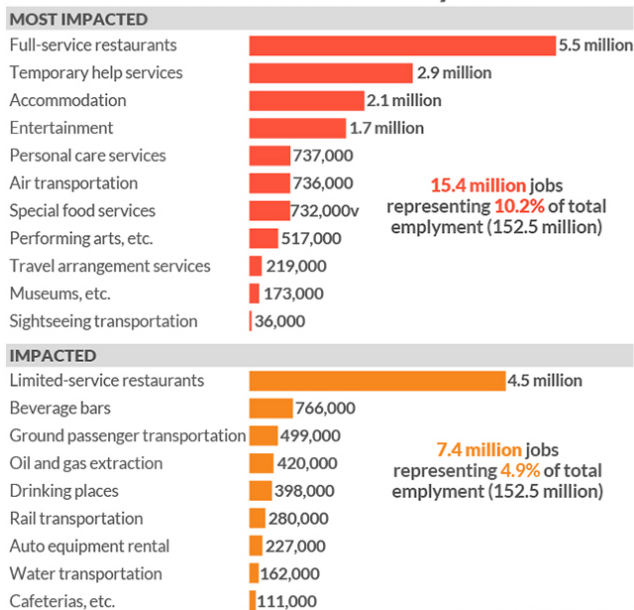


NATIONAL VETERANS EMPLOYMENT & EDUCATION COMMISSION

TOPIC 1: ECONOMY

Jobs and industries hurt most by COVID-19



Source: The Conference Board

Some 23 million jobs may be in immediate danger from the massive disruptions to the US economy from the coronavirus epidemic.

Americans who work in retail, airlines, travel agencies, restaurants, hotels, and entertainment are the most vulnerable, according to a new study by the Conference Board, a private research firm. Those industries employ some 12 million people.

Since the Coronavirus has spread, many companies have closed, resorted to skeleton crews or shortened hours. States such as New York and California have also required all nonessential businesses to shut down.

Not all of the workers in these industries will lose their jobs, temporarily or even permanently. In some cases, companies are hiring to meet an increase in demand.

Huge retailers Amazon AMZN, -2.79% and Walmart WMT, -4.89%, for instance, have been inundated with orders with millions of Americans staying at home. Both said they are looking to add more than 100,000 new employees to handle the flood of new business. And some takeout restaurants and fast-food chains might benefit as well.

Yet millions of workers face furloughs, layoffs, or a sharp reduction in hours. In just the past week, up to 3 million people may have lost their jobs, according to Wall Street estimates. Bank of America predicts 3 million people likely applied for jobless unemployment benefits in the week running from March 15th to March 21st. TD Bank estimates 2.5 million and Goldman Sachs 2.25 million.

By contrast, an average of around 220,000 a week was losing their jobs, but quickly finding new ones, before the crisis. Weekly jobless claims will be reported next Thursday. Among the many job cutbacks, engine maker Cummins Inc. CMI, +2.63% said late Friday that it would close for two weeks its midrange engine plant in Wellsboro, Ind., 50 miles south of Indianapolis, that are used in Fiat Chrysler pickup trucks. Fiat Chrysler FCAU, +5.99% has said it will shut down that production until at least the end of March. It didn't say how many employees would be affected. The longer the disruption lasts, the bigger the butcher's bill for workers.

Gad Levanon, chief economist for North America at The Conference Board, said: "one quarter to one half" of the 23 million at-risk jobs could be eliminated if the crisis goes on for two or three months.

The saving grace, if it can be called that? The economy could recover relatively quickly if the crisis begins to recede by midsummer. "Six months from now, many of those jobs could come back," said Levanon, though he noted that "there will be industries in which we will see a slower comeback."

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	
	FEB 2019	FEB 2020	FEB 2019	FEB 2020	FEB 2019	FEB 2020
Unemployed	118	155	97	140	21	16
Unemployment rate	3.4	4.5	3.3	4.8	4.3	2.8

The national unemployment rate is 3.6 percent (February 2020). Gulf War II veterans' unemployment rate is 4.5 percent.ⁱ Currently, the unemployment rate for Gulf War II women veterans is 2.8 percent (up from 2.6 percent in February).

TOPIC 2: CONFERENCE CALLS

On Monday, March 23rd, 2020, the National Veterans Employment and Education Division spoke with SVAC, and HVAC on Takano/Roe GI Bill dropped today. Conversations on work-study, closures of schools, based on national disasters and health emergencies, and rehabilitation benefits. Conversations with NASAA Executive Board and leadership on implementation of PL 116-128, and concerns about VA interpretation independent learning vs. residential learning. Application of the law to NCD schools and APP/OJT.

