

NATIONAL VETERANS EMPLOYMENT & EDUCATION COMMISSION

TOPIC 1: ECONOMY

Hopes for a rebound are endangered by prolonged closures of schools, renewed state restrictions on business and fears of a difficult autumn and winter.

The United States economy is headed for a tumultuous autumn, with the threat of closed schools, renewed government lockdowns, empty stadiums and an uncertain amount of federal support for businesses and unemployed workers all clouding hopes for a rapid rebound from recession.

For months, the prevailing wisdom among investors, Trump administration officials and many economic forecasters was that after plunging into recession this spring, the country's recovery would accelerate in late summer and take off in the fall as the virus receded, restrictions on commerce loosened, and consumers reverted to more normal spending patterns. Job gains in May and June fueled those rosy predictions.

But failure to suppress a resurgence of confirmed infections is threatening to choke the recovery and push the country back into a recessionary spiral — one that could inflict long-term damage on workers and businesses large and small, unless Congress reconsiders the scale of federal aid that may be required in the months to come.



The looming economic pain was evident this week as big companies forecast gloomy months ahead and government data showed renewed struggles in the job market. A weekly census survey on Wednesday showed 1.3 million fewer Americans held jobs last week than the previous week. A new American Enterprise Institute analysis from Safegraph.com of shopper traffic to stores showed business activity had plunged in the second week of July, in part from renewed virus fears.

Amazon on Wednesday extended a work-from-home order for eligible employees from October to January, and Delta Air Lines said on Tuesday it was cutting back plans to add flights in August and beyond, citing flagging consumer demand.

The nation's biggest banks also warned this week that they are setting aside billions of dollars to cover anticipated losses as customers fail to pay their mortgages and other loans in the months to come.

May and June will prove to be “easy” in terms of recovery, Jennifer Piepszak, the chief financial officer of JPMorgan Chase, said during an analyst call on Tuesday. “We’re really hitting the moment of truth, I think, in the months ahead,” she said.

Jamie Dimon, the bank's chief executive, said much of the economic pain had been blunted by federal spending, which was now running out. "You will see the effect of this recession," he said.

Some companies that used small-business loans to retain or rehire workers are now beginning to lay off employees as those funds run out while business activity remains depressed. Expanded benefits for unemployed workers, which research shows have been propping up consumer spending throughout the spring and early summer, are scheduled to expire at the end of July, while more than 18 million Americans continue to claim unemployment.

Many states are already renewing lockdowns, including California, where officials have ordered indoor bars, restaurants, gyms and other establishments to close. College sports conferences are beginning to cancel fall sports, including the lucrative football season, and concert tours are out of the picture.

"The earlier-than-anticipated resumption in activity has been accompanied by a sharp increase in the virus spread in many areas," Lael Brainard, a Federal Reserve governor, said on Tuesday. "Even if the virus spread flattens, the recovery is likely to face headwinds from diminished activity and costly adjustments in some sectors, along with impaired incomes among many consumers and businesses."

Most economists abandoned hope for a "V-shaped" recovery long ago. Now they are warning of an outright reversal, with mounting job losses and business failures. And this time, much of the damage is likely to be permanent.

"Our assumption has to be that we're going into re-lockdown in the fall," said Karl Smith, the vice president of federal policy at the conservative Tax Foundation in Washington.

Until recently, Mr. Smith said, he had been pushing administration officials and members of Congress to begin phasing out an extra \$600 per week for unemployed workers — perhaps replacing it with an incentive payment for Americans who return to work — and to shift spending toward tax incentives.

The last two weeks of coronavirus data changed his mind. He is now calling for another large economic rescue package from Washington, including extending the enhanced unemployment benefits, offering more aid to small businesses and perhaps sending another round of stimulus checks to American households.

"We have to go back to liquidity mode. I know in Congress there's not a lot of appetite for that," Mr. Smith said. "But there's still a chance it could be a horrible fall, and the legislative calendar is not set to deal with that."

