Joe Wescott and Mr. John Kamin, played a key role in the items having to do with education in the new law. In that area, Isakson and Roe provides for expansion of both the Edith Nourse Rogers STEM Scholarship (for clinical training) and the Fry Scholarship. It provides for the expansion of in-state tuition to all GI Bill students and directs VA to create a website with a database to include any public schools’ in-state tuition requirements. It expands both the Work study program for student veterans and the Yellow Ribbon program.

The new law also provides for robust and more thorough oversight of approved GI bill providers by expanding the reasons why a course of education may be disapproved for Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits. Furthermore, it requires VA to work with State Approving Agencies (SAAs) to create a new risk-based survey that provides oversight over all schools and requires VA and SAAs to create a searchable database to track all these risk-based surveys. VE&E Director Joe Sharpe served on the National Advisory Committee along with Dr. Joe Wescott, Higher Education Consultant that developed this new model. The pilot program begins this month in six states across the nation and the new model and method of oversight is being looked at by DOD and ED, in addition to VA. The law also codifies the requirements of the Principles of Excellence Program (Executive Order 13607). In addition to providing support for education, the law also allows SAAs to conduct outreach activities to schools and businesses, particularly to highlight apprenticeship and On The Job training opportunities for Veterans.

Finally, several provisions of the law provide support for veterans and schools impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic. For instance, the law provides that VA may continue paying educational

assistance benefits during the COVID-19 emergency if the Secretary determines a student was negatively affected by the emergency. This is a broad, flexible authority aimed at covering any gaps in protection the rest of these education provisions do not. It also provides that if a school closes due to COVID-19 that certain entitlement used by an individual at that school will not be charged against their overall entitlement amount. For Veterans enrolled in an OJT program or apprenticeship and unable to fulfill the 120-hour requirement due to COVID-19-related unemployment or inability, the law provides that the VA will recognize the number of hours the individual was able to work and pay them.

These and other provisions of the law are helping veterans and their families in these challenging times and through the efforts and constant support of our volunteers and members throughout the nation, the American Legion continues to do its part to ensure our veterans and military have the support they require to transition and find the education and training they need for success!

[Reported by Joe Wescott]

Joseph C. Sharpe, Jr., Director
Veterans Employment & Education Division
202.861.2700 ext. 2989
Week Ending: 1/22/2021

H.R. 7105: THE JOHNNY ISAKSON AND DAVID P. ROE, M.D.
VETERANS HEALTH CARE AND BENEFITS IMPROVEMENT ACT
SUPPORTING THOSE WHO HAVE SERVED THROUGHOUT THEIR LIVES

- + Expands access to education and training services for transitioning servicemembers, particularly by allowing TAP to be provided at off-base locations and supporting community organizations that assist with transition
- + Continues to ensure servicemembers and veterans impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic are taken care of
- + Supports key programs by expanding the STEM scholarship program and increasing funding for the VET Tec Pilot program
- + Requires VA to reinstate public-facing Disability Benefits Questionnaires (DBQs) on their website
- + Improves healthcare services and benefits for women veterans at VA by ensuring that the VA healthcare system is more prepared for their needs and helps instill a culture that is more welcoming, inclusive, and safe
- + Modernizes the Service-Disabled Veterans Insurance Program to meet the needs of today's economy
- + Supports services for veterans who are homeless by increasing funding for transitional housing providers and improving case management procedures
- + Streamlines benefits for survivors of military sexual trauma