On Tuesday, March 24th, 2020, the Veterans Employment and Education Division had a phone conference with the small business administration regarding the potential utilization of grantees to get the information out regarding the new loans available in the third phase of the COVID 19 stimulus package. SBA also discussed the programmatic switch to online tutorials for federally funded entrepreneurial development educational programs.

On Tuesday, March 24th, 2020, the Veterans Employment and Education Division had a phone conference with SVAC and HVAC staffers, minority and majority, to discuss the Takano/Roe bill and the challenges of passage. Senate was hot lining their bill, but concerns that if it did not pass, what was the path forward to passage. Also concerns about the broad coverage for school closure in the House version vs. that in the Senate. Conversation with Wake Forest University leaders as to what they would be doing for individuals under lockdown in various states. Finally, briefed Indy leadership on the work done by AL behind the scenes to secure passage of S. 3503, which became PL 116-128.

On Tuesday, March 24th, 2020, the National Veterans Employment and Education Division spoke with Charly Yancy, Program Manager, Transition Readiness Seminar (TRS) at Marine Corps Base Quantico and Henderson Hall all Marines are still required to attend the Transition Assistance Program (TAP), via Joint Knowledge Online (JKO)

On Wednesday, March 25th, 2020, the National Veterans Employment and Education Division conferenced with Ebonie Powel, Program Manager, Navy Transition Assistance Program, Navy Yard. Per [NAVADMIN 082/20](#) announces immediate suspension of all Navy Transition Assistance Program (TAP) in-person classes until further notice. Sailors with upcoming separation dates who are unable to reschedule TAP attendance for a later date must complete TAP via JKO. Sailors with sufficient time remaining before their separation or retirement date can reschedule the TAP course for a later date.

On Wednesday, March 25th, 2020, the National Veterans Employment and Education Division continued to work PL116-128 implementation with SAAs and Maryland as well as the new Takano/Roe bill in the House and Senate. Questions on how the new distance learning bill will influence VA's treatment of competency-based education. Also, conversations with J. Kamin and J. Sharpe on VA action against Phoenix, Temple, etc. and how they will move forward. We are seeking a meeting to discuss the reasons for the action and potential actions surrounding reinstatement or punishments.

On Thursday, March 26th, 2020, the Veterans Employment and Education Division conferenced in on a "question and answered" seminar with Anderson & Associates PLLC, which also included Virginia Senator Amanda Chase. We discussed the critical issues in Phase 3 of the COVID19 relief package as it pertains to small businesses. Finally, we discussed how to apply for funding after the CARES Act becomes law.

On Thursday, March 26th, 2020, the Veterans Employment and Education Division conference on a call with Richard Sisk, a reporter from Military Times. We spoke about the adverse effects the Coronavirus may have on our veterans leaving the military or those currently out when looking for employment. The American Legion is closely monitoring the unemployment rate but will have a better idea when March's numbers are released on April 3rd.

On Thursday, March 26th, 2020, the Veterans Employment and Education Division initiated research on DeVry University and the quality of education issues. Call with Kelsey Baron to discuss CARES Act and the second GI Bill Act (companion to Takano and Roe Bill in the House.) Also, a conversation with Gregory Pace on a path forward for DeVry University. The plan is to set up a meeting with the President of DeVry and Washington American Legion senior leadership to discuss the quality of programming and outcomes. We are meeting to occur at the end of April. Conversation/preparation of SAAs chosen to brief RBS committee members, which includes the American Legion.

On Thursday, March 26th, 2020, the National Veterans Employment and Education Division spoke with Ebonie Powel, Program Manager, Navy Transition Assistance Program, Navy Yard. Per newly released [NAVADMIN 089/20](#), to help provide stability in this uncertain US economy, the Navy is allowing Sailors to submit applications for those separating or retiring from the Navy. The Extension ranges from 6 – 12 months.

On Thursday, March 26th, 2020, the National Veterans Employment and Education Division conferenced with SGM Kristopher Rick, Sergeant Major of the Army Senior Fellow, Department of Labor-Veterans Employment and Training Services. With approval from their immediate commander, a Soldier may request to reenlist or extend for a period of 3 to 23 months. Soldiers who extend for 12 months or more are also entitled to stabilization at their current duty station.