Trump administration officials have suggested a willingness to negotiate with Democrats on unemployment benefits, small-business aid and possibly another round of stimulus checks, while also pushing for business tax cuts that have found little traction in Congress. Some Senate Republicans want to cut off pandemic spending increases entirely, though their leadership has expressed openness to a deal if it includes protections from lawsuits for businesses that reopen.

Small businesses around the country say that if lockdowns persist without some type of additional financial cushion from Congress, they will be faced with a dire choice.

At Sonoma Fit, a three-gym chain in Northern California, business was finally starting to stabilize this month after weeks of lost revenue and extreme uncertainty. Old customers were starting to come back. New ones were signing up. The thousands of dollars that Jennifer and Adam Kovacs, the owners, had spent to overhaul their facilities to allow for social distancing seemed to be paying off.

Then on Monday, a friend called to tell Ms. Kovacs that the governor had just ordered gyms in much of California to close again. Ms. Kovacs said she was “blindsided” — but she tried to hide it from her 17-year-old daughter, who was working at the front desk.

About three-quarters of Sonoma Fit’s nearly 5,000 members stuck with them through the first shutdown, but Ms. Kovacs said she thought they would be lucky to retain half their members this time. She said she could not imagine business returning to normal as long as rules differed by county and industry — and were subject to change at a moment’s notice.

“I really cannot express the level of fear and frustration and helplessness that we feel,” Ms. Kovacs said. “This slow reopening isn’t working. Shut down everything, shut down every single thing, and keep us home for three weeks. I’d rather do that than this off-on, off-on, off-on. Because every time we do that, we’re losing thousands of dollars.”

Mr. Trump’s advisers continue to predict the economy will rebound sharply in the months ahead, and the president has made increasingly insistent calls for a full reopening of schools this fall. Many economists agree that the economy cannot fully recover — let alone grow — if millions of young children remain at home without viable child care options. Yet failure to control the virus has made reopening a risky trade-off.

Some of the nation’s largest school districts, including Los Angeles and San Diego, have announced that they will not immediately return to in-person classroom instruction when the new school year begins. In New York and other large public school districts around the country, officials are preparing to bring students back for only part-time instruction and have warned parents they could shut down again if cases rise.

Those announcements have not been accompanied by government-funded programs that economists say would help schools open safely or ensure access to child care for millions of Americans who are struggling to juggle parenting and work — a group that is disproportionately made up of women who are not white. Even as Mr. Trump pushes a return to classrooms, many districts are facing pandemic-induced budget shortfalls.

Census figures from 2019 analyzed by Melissa S. Kearney, a University of Maryland economist who directs the Economic Strategy Group at the Aspen Institute, show that nearly one-quarter of American workers — about 38 million adults — have at least one child under the age of 13 at home. The share is higher among so-called essential workers who are required to report to their jobs during lockdowns, and it rises to one-third for workers in low-income families.

Only 16 percent of all workers with a young child have a nonworking spouse at home who could plausibly care for children who are not in school in order for a spouse to report to work, Ms. Kearney said.

“There’s millions of workers that can’t go back to work if their kids don’t have a safe place to be, most days a week,” Ms. Kearney said. “This is not, get schools open or don’t get schools open. We need to figure out a way to get schools open safely.”

Even for workers who are able to do their jobs from home, having to juggle parenting responsibilities during the day reduces productivity and hurts the economy, Ms. Kearney added. “It’s hard to work at home when kids are at home.”

Driving all that damage is the resurgence of the virus. The federal government is nowhere close to the testing and tracing capacity that some economists have long warned are needed to restore consumer confidence until a vaccine is found. The White House and lawmakers at every level, on school boards and in Congress, have not coalesced around a unified approach to getting as many Americans as possible back to work safely by the fall.

