

NATIONAL VETERANS EMPLOYMENT & EDUCATION COMMISSION

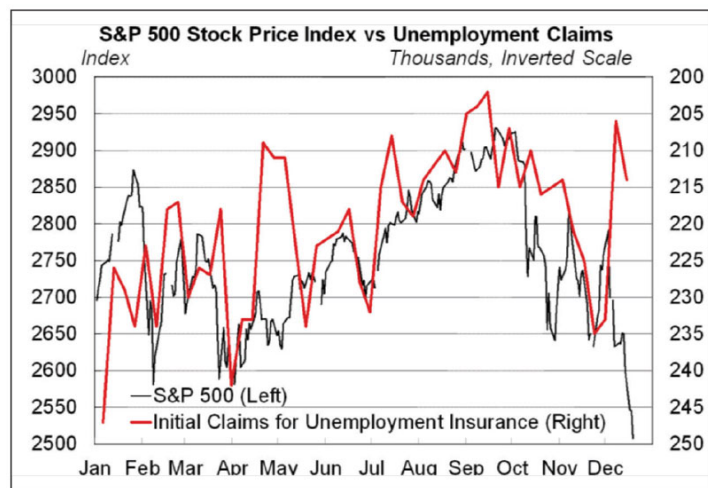
TOPIC 1: ECONOMY

U.S. GDP growth will slow to 2.2% in 2019 from 3% in 2018. It will be 2% in 2020 and 1.9% in 2021. That's according to the most recent forecast released at the Federal Open Market Committee meeting on September 18, 2019.¹ The projected slowdown in 2019 and beyond is a side effect of the trade war, a key component of Trump's economic policies.

The unemployment rate will average 3.7% in 2019 and 2020. It will bump up to 3.8% in 2021. That's lower than the Fed's 6.7% target. But former Federal Reserve Chair Janet Yellen noted a lot of workers are part-time and would prefer full-time work. Also, most job growth is in low-paying retail and foodservice industries.

Some people have been out of work for so long that they'll never be able to return to the high-paying jobs they used to have. Structural unemployment has increased. These traits are unique to this recovery.

Yellen admitted that the real unemployment rate is more accurate. It's double the widely-reported rate. You can put this report into perspective by viewing the unemployment rates since 1929. Inflation will average 1.5% in 2019. It will rise to 1.9% in 2020 and 2.0% in 2021. The core inflation rate strips out those volatile gas and food prices. The Fed prefers to use that rate when setting monetary policy. The core inflation rate will average 1.8% in 2019, 1.9% in 2020, and 2.0% in 2021. The core rate is slightly below the Fed's 2% target inflation rate. That may push the Fed room to lower interest rates. The U.S. inflation rate history and forecast provides a good basis for predicting the coming years' inflation levels.



U.S. manufacturing is forecast to increase faster than the general economy. The MAPI Foundation says increased capital growth and higher exports will boost manufacturing. It predicts production will grow by 3.9% in 2019. It will slow slightly to 2.4% in 2020 and 1.9% in 2021.

Interest Rates

The Federal Open Market Committee lowered the current fed funds rate to 2.0% on September 18, 2019. It doesn't expect to increase this interest rate for the foreseeable future. In fact, it hinted it may lower it again in 2019.

The Fed is more concerned about promoting growth than about preventing inflation. In fact, it doesn't see inflation as a threat anytime in the next three years. The fed funds rate controls short-term interest rates.

These include banks' prime rate, the Libor, most adjustable-rate loans, and credit card rates. You can protect yourself from the Fed's rate hikes by choosing fixed-rate loans wherever possible.

The Fed began reducing its \$4 trillion in Treasuries in October 2017. The Fed acquired these securities during quantitative easing, which ended in 2014. At the July 31, 2019, meeting, it announced it would stop reducing its holdings.

Jobs

The Bureau of Labor Statistics publishes an occupational outlook each decade. It goes into great detail about each industry and occupation. Overall, the BLS expects total employment to increase by 20.5 million jobs between 2010 and 2020.