On Friday, March 27th, 2020, the National Veterans Employment and Education Division met with EdCounsel/Lumina Risk-Based Survey Executive Team to discuss the Risk-Based Survey Advisory Committee work in the present emergency environment. Additionally, I conferenced with Hill Staffers on the CARES act and GI Bill (Takano/Roe) Act. Research on program oversight and accreditation of Competency-Based and Online Education.

TOPIC 3: EMPLOYMENT



Most any civilian employer of a member of the Reserve or National Guard will tell you that “busy” is the order of the day with these men and women. The operational tempo — “optempo” — of our reserve components, the Pentagon term for the Reserve and Guard, never have been higher, except perhaps during World War II.

The drawdowns in Afghanistan, if the treaty with the Taliban holds, won’t affect the optempo. Late last year, reflecting on the global situation, a three-star general on the staff of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff flatly told military groups in the Pentagon that the tempo isn’t decreasing in the foreseeable future.

A chief warrant officer who is an Army Reserve engineer told me he recently returned from his third Iraq deployment in nine years. He’s a project manager in his civilian engineering firm. Although he volunteered to be in the Army Reserve, he hadn’t volunteered to deploy again — but of course, went without complaint. His “home-to-war” ratio of time is little different from that of a “regular” soldier. He’s concerned about his viability in his civilian job.

More than 1 million members of the Reserve and National Guard have been activated since 9/11; nearly 1,300 of them have made the ultimate sacrifice for us. The optempo is about to get higher for many of our citizen-warriors who put everything on the line for the nation; they are ready to leave at short notice all they love — their families, jobs, and communities — to serve us.

The Reserve and National Guard have been activated to provide medical and logistical support to state governments contending with Coronavirus. The president has announced that Reserve Component activations will increase over the next few weeks. In some cases, they have barred entry to bases that had implemented restrictions; our organization, ROA, worked with the Pentagon to get them the access they needed. So, that general in the Pentagon was right on the money.

Here's what we can do, primarily if "we" employ or manage a member of the Reserve or National Guard: give that hero all the support you can — and we recognize that with the closures, your business may be hurting, maybe severely hurting.

Here's an example of what we can avoid doing: In 2016, a US air carrier failed to reinstate an Air National Guardsman after he returned from military training, ultimately firing him. The Guardsman had notified his employer of the training and, court documents show had the employer's permission. There is a federal law, the 1994 Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act (USERRA), which helps protect the jobs of reservists who are activated. It's not perfect, and it is not-infrequently flouted. We are seeing evidence that some employers may avoid hiring a member of the Guard or Reserve because their military duties may result in absences, a violation of USERRA.

Back to the case of the airline refusing to reinstate the Guardsman: a federal judge found in the Guardsman's favor, ordering the airline to pay \$170,000 in attorney's fees and expenses. More servicemembers' employment rights cases can be found on ROA's law center website.

This citizen-warrior was fortunate: The federal government hasn't the resources to prosecute every alleged USERRA violation. So, as in so many other aspects of society, we depend on the civil conduct of citizens to "self-enforce" the spirit of the law. The vision is simply this: Our nation utterly depends on the young men and women who agree to underwrite our freedom with their very lives. The least we can do is support them in substantive ways — in this case, ensuring their confidence that they will have the means to make a living. That means preserving their jobs for their return, ensuring they are promoted and recognized at a rate comparable with any other employee's similar performance, and making it explicitly clear to one and all that they are valued both as employees and as citizen-warriors.

Many American companies, large and small, privately owned and publicly held, are doing precisely that. They know who they are, and they have our most profound appreciation. More importantly, they have the loyalty and respect of the citizen-warriors in their employment ranks. Doing so may be very, very difficult, especially in a small business or firm. But doing anything less is just flat wrong for America.

TOPIC 4: CAREER FAIRS

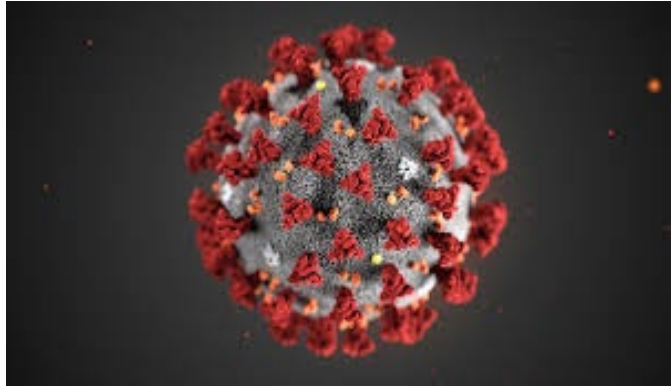
ALL CAREER FAIRS SCHEDULED THROUGH APRIL HAVE BEEN CANCELLED, SUSPENDED, OR POSTPONED.