The country has now tried two strategies to raft its economy through the pandemic: shutting down commerce to slow the spread of the virus and rapidly lifting restrictions on activity to get business humming again. It has not followed through on either approach.

Officials in Florida, Texas and other states began a rapid reopening of their economies in May, while the nation’s infection rate remained higher than those of other wealthy nations — and well before the federal government had a plan to ensure the safety of anything resembling normal business activity. An ensuing surge of cases in the Southeast and Southwest has forced some governors to re-impose limits like shutting down bars.

Restaurants, retailers and other businesses that have partly adapted to the new realities of the crisis, often by moving some operations outdoors, must now brace for the prospect of at least several more months of constricted revenues as colder weather sets in. Broadway has shuttered until 2021. Popular music groups have canceled tours, leaving independent concert venues with no way to earn money to survive.

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 2019	June 2020	June 2019	June 2020	June 2019	June 2020
Unemployed	298	776	250	675	48	101
Unemployment rate	3.2	8.6	3.0	8.5	4.6	9.6

The national unemployment rate is 11.1 percent (June 2020). Gulf War II veterans' unemployment rate is 10.3 percent.ⁱ Currently, the unemployment rate for Gulf War II women veterans is 13.7 percent (Up from 10.1 percent in May).

In June 2020, the veteran unemployment rate is 8.6%, down from 9.1% last month and 11.3% two months ago. The comparable non-veteran unemployment rate was 13.3% in May and 11.1% in June

TOPIC 2: CONFERENCE CALLS

On Monday, July 13, Georgia Governor Brian P. Kemp, published Georgia's Broadband Availability Map, a new tool that will bring more transparency about the internet marketplace and clarify which Georgia households do not have access to high-speed internet. Unfortunately, more than a million Georgians lack access to reliable high-speed internet service, defined by the Federal Communications Commission as twenty-five megabits per second download and three megabits per second upload (25/3 mpbs).

The Georgia Broadband Availability Map gives a new view of the difference between access to high-speed internet in metropolitan and rural areas. Of the more than 507,000 homes and businesses lacking access to reliable broadband service at speeds of 25/3 mpbs, nearly 70% of these locations are in rural parts of Georgia.

The new mapping tool help will help stimulate private investment, but it also enables Georgia to support local communities and track progress toward serving the unserved.

On Monday, July 13, the National Veterans Employment & Education Division prepared for the next Advisory Council meeting on Risk Based Surveys, particularly the issues and challenges to be discussed. Conversation with NASAA President and Lumina RBS Project Manager about those issues. Also, research and prep for call with the HVAC Majority on Quality of Education and the impact of COVID-19 on same, particularly as pertains to distance education. Also discussed these issues with Director Joe Sharp and the Legion's present and future role. Talked with HVAC Majority staff about measures needed to ensure quality of education in view of many schools / programs going on line again in the Fall Term.

On Monday, July 13, the National Veterans Employment & Education Division held a conference call with the Executive Director of the AFL-CIO's Union Veterans Council about upcoming legislation affecting veterans training pipelines in the trades. Specifically, the Union Veterans Council is interested in supporting H.R. 7111.

On Tuesday, July 14, the National Veterans Employment & Education Division attended a meeting hosted by the law firm of Piliero Mazza regarding new changes to federal contracts for services. Compliance with the Service Contract Act (SCA), now referred to as the Service Contract Labor Standards, is a challenge for many companies. Understanding applicability, wage determinations, health and welfare benefits, and leave can cause major headaches. non-compliance will lead to a Department of Labor (DOL) audit.

On Tuesday, July 14, the National Veterans Employment & Education Division continued conversations with HVAC and SVAC staff on 4626 and provisions to protect the GI Bill and quality of education. Research on 90/10. Also research on other provisions that might indicate risk or need for greater oversight. Discussion with Southern SAAs on the possibility of remote surveys under the new RBS model. Further conversation with GA SAA about NCD that might require greater oversight and how Compliance Surveys fail to find issues.

