

NATIONAL VETERANS EMPLOYMENT & EDUCATION COMMISSION

TOPIC 1: ECONOMY

President Donald Trump's plan to reopen the American economy after a near-total shutdown due to the coronavirus pandemic consists of three graduated phases, according to a copy of the proposed actions.



Trump unveiled the plan in a video conference call with the nation's governors on Thursday afternoon. The state leaders were instructed that they could move through the guidelines at their own pace and that the guidelines are not formal orders from the federal government, according to a person familiar with the call.

"Phase one" calls on employers to telework where possible, return to work in phases, minimize non-essential travel and make accommodations for the vulnerable populations within the workforce. It calls on all vulnerable individuals to "shelter in place," and when in public, all individuals should continue social distancing. Large venues, including churches and gyms, can open if they operate under "strict" social distancing and sanitation protocols. Bars should remain closed. Elective surgeries can resume.

However, a critical piece to this is the "gating criteria" that all states and regions should achieve before they can move on to phase one. This includes a "downward trajectory" of reported "influenza-like illnesses," "covid-like syndromic cases" and "documented cases" or "positive tests as a percent of total tests" within a 14-day period, as well as the ability for hospitals to "treat all patients without crisis care" and have a "robust testing program in place for at-risk healthcare workers, including emerging antibody testing."

In "phase two," non-essential travel for employers can resume. Schools and organized youth activity can reopen. Bars can operate with diminished standing room occupancy. Large venues can continue under "moderate" social distancing protocols.

The third phase says all these venues -- bars, gyms and large venues -- can reopen with "limited" social distancing and "standard" sanitation. Employers can resume "unrestricted staffing of worksites," so employees can physically return to work. The final phase also reintroduces visits to senior care facilities and hospitals. The president described the guidelines "as a bit of a negotiation," a source said.

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	
	MAR 2019	MAR 2020	MAR 2019	MAR 2020	MAR 2019	MAR 2020
Unemployed	106	140	87	107	19	33
Unemployment rate	3.1	4.1	2.9	3.7	4.0	6.2

The national unemployment rate is 4.4 percent (March 2020). Gulf War II veterans' unemployment rate is 4.1 percent.ⁱ Currently, the unemployment rate for Gulf War II women veterans is 6.2 percent (up from 2.8 percent in February).

TOPIC 2: CONFERENCE CALLS

On Monday, April 13th, the Veterans Employment & Education Division teleconferenced with HVAC staff members on minority HVAC call. Discussion of a “COVID 4” Bill to address leftover needs from the previous three bills. No idea on when this might move because there is still no legislative calendar for the next several weeks. Staffers from the Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs (DAMA) subcommittee discussed a recent call with VA and they were assured that all newly established GI Bill debts will be put on hold (all debt collection activity suspended). Already established debts, veterans must contact Disproportionate Minority Contact (DMC) to let request suspension. Jon Clark shared that VA is going to great lengths to contact these veterans so that they are aware of this debt forbearance policy. Also, veteran students who are unsure about whether the new unemployment provisions of the CARE Act apply to them should go ahead and apply within their states. Conversations with Division Director Joe Sharpe on 3696 regulations and VA process.

On Monday, April 13th, the Veterans Employment & Education Division attended a webinar hosted by the US Chamber of Commerce Foundation with small, medium and large businesses to discuss the safest ways in restarting the economy after the pandemic subsidies. The program includes a comprehensive framework of considerations, featuring diverse viewpoints from the public and private sectors and recommendations on the practices and policies needed to begin a phased process to bring the full American economy back to work.

On Tuesday, April 14th, the National Veterans Employment & Education Division teleconferenced with USDVA and GA Stakeholders. Secretary Wilkie share that of the approximately 9.5 million veterans in the VA system, approximately 4,200 veterans had tested positive for COVID-19 and of those, 257 had died. Most of those who had tested positive (over 80%), were being treated at home. Due to the efficiency and effectiveness of the VA System, the VA was able to continue to fulfil the Fourth Mission of assisting non-VA personnel (But he stated that Veterans will and must remain our priority.) HE also pointed out that telehealth appointments are up from a monthly average of

40,000 to 154,000 for the month of March. USB Paul Lawrence shared that GI Bill debt collection is suspended (as mentioned above) there continues to be a lot of communication with education and training institutions about distance learning and VA student work study. He stated they are working closely with Congress to deal with issues surrounding those still areas (that needed addressing).

On Wednesday, April 15th, the National Veterans Employment & Education Division held a teleconference with VES staff on a Bible School in Georgia that seems to be taking advantage of veteran students. The school is unaccredited and yet is still offering course work in other states across the nation on-line, which is in total noncompliance with federal regulations. I will contact the SAA directors in both GA and TX to address this issue. Had further conversations with Director Sharpe and Assistant Director Kamin on 3696 regulation and impact of COVID-19 on OJT and APP.