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

Questions and Answers Regarding Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and the Coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19) Pandemic

In light of the COVID-19 pandemic and as a consequence of the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, the United States is experiencing a nationwide emergency, implicating both public health and the economy. Secretary Azar declared a nationwide public health emergency on January 31st, 2020, and President Trump declared a national emergency on March 13th, 2020. The American Legion is sharing valuable and insightful information on behalf of federal agencies for widest dissemination.



Several grantees have expressed concerns about the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic in the TANF program. The US Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families Office of Family Assistance is fielding many questions about how TANF can help support people affected by it. HHS's top priority is the public health and safety of all those operating our program and receiving its services. Given the latest news on the disease, they anticipate an increased need in many states for essential assistance and other financial benefits. With that in mind, the information of program instruction below includes questions and answers about how state and tribal grantees might use TANF to help those in need. It also addresses TANF's administrative flexibilities for both states and tribes.

1. **Question:** How can states and tribes use TANF to help anyone affected by the COVID-19 emergency?

Answer: TANF can be used to assist needy families with children (or expecting a child) who are experiencing financial difficulties due to the COVID-19 emergency. States and tribes set the criteria for "needy" and can set different income levels for different services. A state or tribe could assist needy families in which parents are unable to work due to contracting the disease, exposure to someone with the disease because their children's school or childcare provider has closed, or because their workplace has closed.

2. **Question:** What can TANF help within the immediate crisis?

Answer: TANF is a very flexible program that can fund a wide range of services and benefits. Because many affected families could have multiple needs, states and tribes may consider expanding their services and broadening their eligibility criteria. One particularly useful option in an emergency or time of crisis is a non-recurrent, short-term benefit (NRST). An NRST: (1) is designed to deal with a specific crisis, or an episode of need; (2) is not intended to meet recurrent or ongoing needs; and (3) will not extend beyond four months. 45 CFR §§ 260.31(b); 286.10(b). A state or tribe has the flexibility to set a higher income standard for an NRST than for regular TANF cash assistance. For example, a state or tribe could provide benefits to impacted families with incomes up to 200 percent of poverty. An NRST payment could help a family that is without income due to COVID-19 meet basic needs. NRSTs are outside TANF's definition of "assistance" and therefore do not trigger TANF requirements associated with "assistance," such as the 60-month time limit for states, work requirements, child support assignment, and detailed data reporting. As a result, NRSTs may be less administratively burdensome for grantees. Examples of

NRST benefits that might be helpful with the impact of COVID-19 include short-term benefits to make up for lost wages, short-term rental or mortgage assistance, utility, and energy assistance.

Additionally, housing search and placement services; clothing allowances; family support services to deal with stressful events. Financial and credit counseling; certain legal services (see <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/ofa/resource/q-a-use-of-funds> questions 19 and 20); and administrative costs associated with any of these activities. These benefits could come in the form of cash, vouchers, or direct services. We remind states that they cannot use federal TANF funds for medical expenditures.

3. **Question:** Does a grantee need to request approval or submit a plan amendment before making program changes to respond to COVID-19?

Answer: The rules for states and tribes concerning TANF plan amendments are modestly different. A state has 30 days to submit a plan amendment and, thus, a state does not need to request approval or submit a plan amendment before making program changes. Still, it should seek guidance from ACF on whether a particular action is allowable under program requirements if the state has any questions. Under 45 CFR § 286.165(b), a tribe should submit an amendment at least 30 days before approval; however, we want tribes to make choices that protect the health and safety of their TANF beneficiaries. If a tribe proceeds with implementing activities that require a plan amendment, tribes must seek preliminary approval from ACF. Tribes may do so by sending an e-mail to their regional point of contact. ACF will provide preliminary approval in a reply e-mail, if appropriate. We ask that tribes do not ask for a change in work participation rates through this process, but rather address any difficulties meeting the work participation rate through the process outlined in question 7. ACF will grant retroactive approval of the plan amendment for any changes that received preliminary approval.