On Wednesday, July 15, the National Veterans Employment & Education Division followed up with conversations with Bush Institute on Higher Education. Also questions on state residency and whether they need to be addressed in the next COVID package. Research on Qualitative and Quantitative measures of quality. Additional conversations with NASAA Leadership and Congressional staffers on the same.

On Thursday, July 16, the National Veterans Employment & Education Division engaged in conversations with Majority HVAC Staffers ensuring Quality of Education. Particularly issues surrounding institutions recently granted Not for Profit Status by the Department of Education. Majority Members are seeking a bill which will require more robust oversight of those institutions for 10 years. Idea is to have these institutions undergo a Risk Based Survey (RBS) each year (for 5 years not 10). Conversations with Minority HVAC staffers on this issue of For-Profit oversight as well and on the new jobs bill. Concern a about adequate measures in that bill to ensure quality and proper level of oversight. Conversation with RBS Project Manager on plans for the next RBS Advisory Council meeting and needed legislative language for a national database, using moneys turned back in by SAAs. Also, questions pertaining to SAA outreach bill to ensure that veterans are aware of training, such as OJT, Apprenticeships and Certifications Conversations with Senate on 4 items needed in 4625: 1) Listing of important RBS measures/matrices, 2) Priority of RBS over CS for SAAs, 3) Outreach Language and 4) National Database.

On Thursday, July 16, the National Veterans Employment & Education Division attended the VA's GI Bill Monthly Stakeholder Meeting. The conference call focused on Colmery Forever GI Bill updates, integration of Department of Labor FTE for GI Bill program certification, and review of the VA's recent decision on University of Phoenix.

On Friday, July 17, the National Veterans Employment & Education Division attended a webinar hosted by the US Chamber of Commerce regarding the state of the coronavirus pandemic and the planned stages of reopening. Dr. Anthony Fauci provided an in-depth conversation about COVID-19 and field questions from U.S. Chamber President Suzanne Clark and members of the audience.

On Friday, July 17, the National Veterans Employment & Education Division spoke with the Education Counsel, Lumina and NASAA Weekly Meeting to discuss the next Council meeting and COVID Challenges to meaningful oversight of GI Bill approved institutions. American Legion weekly meeting. Complete Invoices and research on 90/10. Conversations with SVAC staffers on 4625, Protect the GI Bill Act, and conversation with Senate staffers on 90/10 (Senators Tillis and Burr).

On Friday, July 17, the National Veterans Employment & Education Division met with Renata Bradford, Veterans Program Manager for the Department of Veterans Affairs. We discussed issues with the hiring of veterans within the federal government as a whole. There have been concerns that veterans who hold a schedule A letter is not being considered for employment.

TOPIC 3: TRACKING LEGISLATION

HR 6800 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 VA Medical Centers to allow homeless veterans to shelter on VA parking lots temporarily; Allows VA to provide reimbursements to social service providers receiving grants for the costs of services for minor children. (Davy)

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

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. (Ariel/John)

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

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

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

S.2857: The Protect Veterans' Education and Taxpayer Spending Act. Closes the 90-10 loophole by amending the Higher Education Act of 1965 to count military and veterans education benefits as Federal educational assistance, and for other purposes. (John)

[Resolution No. 15: Support Greater GI Bill Outcomes By Closing 90-10 Loophole](#)

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. (Ariel/John)

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

HR 7010, Paycheck Protection Program Flexibility Act of 2020: This bill significantly changes the terms of the PPP loans 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. (Davy)

HR 4625: To require education programs to be approved by the VA 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. (John)

[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. (John)

[Currently Studying for appropriate resolution.](#)

HR 4941 Veteran Employment Transition Act: Sponsored by Representative Andy Kim. The last action on the bill 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 to 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 for in the area. (Raymond/Ariel)

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

HR 7003: 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 members of 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. (Raymond/Ariel)