While 88% of all occupations will experience growth, the fastest growth will occur in healthcare, personal care and social assistance, and construction.

The BLS assumes that the economy will fully recover from the recession by 2020 and that the labor force will return to full employment or an unemployment rate of 4% to 5%.

The most significant growth, forecasted at 5.7 million jobs, will occur in healthcare and other forms of social assistance as the American population ages.

The next most substantial increase, 2.1 million jobs, will occur in professional and technical occupations. Most of this is in computer systems design, especially mobile technologies and management, scientific, and technical consulting.

Businesses will need advice on planning and logistics and implementing new technologies. They will need consulting to comply with workplace safety, environmental, and employment regulations.

Other substantial increases will occur in education, predicted to be 1.8 million jobs; retail, 1.7 million jobs; and hotel/restaurants, 1 million jobs. Another area is miscellaneous services at 1.6 million jobs. That includes human resources, seasonal and temporary workers, and waste collection.

As housing recovers, construction will add 1.8 million jobs while other areas of manufacturing will lose jobs due to technology and outsourcing.

Climate Change

The Federal Reserve is taking into account how climate change is affecting the economy.⁶ Research from the Richmond Fed estimated that it will reduce U.S. economic growth by 30% over the next century.

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	
	NOV 2018	NOV 2019	NOV 2018	NOV 2019	NOV 2018	NOV 2019
Unemployed	120	164	98	122	22	43
Unemployment rate	3.4	4.7	3.3	4.1	4.1	8.0

The national unemployment rate is 3.5 percent (November 2019). Gulf War II veterans' unemployment rate is 3.4 percent.ⁱ Currently, the unemployment rate for Gulf War II women veterans is 8.0 percent (down from 9.5 percent in October).

TOPIC 2: MEETINGS

On Tuesday, December 17, 2019 the National Veterans Employment & Education Division held a planning call with the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) over Legion participation in the AACC's Workforce Development Initiative conference in Amelia Island on January 22nd. VE&E staff has organized a plenary panel on "*Warrior Transition: Paths to Advance Military-Based Learning and Civilian Employment*" on the first day of the conference.

On Tuesday, December 17, 2019 the National Veterans Employment & Education Division met with representatives from DeVry University seeking clarification with their scholarship program.

On Tuesday, December 17, 2019 the National Veterans Employment & Education Division met with the Mike Miller, Transition Assistance Manager, Department of Defense. We discussed the implementation of TAP and how it affects our servicemembers in today's digital world.

On Tuesday, December 17, 2019 the National Veterans Employment & Education Division attended the Dixon Center for Military and Veteran Service's holiday reception at Bobby Van's. VE&E staff have been working with the Dixon Center on our Military Credentialing Advancement study, as well as ensuring adequate state approval for GI Bill benefits.

On Tuesday, December 17, 2019 the National Veterans Employment & Education Division attended a briefing on the "*Overview of Impact of Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) Funding*" at the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Advisory Committee on Women Veterans. The briefing was presented by John Kuhn, National Director, Supportive Services for Families, VHA Office of Homeless Programs. Discussed the regulatory framework that supports families and how the Grant Per Diem (GPD) rate established by Congress needs to be revisited.

On Wednesday, December 18, 2019 the National Veterans Employment & Education Division attended several briefings at the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Advisory Committee on Women, which included: "*Overview of VA Educational Benefits*," presented by Charmain Bogue, Executive Director, Education Services, VBA and "*Role of Women Veteran Coordinators*," presented by Scott Posti, Assistant Director, Outreach, Benefits Assistance Service, Office of Field Operations, VBA. During the "*Overview of VA Educational Benefits*," the impact of educational benefits and incarcerated veterans was lightly covered and requires follow-up conversation. During the "*Role of Women Veteran Coordinators*" presentation, VBA stated their goal is to increase knowledge of VA benefits and services provided for women veterans through women veteran coordinators (located in each state and territory).

On Wednesday, December 18, 2019 the National Veterans Employment & Education Division attended the VET-Force Veterans Small Business Forum & 6th Annual Veterans Vendor Session. The event focused on contracting opportunities for Veteran and Service Disabled Veteran Business Owners at the Department of Health & Human Services. HHS Small Business Specialists met one-on-one with Veteran Small Business Vendors to discuss specific agency requirements.