4. **Question:** Are there additional funds in TANF to help with this?

Answer: At present, there are no additional federal TANF funds available for states to address COVID-19 needs. That means any support states and tribes provide using federal TANF funds must come from their existing allocations and unobligated funds and must meet the requirements and restrictions that apply to the use of TANF funds. Many grantees have significant unobligated TANF dollars saved as “rainy day” funds to use in situations such as the current emergency.

5. **Question:** Are there ways that states, and tribes can alter benefits or ease requirements on TANF applicants or recipients during the emergency?

Answer: Yes, grantees could use current TANF flexibility in a range of ways, including: Streamlining the application process to expedite eligibility and payment determinations and offering online or telephonic applications to minimize face-to-face contact. Granting proper cause exemptions from work requirements for TANF participants who cannot go to work or training activities. For example, they are ill, caring for a child whose school or daycare is closed due to the pandemic, or because the work or training site is closed. Providing online approaches for participants to engage in work activities virtually, such as online training, job search, and work readiness to keep them engaged without needing to go to a training site. We view this as a promising alternative that states should consider so that participants can continue advancing their goals through the duration of this emergency; Increasing cash benefit levels for TANF cash assistance recipients who have reduced income or increased needs related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Providing case management by phone or other virtual/electronic communication platforms; Exercising flexibility within the Income and Eligibility Verification System (IEVS) requirement for

states as outlined in TANF-ACF-PI-2007-08. Ultimately, grantees are responsible for ensuring that they are providing benefits only to families eligible for those benefits. Still, we understand that it may not be possible to verify or collect documentation at the same time that they usually would.

6. **Question:** What should a state or tribe do if participants cannot meet work requirements because of the COVID-19 pandemic?

Answer: States and tribes should make sound choices that consider the health and safety of TANF recipients and the public during the pandemic. They should establish and exercise proper cause exemption criteria that take the current health situation into account and consider the advice of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), their relevant state, tribal, and local health officials. The CDC has information on mitigation strategies, including when it is essential to adopt social distancing and to cancel gatherings; we encourage states and tribes to review these resources, e.g., <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html> Visit [disclaimer page](#).

7. **Question:** Will states and tribes still be held accountable for the work participation rates during the emergency?

Answer: We are facing national public health and economic emergency of unprecedented proportions. We want grantees to keep their focus on addressing the crisis and protecting the health and safety of the people they serve and the public at large. To help states and tribes do this, we have looked carefully at our authority to grant reasonable cause exceptions to grantees that face a penalty for failing the FY 2020 work participation rates due to the COVID-19 emergency. A reasonable cause exception means the grantee would not face a financial penalty. While ACF has no authority to waive the work participation rate requirement itself, it does have the authority to grant relief from the resulting penalty in the face of natural disasters and other calamities. ACF will exercise this authority to the maximum extent possible. For more information, grantees should refer to 45 CFR §§ 262.5 and 286.225 for the regulations on reasonable cause applicable to states and tribes, respectively.

8. **Question:** What should a state or tribe do if it is currently operating under a corrective compliance plan (CCP) for its work participation rate and thinks the pandemic will affect its ability to meet that CCP?

Answer: As with a new failure of the work participation requirement, a state or tribe that does not achieve full compliance with its CCP may request that we reduce the penalty if its failure to comply with the CCP was due to a natural disaster or regional recession. As we noted in the answer above, ACF will exercise this authority in this area to the maximum extent possible.

9. **Question:** Will states or tribes be able to expand what counts for work participation during the COVID-19 pandemic? For example, will ACF allow more excused hours to count than under current regulations?

Answer: Rather than revise what counts toward the work participation rate, which is specified in statute and regulation for states and TANF plans for tribes, we will address issues of work participation rate failures, due in whole or in part to the COVID-19 pandemic, through the penalty relief process. Where there is an evident connection between the grantee's failure to meet the work participation rate and the COVID-19 emergency, we expect to exercise our authority to grant penalty relief. Grantees are again encouraged to make sound choices that consider the health and safety of recipients and the public during the pandemic. No one's health and safety should be put at risk because a state or tribe fears it will incur a financial penalty for not meeting its work participation rate.

TOPIC 6: SMALL BUSINESS

The Senate passed the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act or the "CARES Act," on Wednesday, March 25th, to bring financial relief to Americans and businesses hammered by the Coronavirus and its economic toll.