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

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. (John)

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

HR 7111 Veterans Economic Recovery Act of 2020: Require the Secretary of VA 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 payments made to students and schools through the Post 9/11 GI Bill. (John)

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

Homeless Veteran Coronavirus Response Act: The bill allows VA 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 VA to ensure veterans participating in VA homeless programs have access to VA telehealth services. (Teresa)

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

S.3038 Promoting Rigorous and Innovative Cost Efficiencies for Federal Procurement and Acquisitions Act of 2019: A bill to urge federal agencies to innovative acquisition techniques and procurement strategies. Focuses on contracting modernization and information sharing between federal agencies to ensure best practices in small business utilization are shared. (Davy)

[Resolution No. 21 which supports federal programing that will increase the number of opportunities for our veterans small businesses.](#)

Draft Bill: Home loan benefits for national guard To amend title 38, United States Code, to expand eligibility for home loans from the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to certain members of the reserve components of the Armed Forces. (John)

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

Draft Bill: Justice For Veterans Act - To amend title 38, United States Code, to clarify the scope of procedural rights of members of the uniformed services with respect to their employment and reemployment rights, and for other purposes. (Davy)

[Resolution No. 85: Support Employment and Reemployment Rights of National Guard and Reservists Returning from Deployment](#)

Draft Bill: USERRA Protections for State Active Duty - To amend title 38, United States Code, to extend certain employment and reemployment rights to members of the National Guard who perform State active duty. Submitted written testimony to the Legislative Division. (Ariel) [Resolution No. 315: Support Employment and Reemployment Rights of National Guard and Reservists Returning from Deployment](#)

TOPIC 4: EMPLOYMENT

More than 150 Minneapolis police officers are filing work-related disability claims after the death of George Floyd and ensuing unrest, with about three-quarters citing post-traumatic stress disorder as the reason for their planned departures, according to an attorney representing the officers.



Their duty disability claims, which will take months to process, come as the city is seeing an increase in violent crime and while city leaders push a proposal to replace the Minneapolis Police Department with a new agency that they say would have a more holistic approach.

While Floyd's death in May and the unrest that followed are not the direct cause of many of the disability requests, attorney Ron Meuser said, those events and what Meuser called a lack of support from city leadership were a breaking point for many who had been struggling with PTSD from years on the job. Duty disability means the officer was disabled while engaged in inherently dangerous acts specific to the job.

"Following the George Floyd incident, unfortunately it became too much and as a result they were unable to, and are unable to, continue on and move forward," Meuser said. "They feel totally and utterly abandoned."

He said many officers he represents were at a precinct that police abandoned as people were breaking in during the unrest. Some officers feared they wouldn't make it home, he said, and wrote final notes to loved ones. People in the crowd ultimately set fire to the building.

Mayor Jacob Frey issued a statement saying that COVID-19 and unrest following Floyd's death tested the community and officers in profound ways. He said cities need resources to reflect the realities on the ground.

"In the meantime, I am committed to supporting those officers committed to carrying out their oath to serve and protect the people of Minneapolis during a challenging time for our city," he said.

Meuser said in recent weeks, 150 officers have retained his office for help in filing for duty disability benefits through the state's Public Employment Retirement Association, or PERA. So far, 75 of them have already left the job, he said.

Police spokesman John Elder questioned Meuser's figure of 150, though he does expect an increase in departures. The department currently has about 850 officers and will adjust staffing to ensure it can do its job, he said.

The city said it has received 17 PTSD workers compensation claims in the last month, but when it comes to PERA duty disability, officers are not obligated to notify the Police Department that an application was submitted. Meuser said the city isn't being transparent about departures, and the numbers it sees will lag as PERA benefits take months to process.

Doug Anderson, executive director for PERA, said 150 officers seeking duty disability from one department would be high. PERA approved 105 disability applications from both police and firefighters statewide in all of 2019, including 60 claims for duty-related PTSD and 20 for other work-related injuries.

