

NATIONAL VETERANS EMPLOYMENT & EDUCATION COMMISSION WEEKLY REPORT

TOPIC 1: ECONOMY



Growth was a solid 3.4% in the third quarter following a strong second quarter gain of 4.2%. Fourth-quarter growth should also be good, around 2.8%. However, quarterly growth in 2019 will likely be much lower, leaving a yearly average of 2.5%, down from 2.9% in 2018. Consumer spending grew 3.5% in the third quarter and will likely grow more than 3% in the fourth quarter.

A lower stock market could ding consumer spending in 2019, though income growth should still be strong because of low unemployment and lots of folks working. Government spending is still expanding at a good rate, and businesses are adding to inventories. However, business investment is slowing markedly because of the uncertain outlook. And housing is still reeling from higher interest rates.

Exports are showing little growth, likely because of the trade war with China. The added uncertainty could create knock-on effects that slow business investment plans, and the need to rejig supply chains will reduce productivity and increase costs.

Look for the Federal Reserve to hike interest rates twice more in 2019. The Fed is determined to achieve its “policy-neutral” federal funds rate of close to 3%. Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell has indicated that rate hikes are likely to be paused or ended sometime in the year, however.

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	
	Jan 2018	Jan 2019	Jan 2018	Jan 2019	Jan 2018	Jan 2019
Gulf War-era II veterans						
Unemployed	134	147	122	141	11	6

HOUSEHOLD DATA

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[Numbers in thousands]

Employment status, veteran status, and period of service	Total		Men		Women	
	Jan 2018	Jan 2019	Jan 2018	Jan 2019	Jan 2018	Jan 2019
Unemployment rate	4.1	4.2	4.3	4.7	2.6	1.2

National unemployment rate is 4.0 percent (January 2019). Gulf War II veterans unemployment rate is 3.6 percent.ⁱ Currently, the unemployment rate for Gulf War II women veterans is 2.7 percent (down from 3.0 percent in January).

TOPIC 2: MEETINGS

On Monday, February 11, the National Veterans Employment & Education Division spoke at a policy panel over the National Association of State Approving Agencies (NASAA) Winter Conference. VE&E staff discussed the Legion's priorities for 2019 as well as the recently released VA IG and GAO reports on SAA oversight.

On Monday, February 11, the National Veterans Employment & Education Division spoke with Beth Conlin, Senior Advisor for Careers at Blue Star Families (BSF) about participating in the March 12th credentialing roundtable on military spouses. Additionally, BSF provided recommendations for additional invitations to be sent.

On Tuesday, February 12th, The Veterans Employment and Education Division met with the Latino Economic Development Center (LEDC) of Washington DC. As a The Community Development Financial Institutions Fund program of the US Department of Treasury, LEDC equips underserved Greater D.C. and Baltimore area residents with financial tools to create a better future for their communities. The LEDC is also the local administrator of SBA's micro-loans for many local veteran owned small businesses.

On Tuesday, February 12, the National Veterans Employment & Education Division spoke with the Credentialing and SkillBridge Program manager from DoD's Personnel and Readiness office. VE&E shared its plans for the March 12th credentialing roundtable on military spouses, as well as plans for the national credentialing summit in August.

On Wednesday, February 13th, The Veterans Employment and Education Division met with members of the House Small Business Subcommittee regarding our recent testimony to follow up on our suggestions for veteran-related legislation.

TOPIC 3: EMPLOYMENT

Veterans helping Soldiers Transition into Civilian Life

As old as warfare is in the course of human history so has been man's need for shelter. Moreover, if Marine veteran Andy Williams has anything to do with it, those who excel in the first shall solve man's problem with the latter.

Two years ago, Think Realty profiled Andy as Humanitarian of the Year for 2016. So it should be of little surprise to those who read his profile that, some two years later, Andy has been able to tactically acquire the capital, tools, and respect to breach the doors for unprecedented access to the broader veteran community. With corporate partners behind him, Recon Realty and Andy Williams are poised to rally America's veteran community to own the land for which they fought. A "rally point" is a familiar term to those who wore the uniform. In the absence of clear orders or when the inevitable chaos of life arises, a rallying point means a meeting spot before continuing with the mission.



With over 250,000 veterans transitioning into civilian life each year, there is no shortage of these service-minded men and women. All that was missing was the rally point. In 2019, Andy Williams stood ready to lead these men and women on a venture as patriotic as those that took them to foreign lands in uniform. He is now leading them home to buy a piece of it.