The fiscal package passed 96 to none at around 11:50 p.m. ET. The stimulus measure includes direct payments worth \$1,200 to millions of Americans, boosts unemployment benefits, and shores up hundreds of billions of dollars' worth of loans for ailing businesses.

About \$150 billion will be allocated to hospitals and healthcare workers for equipment. US airlines hammered by the virus and resulting travel shutdowns will receive \$50 billion in loans. Democrats won a set of stricter guidelines for how corporations could receive and benefit from emergency loans issued by the Treasury Department.



The bill's passage follows two stoppages by Senate Democrats looking to secure stronger worker protections and stricter guidelines for which corporations could receive government loans. Multiple meetings between Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer and Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin extended talks around the legislation's specifics.

President Trump and leading Republicans called for the measure to reach the White House by the end of Monday, a lofty goal still deemed too late by economists monitoring the Coronavirus's rapidly escalating fallout. Failures to move the bill forward on Sunday and Monday pushed deliberations past the administration's deadline.

Senate leaders inched closer to compromise on Tuesday, while House Speaker Nancy Pelosi introduced her own \$2.5 trillion fiscal plan in a bid to issue quicker economic relief. The White House and the Senate reached a deal early Wednesday morning on the recovery package, teeing the bill up for passage later in the day. Schumer deemed the legislation an "outstanding agreement," while Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell said it represented a "wartime level of investment for our nation."

The bill must now pass in the House of Representatives before it reaches President Trump's desk. Sunday's failed cloture vote fueled short-lived concern in the already debilitated financial sector. US equities futures reached their limit down trading level Sunday afternoon shortly after the vote. The S&P 500 slipped roughly 3% by Monday's close as the bill's failed cloture vote further upset a stimulus-hungry Wall Street.

Stocks posted an 11% recovery in Tuesday's session on fresh hopes for the bill's passage, but few specifics on the legislation's timeline or new measures arose through the session. Tuesday's gain was the Dow's largest since 1933.

While investors have waited on the White House to bring forth fiscal relief, the Federal Reserve has unleashed a salvo of policy tools to ease money markets. The central bank cut its benchmark interest rate close to zero on March 15th after an emergency cut two weeks prior. The Fed's New York branch shored up liquidity through several trillion dollars' worth's of capital injections spread throughout the month.

In its latest effort to combat the virus's economic hit, the bank announced Monday plans for unlimited asset purchases to "support smooth market functioning and effective transmission of monetary policy," according to a statement. Three loan facilities to support businesses, consumers, and employers will be established, and an additional Main Street Business Lending Program will be announced shortly, the Fed said.

TOPIC 7: EDUCATION

The American Legion's advocacy for student veterans in the wake of Coronavirus netted a win and a loss this past week, with one congressional measure signed into law by President Trump and another dying on the Senate floor.



Emergency Legislation Protects GI Bill Housing Benefits

Student veterans will continue to receive their GI Bill benefits under S. 3503, which President Trump signed into law March 21st. The law enables the VA to continue providing the same level of education benefits to students having to take courses online due to the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak.

The law gives VA temporary authority to continue GI Bill payments uninterrupted in the event of national emergencies. This allows for continued payment of benefits even if the program has changed from resident training to online training.

Thanks to the law, GI Bill students will continue receiving the same monthly housing allowance (MHA) payments they received for resident training until December 21st, or until the school resumes in-person classes.

In the wake of COVID-19, thousands of students nationwide have been converted to distance learning as many educational institutions are transitioning to technology-based lesson delivery.

"I commend President Trump and Congress for their work on this important law," said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. "It will give Veteran students certainty as they continue their education."

Separately, The American Legion learned from schools that the push to online learning would have additional impacts on Voc Rehab and VA work-study students. Legion staff worked with House and Senate Veterans Affairs Committees to put together a second package to support these student veterans, named the "Student Veteran Coronavirus Response Act of 2020," which was passed by the House of Representatives early this week.

To expedite the passage of the bill in the Senate a "hotline" procedure was invoked. Which requires unanimous consent from all Senators to pass. A single Senator can invoke an anonymous hold on a bill under this protocol, which ostensibly prevents all but the most common-sense bills from being "hotline."

Sadly, an anonymous Senator surprisingly put a hold "Student Veteran Coronavirus Response Act Of 2020", preventing its passage through unanimous consent. American Legion National staff is investigating the source of this and canvassing alternative procedural possibilities to secure passage of the bill.

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Week Ending: 3/27/20