PERA is primarily a retirement plan, in which members and employers contribute funds. Members who become disabled can receive a disability benefit until age 55, at which time retirement benefits kick in.

A high percentage of those on duty disability do not return to the job, Anderson said.

"It's a disability that as a general rule is a permanent designation entitling them for benefits for the rest of their life," Meuser said.

A high number of people taking PERA disability likely won't impact the city budget immediately, as the city's rate of contribution to the plan is fixed, though the Minnesota Legislature could increase contribution rates. The city can incur significant costs if the leave is classified as "duty disability," because the city would continue to pay for the officer's health insurance.

To apply, an officer needs supporting documents from two physicians. A third-party administrator ensures applications are complete. If there is a discrepancy, PERA can require an independent medical evaluation. The Police Department could also challenge an application, and there is a process for appeal. Denials and appeals are uncommon, Anderson said.

Meuser made his announcement amid an increase in violent crime. From Thursday night to Friday morning alone, nine people were shot in Minneapolis, including one fatally. Police data analyzed by the Star Tribune show that at least 243 people have been shot so far this year, compared with 269 in all of 2019.

Asked about his timing, Meuser said he believes Minneapolis officers are being unfairly tarnished, and it's time to call out "decades of failed leadership" in the city.

Meuser opposes calls to dismantle or defund the Police Department, and said he hopes the news that veteran officers are leaving will make the public reassess the city's current trajectory.

"The men and women in public safety who give their heart and soul to serve Minneapolis and keep it safe deserve to have Minneapolis leaders to step up and supporting them," he said. "Instead of spending time plotting the dismantling of the force, let's come together to improve community trust and work towards a safer city for all."

TOPIC 5: VETERAN HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS

The Department of Veterans Affairs announced it planned to pledge an additional \$400 million of its nearly \$20 billion in COVID-19 emergency response funding to help homeless veterans and those at risk of homelessness.

Tens of thousands of veterans are homeless on any given night in America, and more than 1.4 million were at risk of becoming homeless before the coronavirus pandemic struck.

As the pandemic continues to pummel the economy, more and more veterans are put at risk of homelessness, and many of those already homeless have lost access to the few resources they had as shelters across the country shuttered.

Earlier in the pandemic, advocates warned that without permanent housing, America could expect to see a "huge spike" in veteran homelessness.



In April, Congress and VA signed off on providing \$200 million in emergency funds to help house homeless veterans in hotels and pay for testing for those who fall ill. Now, the department is allocating another \$400 million.

“The additional allocation of CARES Act funding will support the continuity of care of vulnerable veterans during the COVID-19 pandemic,” VA Secretary Robert Wilkie said in a statement Thursday. “With this additional funding, VA’s Homeless Programs Office can provide more homeless prevention assistance and emergency housing to make it possible for veterans to maintain appropriate physical distancing and to ensure they are living in safe conditions.”

The additional cash is earmarked for the Supportive Services for Veteran Families Program, which "offers secure housing for veterans," according to the department.

In May, Reps. Gus Bilirakis, R-Fla., and Mike Levin, D-Calif., in the House and Sens. Dan Sullivan, R-Ark., and Kyrsten Sinema, D-Ariz., in the Senate, introduced the Homeless Veteran Coronavirus Response Act aiming to protect homeless vets by using existing funds for a wider range of services to help.

VA does not currently have the authority to provide food, phones or other supplies to homeless veterans, VA officials told Connecting Vets. The bill, in part, would allow VA to use existing funds to provide many of those resources and more, loosening limitations on VA for ways in which it can use emergency money to help homeless vets.

The more than \$600 million so far allocated to help homeless vets during the pandemic is also expected to benefit the Housing and Urban Development VA Supportive Housing Program, according to the department, which works to place vets in "safe housing to isolate them from the virus."