On Wednesday, December 18, 2019 the National Veterans Employment & Education Division held a meeting with the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) over potential participation in the Legion's Credentialing Roundtable. Andrew Morton, SHRM's Director of Veterans and Certification Affairs, agreed to officially represent the organization on the Credentialing Roundtable for the duration of 2020.

TOPIC 3: EMPLOYMENT

Congress made TAP training mandatory in fiscal 2011 when veteran unemployment was still lagging from the recession at 12.1 percent while non-veterans were at 8.7 percent. It is a program made up of several different federal departments, including the Defense Department, the VA and the Department of Education.

The American Legion has consistently advocated for the improvement of TAP that will meet today's challenges for our servicemembers.



Servicemembers will have to complete a program meant to help them transition into civilian life sooner as the new Transition Assistance Program requirements become effective Oct. 1.

All active-duty military, including National Guard and reservists, who served continuously for 180 days now have to meet with an initial TAP counselor, attend pre-separation counseling and start his or her transition plan one year before leaving or retiring, among other new requirements.

The Department of Veterans Affairs estimates about 200,000 servicemembers are expected to transition to civilian life annually in the next four years.



"Although transition preparation is embedded as part of a servicemember's military life cycle, these changes will tailor TAP to meet individual needs and with a look at their unique transition experience to best prepare for civilian life," Tamre Newton, Transition to Veterans Program Office director, said in a statement when the change was announced in April.

In its latest Military to Civilian report, the VA staff wrote that a younger, more diverse population of people who served is affecting how members should be trained to transition into civilian life.

Commanders will still verify a service member has achieved career readiness standards with the Capstone event, but it must be done no later than 90 days before leaving.

"Not only are individual goals and needs addressed during the individualized counseling," Newton said, "but transitioning servicemembers also receive more information on these topics during TAP."

TAP's new requirements will have servicemembers choose at least one of four new "tracks" that they can use when developing their transition plan and post-transition goals. The two-day instructional tracks are the Department of Labor Employment Track, DOL Vocational Track, DoD Higher Education Track, and Small Business Administration Entrepreneurship Track.

The last one is the SBA's Boots to Business program, which has helped 100,000 servicemembers transition. Graduates of the program have managed to open their breweries, start their own consulting companies and open restaurant franchises.

"With Boots to Business, transitioning servicemembers learn about business fundamentals and can determine after the completion of the class if they want to continue on their path to entrepreneurship or if another track is better-suited for them -- like education or employment," a spokeswoman from the SBA's Office of Veterans Business Development said in an email.

Another TAP partner Office of Personnel Management, provides transitioning servicemembers and their families consistent information on the federal employment process.

"What's also as important is helping agencies understand that veterans value the opportunity to continue their service through federal service by bringing state-of-the-art training, specialized experience, and GI Bill benefits that have fueled their education," an OPM spokesperson said via email.

Meanwhile, the Defense Department will still have its eight-hour-long training on financial education and defining military skills in civilian language. The VA will continue its briefs on the benefits and services available after separation or retirement. And the original three-day DOL Employment Workshop on employment will be shortened to one day.