Veterans Buy America is the latest and perhaps most impactful mission of Recon Realty. Veterans — who often left home at a young age to defend America — are now going to own a piece of it. Veterans facing a daunting military transition to civilian life are going to be more equipped than ever to solve man's oldest dilemma of shelter and security. With a successful real estate portfolio and a venture into television, Andy displayed his leadership to the veteran community on HGTV's "Flip or Flop Fort Worth."

Lest one thinks this is a charitable venture, he is candid that this is a strategic investment in those who have already put it all on the line. Andy makes it clear that "charity has its right and just place in the veteran community. However, so does entrepreneurship, and the latter will fuel the prior." Being personally invited into the boardrooms of America's elite, Andy didn't approach corporate partners with a charitable mission. He contacted them with a solution to a long-standing problem and, as such, he earned their respect. Those who have fought for this land are uniquely equipped to steward it and develop it for the future.

Andy's successful flipping of home while deployed in Iraq was all the evidence any corporate partner needed. Remarkably, it was not all the evidence Andy had to offer. As Andy's profile grew, he began to attract similarly-minded veterans to the rally point.

Veterans like Navy pilot Stuart Grazier saw a similar vision. After graduating from the Naval Academy in 2002, Grazier pursued his first real estate investment in 2003 and now stood ready to retire from the military in complete command of his transition. Air Force officer Steve Leblanc left Arizona with little more than the shirt on his back and is now set to retire with a net worth of over \$1.2 million. What Andy is helping corporate partners realize is that neither he, Stuart nor Steve are alone.

What active duty military and veterans often fail to realize is that they have all the same tools at their disposal. What active duty and military veterans would do well to realize is that now they can benefit from Recon Realty on their side. What was missing was a guide. What they needed was a place to rally up with a leader to help them back from the front lines.

Two years later, Andy is not where we left him. Rather, he is miles down the path calling for his fellow veterans to rally up. Recon Realty has been the vehicle for Andy's successful transition, and it's getting ready to add a few more seats. Through this successful venture, he is looking to empower and equip 10,000 fellow veterans to buy the land they love. With corporate partners ready to march, the beacon is lit, and Recon Realty is the rally point for America's veteran community.

TOPIC 4: VETERAN HOMELESSNESS



Georgia State Rep. Sandra Scott, D-Rex, is betting that Georgia lottery players will chip in for homeless veterans. Scott's idea, as detailed in House Bill 14 and House Resolution 7, is to have the Georgia Lottery Corporation offer one or more games dedicated to helping homeless veterans. She envisions a scratch-off ticket for that purpose. "As a former staff sergeant in the U.S. Army and a veteran who is involved in different organizations, it is crucial that we do the right thing for our homeless veterans," Scott said.

The legislation would not divert funds from existing homelessness or veterans' organizations, she added, nor would it take away HOPE scholarship funds. HB 14 is before the House Appropriations Committee and would allow the Georgia Lottery Corporation to offer one or more lottery games to assist homeless military veterans in Georgia. Proceeds would go into the state's general fund. From there, the governor would make specific recommendations on how best to appropriate the funds for ending homelessness, preventing near-term homelessness and providing veterans with safe and secure living conditions.

HR 7 would create a companion constitutional amendment, giving the General Assembly the power to appropriate those lottery proceeds for the benefit of homeless veterans.

Cosponsors of both measures include Rep. Rhonda Burnough, D-Riverdale, Rep. Billy Mitchell, D-Stone Mountain, Rep. Sharon Beasley-Teague, D-Red Oak, Rep. Sheila Nelson, D-Augusta, and Rep. Park Cannon, D-Atlanta.

"Georgia has thousands of veterans, and they should not be forced to sleep in cars on the streets when we are capable of creating something that could ultimately end veteran homelessness," Scott said. "We should let the people decide whether they would support a lottery ticket that would help put an end to veteran homelessness in Georgia." The Clayton County Board of Commissioners named Scott its Veteran of the Month at its Feb. 5 meeting.

TOPIC 5: CAREER FAIRS & YELLOW RIBBON EVENTS

This week, work continued on The American Legion's upcoming hiring events to be staged in Carlisle (PA), Fredericksburg (VA), Herndon (VA), Joint Base Anacostia-Bolling (DC), Joint Base Andrews (MD), Lexington Park (MD), Oklahoma City (OK), The American Legion, Austin (TX).

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

TOPIC 6: SMALL BUSINESS

Veteran entrepreneurs will benefit from a new law aimed at helping them grow their small businesses, create jobs and expand economic opportunity.

The Veterans Small Business Enhancement Act was signed into law by President Trump earlier this month. The legislation adds veterans to the list of eligible recipients for federal surplus personal property, such as office equipment and furniture to specialized apparatuses including scientific devices and heavy machinery.