Advocates have said they need closer to \$1.3 billion to address homelessness and housing insecurity caused by the pandemic.

About \$88 million has also been provided for VA's Grant and Per Diem Program and \$10 million for the Health Care for Homeless Veterans Program, according to the agency.

VA plans to host a webinar Friday on budgeting and planning for the organizations which will receive the funding.

TOPIC 6: CAREER FAIRS

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

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

There were 1,021 initial claims filed by newly discharged veterans, a decrease of 175 from the preceding week.

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 7: SMALL BUSINESS

EXB Solutions, Inc., a Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned Small Business (SDVOSB) specializing in safety critical software has been named the U.S. Small Business Administration's 2020 Subcontractor of the Year. A part of the Federal Procurement Awards Category, this award honors small businesses that have provided the government and industry with outstanding goods and services as subcontractors.

Nominated by Collins Aerospace, this award recognizes EXB's outstanding software development contributions on a major program since late 2018. The Fly-by-Wire software team at Collins Aerospace was asked by their customer, Boeing, to ramp up efforts to complete their milestones to meet their commitments for the new Boeing 777X airplane.



"We are honored to be nominated by Collins Aerospace and recognized by the Small Business Administration. It is one of the nation's highest honors for small businesses like us and underscores our mission and passion to contribute to the nation's critical infrastructure," says Chris Schwartzbauer, President and CEO of EXB Solutions. The award was evaluated on Contract Performance, Customer Interface and Innovativeness of service(s) offered to Collins Aerospace.

During the course of the project, four engineering service providers built teams to support the plan. Throughout 2019, each vendor's performance was measured in qualitative and quantitative ways to identify the best-earned value, on-time delivery, and capability. "EXB was rated as one of the top vendors on our projects and showed higher earned value over the four-vendor average through

our initial deliveries. Through our expansion on the project, EXB demonstrated their ability to build their team, engage quickly, and add value to hit our safety of flight milestones," says Brian Dugan, Avionics Group Leader at Collins Aerospace.

EXB leveraged successful past performance to implement an engagement approach that allowed its engineers to support Collins Aerospace efforts without increasing burden on technical managers. Dave Surret, Program Manager at EXB who led the Collins' team further explains, "EXB's purpose is to help customers build high-quality software. Our managed engagement approach and agile teams provided flexibility and dynamic response to the changing needs of Collins Aerospace. This helped Collins assign additional scope to meet milestones."

Run by the U.S. Small Business Administration, year after year, the National Small Business Awards have celebrated the inspiring achievements of America's small businesses and the countless contributions they make to their local communities, and to the U.S.' economy. "It's an honor for me to recognize the National Small Business Week state and territorial winners from across the nation whose exceptional hard work has created and built successful small businesses," stated Jovita Carranza, Administrator of the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA). "These women and men have not only realized their dreams of entrepreneurship but have also been tremendous job creators, helping to expand our economy. They represent the 30 million American small businesses – our nation's innovators and risk-takers," she added.

The SBA is the only cabinet-level federal agency fully dedicated to small business and provides counseling, capital, and contracting expertise as the nation's only go-to resource and voice for small businesses.

TOPIC 7b: SMALL BUSINESS

“Putting America Back to Work: The Role of Workforce Development and Small Business Rehiring.”

The National Veterans Employment & Education Division joined the virtual hearing of the House Small Business Committee Subcommittee on Innovation and Workforce Development regarding “Putting America Back to Work: The Role of Workforce Development and Small Business Rehiring.” Economists project that up to 42 percent of layoffs caused by the COVID-19 pandemic may become permanent. Therefore, if old jobs do not return, new jobs will be needed in their place. New jobs, in many cases, may require new skills and skillsets that workers may not have been trained for in the past. This could indicate the need for a greater role of the federal government in aiding small businesses as they rebuild, whether it be through more fiscal stimulus directly to the people to generate more demand or more widely available capital for businesses to invest in their workers.