On Thursday, April 16th, the National Veterans Employment & Education Division held discussions with SVAC staff on pending legislation in the Senate. The Senate was not able to reach agreement on the SBA bill so no movement on HR 6322. They are hoping to move it in a pro forma session on Monday or in a later session scheduled this month. SVAC staffers will also be soliciting an American Legion letter to the White House supporting the posthumous award of the Medal of Freedom to Harry Colmery.

On Friday, April 17th, the National Veterans Employment & Education Division had its weekly teleconference meeting with EdCounsel/Lumina Risk Based Survey Executive Team to discuss Risk Based Survey Advisory Committee work, including review of the flow chart on how to determine which schools receive a Risk Based Survey. Also, further discussion of the next Advisory Council meeting, when and where it will occur. Finally, we will discuss whether SAA will be ready to pilot the new RBS model in October. Conversations with Hill Staffers on issues involving implementation of legislation by the VA, new legislation and Outreach for SAAs.

On Friday, April 17th, the National Veterans Employment & Education Division hosted a teleconference call with DOL, the Department of N.J., TAL HR, and Wounded Warrior Transition Unit, we discussed the feasibility for holding a resume and LinkedIn workshops. In these uncertain times, we need to ensure that our veterans are prepared for the challenges and struggles they will face when looking for suitable employment. The American Legion will host its first “Virtual Resume” workshop on April 22nd.

TOPIC 3: EMPLOYMENT

The American Legion has always been supportive of legislations that protects the employment of veterans within the US Postal Service, as outlined in [Resolution No. 344](#) passed during the 2016 National Convention. We will continue to monitor this situation.

With 97,000 veteran employees, the United States Postal Service is one of the country’s largest veteran employees — and it’s facing significant financial hardship at the hands of coronavirus.

Postal workers are needed now more than ever to deliver essentials across the country including prescriptions, food, household necessities and — of course — mail. But the USPS has projected it will lose more than \$22 billion over the next 18 months as a result of the virus. Long term, that deficit could reach \$54 billion and “threaten our ability to operate.”



“As Americans are urged to stay home, the importance of the mail will only grow as people, including those in rural areas and senior citizens, will need access to vital communications, essential packages and other necessities,” Megan J. Brennan, postmaster general and CEO said in a statement Friday.

“As Congress and the administration take steps to support businesses and industries around the country, it is imperative that they also take action to shore up the finances of the Postal Service, and enable us to continue to fulfill our indispensable role during the pandemic, and to play an effective role in the nation’s economic recovery,” Brennan added.

Despite the sharp drop in revenue, the USPS has not received any funding from Congress’ relief legislation so far. And according to the Washington Post, President Donald Trump communicated he would not sign any act that included measures specifically aimed to bail out the USPS. Instead, the most recent legislative effort, the CARES Act, included a \$10 billion loan for the USPS — rather than the \$13 billion bailout Trump rejected.

There have been numerous past attempts by politically conservative parties to privatize the country’s mail system. The loan is still awaiting Treasury Department approval. But the postal service could run out of money as soon as Sept. 30.

So far, about 500 postal workers have tested positive for COVID-19, according to information USPS provided lawmakers, and 462 others are presumed to have the virus but have not received official confirmation. At least 19 have died and more than 6,000 are in quarantine because they were exposed.

Now, Americans are buying stamps and posting tributes with the hashtags #SavetheUSPS to bolster mail carriers for as long as possible. The Washington Post predicts, without a bailout, the service will only be financially operational until September.

TOPIC 4: CAREER FAIRS

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

The American Legion is working on hosting virtual career fairs.

The National Veterans Employment & Education Division will hold its first "Virtual Resume" workshop on April 22nd, from 11:00 am – 12:00 pm. Currently there are 73 veterans, transitioning, and spouses registered.

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 5: VETERAN HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS

The Seymour Lions Club, along with fellow Lions across the state, recently delivered carloads of clothing and everyday essentials to homeless, female veterans trying to get back on their feet.

Lions Clubs statewide selected Homes for the Brave in Bridgeport, and specifically its program called Female Soldiers: Forgotten Heroes at the PFC Nicholas A. Maderas Home, as the benefactor of the clubs' recent service project.



The collection, according to Pam Mainero, District 23-A's chairman for women and children, surpassed expectations. Two carloads of bins and bags loaded to the brim with clothing, socks, coats, toothbrushes, shampoo, conditioner, shaving cream, soap, sheets, household items and other everyday necessities were collected by the various Lions Clubs, for women housed at the facility.

"We are so grateful for organizations like the Lions Club," said Elizabeth Gorenbergh, director of communications and outreach for Homes for the Brave. "With their support, we can continue to help our female veterans to gain the foundation they need to achieve their goals, beginning their life-transforming journeys."

Seymour Lions Treasurer Melissa Smith said she and her fellow Seymour Lions were happy to contribute six cases of shaving cream, as well as numerous grocery bags loaded with essentials.

"We think that it is very important to support our veterans, spotlighting the women who supported our country," Smith said. "If it wasn't for all vets, we would not have the freedoms that we do."