TOPIC 4: CAREER FAIRS

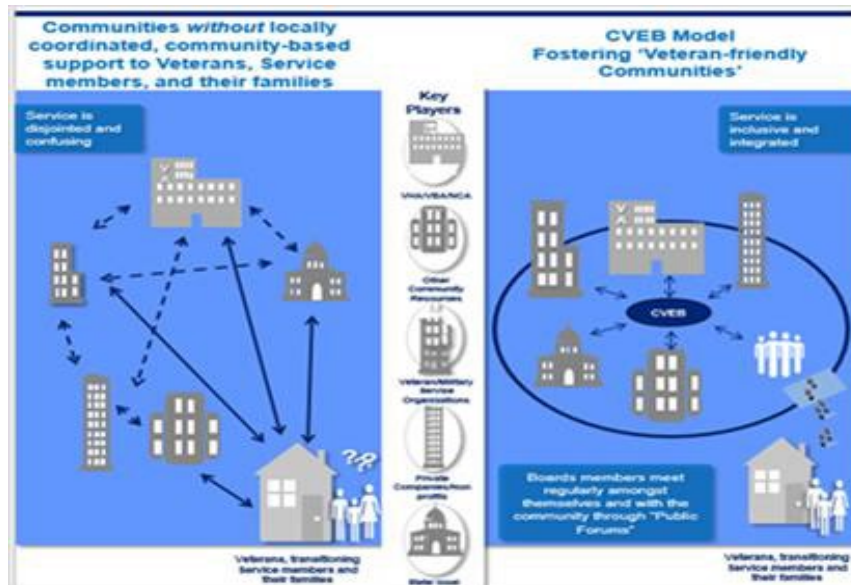
This week, work continued on The American Legion’s upcoming hiring events to be staged in Herndon (VA), Fort Carson (CO), Aurora (CO), JBLM (WA), King George (VA), Fort Meade (MD), Dalgren (MD), Fort Hood (TX)

The Department of Texas, with assistance from the National staff, will be conducting several workshops – resume writing (civilian & federal), financial literacy, LinkedIn - before the MEGA Job Fair at Fort Hood on January 13th, 2020.

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

Since 2015, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) leaders have been working to maximize the collective impact of local services, stakeholders, and federal/state agencies working to improve veteran outcomes where they live, work, and raise their families. To advance and enhance this initiative, the Veterans Experience Office has fostered and supported 160 local Community Veterans Engagement Board (CVEBs). The CVEB model enables veterans, service members, military families, veteran advocates, community service providers, and stakeholders, an opportunity



to have a collective voice in identifying their community goals to work and resolve any gaps in services at their level. The engagement board, which is under the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, can partner and network with local organizations to consolidate resources and make improvements for veterans and military

families, and that is what the Washington County (Maryland) Community Veterans Engagement Board chairwoman (Teresa Spruill) did. She engaged Washington County Commissioner Jeff Cline to speak with him about forming an advisory committee, as Washington County is one of three in the state of Maryland without an advisory committee, considering the county projects about 11,000 residents are veterans.

Commissioner Cline hopes to see help for homeless veterans and access to services they've earned but may be unaware of in their county, so on 17 December they established a Veterans Advisory Committee. The board unanimously approved the bylaws for the group, and their mission will be to identify the needs of veterans and provide the commissioners with recommendations for increased resources and services.

The Washington County Advisory Board members will include four veterans who have been separated from the US military under honorable conditions, and three non-veterans who represent an organization that serves veterans. The bylaws also call for a Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs representative and two ex-officio members (Director of the county health departments Behavioral Health Services Division and the county commissioner). The final board member is to be a representative of a veterans organization such as the American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars, AMVETS, Disabled American Veterans, or the Military Order of the Purple Heart.

Current American Legion POCs serving on Community Veterans Engagement Boards (CVEBs):

State/ Territory	City	Board Name	POC	American Legion Affiliated
AZ	Phoenix	Be Connected Community Network - Central Arizona	Angel Juarez (Co-Chair)	x
PR	San Juan	My VA Veterans and Families Community of Puerto Rico	Angel Narvaez (Co-Chair)	x

Locate the VA Veterans Experience Office CVEB point of contact by state:

<https://www.va.gov/ve/engagement/veoPocs.asp>

Access a Community Veterans Engagement Board (CVEB) Search by State:

<https://www.va.gov/ve/engagement/communityBoards.asp>

TOPIC 6: SMALL BUSINESS

A Wisconsin businessman has been sentenced to 6½ years in federal prison for leading a 12-year fraud scheme involving more than \$260 million in government-funded contracts intended to benefit small businesses.

U.S. Attorney Matthew D. Krueger of the Eastern District of Wisconsin announced Monday that Brian L. Ganos of Muskego was sentenced by Federal Judge Pamela Pepper. The sentence also includes two years of supervised release, a \$5,000 fine, and forfeiture of assets worth nearly \$4 million.