Dr. Demetra Smith Nightingale, Urban Institute, shared there are at least three ways small businesses can avail themselves of services available in the workforce development system to hire workers as the economy improves and access skilled workers that will be needed in the future.

- a. First, to stay abreast of shifts in high demand occupations and necessary skills, businesses should regularly refer to the federally funded labor market information and occupational projections the state workforce agencies maintain.
- b. Second, small businesses can partner directly with the local workforce development system for training current and future employees.

- c. Third, businesses should prepare for the possibility of a long-term period of high unemployment and potentially more federal stimulus funding that may include job training programs.

Dr. Joe Schaffer, President Laramie County Community College (WY) explained that community colleges have a rich history of developing and delivering programs that prepare job seekers for real opportunities within their communities, states, and regions. For America more broadly, and certainly our rural areas, we need to fundamentally shift from only focusing on developing job seekers to equally emphasizing developing job creators.

Communities, he shared, need to shift their focus from business recruitment as their primary economic development strategy to a mindset focused on entrepreneurship. Community colleges are helping drive this shift.

TOPIC 8: EDUCATION

Democrats on a key House committee on Monday approved an education spending bill that would reject hundreds of millions in cuts for colleges and universities, as well as more than a billion in cuts to college student aid, that have been sought by President Trump.



Trump's Budget Proposes More Than \$200 Billion in Cuts to Students

The spending measure approved by the House appropriations committee, along partisan lines, would also increase spending on career and technical education by \$25 million, \$738 million less than the major boost Trump and Education Secretary Betsy DeVos want.

The Democrat-controlled House must still work out a deal with the Republican Senate and the Trump administration as part of a budget deal later this year.

The spending package is separate from discussions around the next coronavirus relief package, expected to begin in earnest when the Senate returns from its July 4 break next week, and does little to deal with huge financial losses higher education institutions are taking from the pandemic.

The House proposal would provide a modest \$716 million increase to the Education Department's budget, to \$73.5 billion.

It raises funding for higher education institutions by \$81 million to \$2.6 billion, \$768 million more than what Trump proposed. Included in the proposal is \$49 million more for historically Black colleges and universities and other institutions serving minorities.

The measure stops short of the long-term doubling the size of Pell Grant awards, as higher education advocacy groups want. But Jessica Thompson, an associate vice president at the Institute for College Access & Success, praised the proposal for increasing the size of the maximum Pell Grant by \$150 to \$6,495, to keep pace with inflation at a time when the recession is expected to make it more difficult for lower-income students to attend college.

In addition, the bill removes a prohibition on incarcerated students receiving Pell Grants. Representative Rosa DeLauro, the Connecticut Democrat who chairs the appropriations subcommittee on education, said the change would “reduce recidivism and provide opportunity.”

The proposal would also amend the so-called 90-10 rule, which caps the share of revenue for-profit institutions can take in from federal sources at 90 percent.

Because the current cap exempts federal tuition benefits for veterans and active members of the U.S. military, critics have said it encourages for-profit institutions, some of which have been found to have used misleading recruiting practices, to target veterans and service members. However, the bill would tighten the restriction so that no more than 85 percent of the incomes of for-profits can come from the federal government. It would also begin counting tuition help for veterans and service members toward the cap.

According to an analysis by the liberal think tank Center for American Progress, Trump’s proposal would cut more than \$2 billion next year in federal student financial support, mostly by bringing back proposals to eliminate programs like subsidized Stafford Loans, freeze the maximum Pell Grant for the next decade and cut \$630 million from the federal work-study program.

The administration also proposed creating “sensible annual and lifetime loan limits for graduate and parent borrowers,” a budget document said. It would limit Parent PLUS loans for undergraduate students to \$26,500. Dependent undergraduate students would be eligible to borrow an additional amount, up to \$57,500, depending on the parents' eligibility for additional borrowing.

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