The Female Soldiers: Forgotten Heroes facility opened in 2011 and is Connecticut's only community-based transitional home exclusively for homeless, female veterans and their young children, according to the Homes of the Brave website. The facility serves homeless women returning from active duty, and provides them with a safe, secure home and food, while empowering them to work toward long-term goals of finding permanent housing and financial stability.

Helping the organization was a no-brainer for Bill Manthey, District Governor for Connecticut Lions District 23-A and a Cheshire Lions Club member.

"The Lions motto is 'we serve,'" said Manthey. "We are always looking to serve those in need in our communities. One of our goals this year was to help women and family centers. Our collection of items for these centers at our mid-winter convention was embraced by Lions Clubs throughout Fairfield and New Haven counties who brought carloads of necessities. We also work to help veterans, so helping the Home for the Brave in Bridgeport made sense. Because of the ongoing needs of the Home for the Brave and all the good they do, our Lions Clubs plan to continue our support in the future."

Lions Clubs International is the largest service club organization in the world. Its 1.4 million members in more than 46,000 clubs serve communities around the globe. Since 1917, Lions clubs have aided the blind and visually impaired, championed youth initiatives and strengthened local communities through hands-on service and humanitarian projects.

TOPIC 6: SMALL BUSINESS

The government's lending program for small businesses is on hold. The Small Business Administration said Thursday that it reached the \$349 billion lending limit for the program, after approving nearly 1.7 million loans.



Thousands of small business owners whose loans have not yet been processed must now wait for Congress to approve a Trump administration request for another \$250 billion for the program. Lawmakers have been haggling over whether to extend the program as it stands now, or whether to add provisions that, among other things, would help minority businesses. It's unclear when they might reach an agreement that would allow loan approvals to continue.

Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin and SBA head Jovita Carranza on Wednesday urged Congress to approve more funds. Meanwhile, thousands of businesses are still applying, hoping to get loans when Congress approves an extension of the program.

The fight in Congress over the extension is along party lines. Republicans are amping up the political pressure in hopes of getting a relatively narrowly drawn infusion of \$250 billion in funding into the program, but top Democrats are seeking to add funding for hospitals and state and local governments.

Action on Capitol Hill is complicated by the shuttering of the Capitol other than for pro forma sessions that require unanimous agreement for any legislation to advance. The sums are unlike anything that has passed under conditions requiring such unanimous consent — a wholly unprecedented situation that has scrambled the power dynamics inside the Capitol.

Democrats like House Speaker Nancy Pelosi of California are also seeking to add provisions that among other things would help minority businesses.

A Senate session Thursday afternoon likely won't produce any progress, which means the business payroll subsidy program won't get funding until next week at the earliest. The most likely outcome if there is to be a successful result could be a relatively narrowly-drawn bill involving additional funding for hospitals and maybe testing.

TOPIC 7: EDUCATION

White House officials are considering extending the military's GI Bill benefits to front-line civilian health care workers responding to the coronavirus outbreak, according to a conservative radio host with ties to the administration.

In an op-ed in the Washington Post Wednesday evening, political analyst Hugh Hewitt said extending veterans education benefits to hospital staffers and other medical personnel facing extreme working conditions is "on the president's mind." He predicted the move would be widely popular.



"There are tens of thousands of Americans at work in the virus 'hot zones' who are risking themselves and their families every day for the common good," Hewitt wrote. "We should clap them to and from work when we can, but we should also create for them a concrete set of economic thank-yous for those seeing us through the crisis."

The GI Bill has been a key military recruitment program for the last seven decades, especially since the program was massively overhauled in 2009 to provide more generous benefits to veterans.

Under current Post-9/11 GI Bill rules, troops who serve at least three years on active-duty can receive 36 months of tuition payouts equal to the most expensive state-run university in their home states, plus a monthly living allowance and a book stipend for each semester.

The total value of the package can run well above \$100,000, depending on where veterans attend school. Individuals who serve at least 90 days on active duty can receive a portion of that payout.



In addition, troops who agree to serve at least 10 years in the military can transfer those education payouts to a spouse or dependents. Defense Department officials have fought easing of those transfer rules in the past, arguing that the tuition payouts should be closely protected as a military recruiting and retention tool.

Nearly one million individuals received some type of education benefits from the VA this school year. The Congressional Budget Office said from 2010 to 2016, the Post-9/11 GI Bill program cost VA more than \$65 billion.

Hewitt wrote that expanding the program to non-veterans “would require careful drafting to make sure that a grant of GI Bill benefits to civilians was not too lightly conferred.” He did not provide any potential cost estimates for the plan.

But he argued that several prominent veterans have said that “their lives at the front lines were much, much easier than those of the warriors” battling coronavirus today.

“There’s little doubt that the vast majority of Americans would support this expansion of the GI Bill,” he said. “The famous post-World War II measure has evolved over time and should evolve again. Right now.”

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