Ganos had earlier pleaded guilty to one count of wire fraud and one count of mail fraud. Four other individuals and one corporation have also pleaded guilty to a felony charge in connection with Ganos' scheme.

According to Krueger, the scheme involved operating three construction companies with straw owners who qualified as a disadvantaged individual or as a service-disabled veteran, but who did not actually control the companies. Ganos then fraudulently obtained small business program certifications to win government-funded contracts to which the companies were not entitled.



The scheme continued from 2004 to mid-2016, during which period Ganos and others used those certifications to obtain over \$260 million in federal, state, and local contract payments. These included federal construction contracts that were set aside for Small Disadvantaged Businesses or Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned Small Businesses. In addition, Krueger said, Nuvo Construction Company, Inc. used its DBE certification to win ready-mix concrete contracts based on the false representation that Nuvo provided ready-mix concrete independently when, in truth, Nuvo's concrete operations depended heavily on Sonag Ready Mix. On multiple occasions, the conspirators engaged in efforts to conceal the scheme and obstruct investigations into the matter.

As a result of the scheme, Ganos undermined the small business programs and deprived honest small businesses of opportunities to become established, Krueger said. In addition, Ganos used various means to launder proceeds of the fraud scheme and enrich himself.

As part of his plea agreement, Ganos agreed to the forfeiture of various assets, including: More than \$1.9 million seized from accounts; a ski condominium in Winter Park, Colorado; the office building in Milwaukee used to facilitate the scheme; two Disney timeshares; and five vehicles, including a Corvette Stingray convertible and classic cars.

Driven by greed, Brian Ganos exploited federal programs that Congress intended to help disadvantaged veterans who were injured while serving our country. This case should send a clear warning that cheating federal programs will not be tolerated. The GSA Office of Inspector General will aggressively pursue contractors who make false representations in order to obtain federal contracts. Schemes to fraudulently access opportunities designated as set-aside contracts cheat the government and deserving bidders.

TOPIC 7: EDUCATION

Members of the National Guard serving in Operation Guardian Support at the U.S. southern border were not earning eligibility for benefits such as the GI Bill, unlike the active-duty service members they're serving alongside, who also are paid more.

But that changed last week when, after prompting from Congress, Defense Secretary Mark Esper ordered that they be allowed to earn education benefits for their border wall service.

Lawmakers who had pushed for the deployment to count towards the education payouts praised the move as a fair and overdue decision.



"Whether it's to South Korea, Afghanistan, or right here at home, all those that deploy in defense of our nation have earned the right to use the GI bill to pursue their educational goals after they separate from military service," said Rep. Phil Roe, R-Tenn., and ranking member of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee. "I applaud the Secretary of Defense for doing the right thing and reversing this ill-advised policy."

The policy will be retroactive to Feb. 15, 2019, when President Donald Trump declared a national emergency along the southern U.S. border in order to direct military resources (including construction funds) to ongoing Department of Homeland Security operations there.

The move immediately give thousands of guardsmen access to Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits, since they need only 90 days of active-duty service to qualify.

To receive full benefits — which include 36 months of in-state college tuition, a monthly living stipend and other payouts — individuals need three full years on active duty.

But the 90-day mark is significant for many guardsmen because it makes them eligible for at least 40 percent of the full benefit, which still totals thousands of dollars in tuition payments. In August of next year, that will rise to 50 percent for anyone with 90 days active-duty service.

In his memo, Esper said that military officials “will take necessary actions to ensure that members of the National Guard affected by this determination have a record of their eligibility for any associated entitlements or benefits.”

Earlier this fall, several lawmakers on the veterans affairs committee (both Republicans and Democrats) had lamented the department’s previous findings that the deployments did not count towards education benefits eligibility.

According to service officials, the average Army National Guard soldier serves on duty about 50 days a year, and the average Air National Guard member about 46 days. Reservists average more than 60 days a year. All of those figures are up in recent years, as operations tempo has increased worldwide.

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Week Ending: 12/20/19