Veteran small business owners now join women and minority small business owners and veterans service organizations (VSOs) as eligible recipients for federal surplus personal property.

The American Legion and other VSOs, including VFW and Paralyzed Veterans of America, supported the legislation. The Legion's National Executive Committee passed Resolution 21 at the 2018 Fall Meetings to support legislation ensuring parity for veterans in all state and federal small business programs.

In a press release touting the legislation, Sen. Tammy Duckworth, D-Ill., who introduced the bill with co-sponsors Sens. John Kennedy, R-La., and Dick Durbin, D-Ill., said "When our veterans return home from their service, they deserve our full support as they transition back into civilian life, and that includes supporting their efforts to build and manage a small business."

"Countless veterans are entrepreneurs and small business owners making contributions to their communities, but many struggle with the costs of starting a new business idea," said Durbin. "With the Veterans Small Business Enhancement Act now signed into law, veterans can access GSA's federal surplus property program, which can help them save costs as they open new businesses and store fronts."

TOPIC 7: EDUCATION

Louisiana will be just the second state in the nation to offer help centers for military veterans on every campus this fall under a plan unveiled Wednesday by Gov. John Bel Edwards and other state leaders.

Each site on the state's 30 campuses, called resource centers, will help veterans navigate campus life, including how to access state and federal benefits due them. Officials said there is often a wide gap between rank-and-file students and veterans, especially after years in the military culture and combat service.



Joey Strickland, secretary for the state Department of Veterans Affairs, recalled, at the age of 23, enrolling in a Virginia college after serving for two years in Vietnam. "I didn't know a soul," Strickland said in an interview. "I didn't even know where the registrar's office was."

But a professor at Hampton University, who was also a World War II veteran, recognized his plight, introduced him around and helped turn his college life around.

"That allowed me to settle down and stay in school and start learning to be a student again," said Strickland, who was from Tallulah, Louisiana. "If it wasn't for that, I would not have made it," he said of the professor's assistance. "These veterans centers are going to take care of that."

About 8,300 Louisiana college students are veterans. Most ex-service students are high school graduates who never went to college, and are often first-generation college students out of the habit of attending classes and grappling with homework.

LSU President F. King Alexander said about five years ago officials concluded that LSU had about 50 former service members on campus. After opening a state-of-the-art veterans center two years ago school officials realized they had about 500 ex-soldiers at LSU.

"They are on our campuses," Alexander said. "They just don't have a place to go." Earlier this year Student Veterans of LSU was named chapter of the year by Student Veterans of America from among 1,500 chapters nationwide.

The program announced Wednesday, called the LaVetCorps, will cost about \$520,000 per year. State officials said federal grants are expected to take care of \$320,000 and the Department of Veterans Affairs about \$200,000, including in-kind contributions and \$2,500 site fees paid by campuses.

Schools taking part include LCTCS, LSU System, Southern University System, University of Louisiana System and Xavier University in New Orleans.

Part of the aim of the resource centers is to make campus life for veterans more vibrant. Many of the centers will be staffed by men and women who served in the military and their dependents.

"It is important for veterans to seek out other veterans," said Edwards, an Army veteran himself and graduate of West Point Military Academy.

Higher Education Commissioner Kim Hunter Reed said the centers will let veterans know "we have more than just a welcome mat out there. We have a success map."

Student-hungry colleges and universities also have an incentive to attract and retain the students. Ex-service members bring in more than \$185 million per year in federal dollars to Louisiana through G.I. Bill funding.

Monty Sullivan, president of the Louisiana Community and Technical College System, said students returning from service are winning new respect amid growing numbers. Veterans enjoy reserved parking on the campus of Bossier Parish Community College.

Sullivan said about 6,000 students attending community and technical colleges served in the military, with about 1,400 graduating last year. Those who serve in the centers, called navigators, will be trained by the state Department of Veterans Affairs. They will also provide training for college faculty and staff to boost awareness of what veterans need and military culture.

"Their biggest challenge is not having been in school for four or five years and trying to adjust, get your head wrapped around studying," Strickland said. "They are very much more serious than the average student," he added. "I was a 23-year-old in a 44-year-old body."

Jim Henderson, president of the University of Louisiana System, recalled that, in 1943, legendary Louisiana Tech football coach Joe Aillet said goodbye to 22 underclassmen players headed to war, who then got a letter monthly from the coach during their service.

The gathering included the signing of a memorandum of understanding by Edwards, the leaders of the Louisiana Department of Veterans Affairs and higher education leaders. Louisiana has about 284,000 veterans.

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Week Ending: 2/15/19

ⁱ <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/empsit.t05.htm>