

NATIONAL VETERANS EMPLOYMENT & EDUCATION COMMISSION

TOPIC 1: ECONOMY

The [U.S. economy](#) lost 701,000 [jobs](#) in March, snapping a decade-long record of employment growth, as strict measures to contain the [coronavirus](#) pandemic shuttered businesses and forced Americans to stay at home.

It was the first decline in payrolls since September 2010, and the steepest since March 2009, amid the Great Recession.



The unemployment rate jumped to 4.4 percent, up from a half-century low of 3.5 percent in February.

Economists surveyed by Refinitiv had forecast a payroll decline of 100,000 and the unemployment rate to rise to 3.8 percent.

Restaurants, bars, hotels, airlines, cruise lines, automakers, and entertainment venues have been walloped by the pandemic as a growing number of jurisdictions have ordered the closure of nonessential businesses and directed residents to stay at home.

But the Labor Department's employment report, which is based on surveys conducted in the early weeks of the month, when large swaths of the economy had not yet shut down, does not fully reflect the depth of the economic calamity that the virus outbreak has inflicted. In the final two weeks of the month, 10 million Americans applied for unemployment benefits, a stunning sign of the scope of the economic crash.

"Much bigger job losses are coming," said Mark Zandi, Moody's chief economist, during a conference call with reporters earlier this week. He estimated that between 10 to 15 million jobs could disappear from the economy as a result of the outbreak, with the worst taking place in April. The U.S. has the highest number of confirmed cases of COVID-19, the respiratory illness caused by the novel Coronavirus, with more than 245,573 people infected, according to Johns Hopkins University data. More than 6,000 people in the country have died from the virus.

Estimates vary drastically for how high unemployment will climb, but economists broadly agree that it will be grim. An analysis published by the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis last week projected that unemployment could hit 32 percent in the second quarter as more than 47 million workers are laid off because of the pandemic. That would exceed the 24.9 percent peak during the Great Depression.

HOUSEHOLD		DATA				
Table A-5. Employment status of the civilian population 18 years and over by veteran status, period of service, and sex, not seasonally adjusted						
[Numbers in thousands]						
Employment status, veteran status, and period of service	Total		Men		Women	
	MAR 2019	MAR 2020	MAR 2019	MAR 2020	MAR 2019	MAR 2020
Unemployed	106	140	87	107	19	33
Unemployment rate	3.1	4.1	2.9	3.7	4.0	6.2

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

TOPIC 2: CONFERENCE CALLS

On Monday, March 30th, the Veterans Employment & Education Division had a phone conference briefing on the Emergency Coronavirus Funding for nonprofit organizations. The CARES Act impacts many nonprofit organizations, and the discussion was focused on what to expect regarding the implementation phase, and how it can be used to help nonprofits during this unprecedented crisis. The briefing was hosted by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation.

On Monday, March 30th, the Veterans Employment & Education Division attended an online briefing with the Center for Disease Control hosted by the National Association of Counties. NACo provided comprehensive analysis highlights relevant components of the CARES Act for county governments, including a section-by-section breakdown outlining items of significance for America's counties, parishes, and boroughs.

On Monday, March 30th, the National Veterans Employment & Education Division Worked questions from schools through SAAs and other agencies on work-study, closures of schools based on national disasters and health emergencies, and rehabilitation benefits. Discussed with NASAA leadership potential problems with the implementation of PL 116-128, including programs that close, but the school doesn't. (Not covered under present regulations.) Conversation with UTI leadership and staff on the potential problems for veterans if V.A. continues to not allow certification for the summer terms. (V.A. paused all certification while it published guidance on the new Distance Learning bill.) Conversation with Sr. V.A. Leaders on educational oversight and quality education.

On Monday, March 30th, the National Veterans Employment & Education Division participated in a virtual meeting with VA's Education Services office to discuss their new plans to suspend new GI Bill student enrollments for five colleges it deemed had engaged in "illegal advertising, sales and enrollment practices." VE&E staff questioned the plan by which VA intends to adjudicate these cases, and remains concerned about due process.

On Monday, March 30th, the National Veterans Employment & Education Division participated in a conference call hosted by the Department of Labor, Veterans Employment and Training Services (DOL-VETS). DOL-VETS will soon be launching TAP Apprenticeship Pilot that seeks to identify, track, and increase the number of transitioning service members and their spouses hired, before separation from the military, into apprenticeship opportunities.

On Monday, March 30th, the National Veterans Employment & Education Division participated in National Call on Coronavirus and Homelessness/Housing for National Low Income Housing Coalition. The discussions surrounded emergency rental assistance and eviction prevention assistance, a national moratorium of evictions and foreclosures, and emergency funds for homelessness service providers.

On Tuesday, March 31st, the National Veterans Employment & Education Division spoke with Sarah Roberts, Veterans and Military Program Manager, LinkedIn. We discussed the opportunity for partnering in the future to hold a virtual LinkedIn class. The intent is to prepare veterans for the inevitable possibility of changing careers. In these trying economic times, we need to ensure that veterans are prepared for the employment challenges that await them.

On Tuesday, March 31, the National Veterans Employment & Education Division participated in a four corners call (Majority and Minority staff from Senate and House Veterans Committees) regarding additional support that veterans should be provided over the Coronavirus outbreak. VE&E staff highlighted that the Department of Veterans Affairs is the last federal agency that is still engaged in debt collection operations, and recommended immediate congressional action to curtail VA's debt collections, as the Department of Education and the IRS have already done.

On Tuesday, March 31st, the National Veterans Employment & Education Division Teleconference with SVAC and HVAC staffers, minority and majority, and VSOs to discuss the Student Veteran Coronavirus Response Act of 2020, H.R. 6322. Bill will provide for continued payment of V.A. Work-Study students, additional benefits (4 weeks of housing allowance) in the event of school closure, and the same protection of VR&E student veterans, as well as other benefits. (H.R. 6322 passed the House in the afternoon. Senate will take up the bill after they return to the Hill April 20th.) The Legion Attended Risk-Based Survey Advisory Council Teleconference on SAA Roles and Oversight. Council members were briefed on SAA activities, and a panel of 5 SAA's provided information on how different SAA's approved programs and provided oversight for education and training. Further conversation with DeVry on setting up a meeting with Legion Washington leaders to discuss DeVry's commitment to quality education.

On Wednesday, April 1st, the National Veterans Employment & Education Division participate with the OSAH Steering Legislative Working Group conference call to discuss the development of future stimulus bills and the inclusion of assistance for a mortgage and eviction protection.

On Wednesday, April 1st, the National Veterans Employment & Education Division discussed with HVAC on further legislation being considered that added student veterans are dealing with the Coronavirus pandemic. It includes suspension of debt collection for new and existing debts by the V.A. (V.A. would still track and identify overpayments, and there would be an "opt-in" provision for individuals that wanted to continue repayment.) Continued conversations about V.A. action against Phoenix, Temple, etc. and how this will impact students enrolled or considering enrollment at those institutions. Alerted NASAA President and V.A. leaders (including the Governor's office) about the issue at UVA Law school involving a student (who is in the National Guard) being told he must disenroll due to being called to active duty.

On Thursday, April 2nd, the National Veterans Employment & Education Division spoke with Army Master Sergeant Kirk Johnson, Staff Non-Commission Officer in Charge, Wounded Transition Unit, Fort Meade. Discussed the feasibility of connecting their Soldiers to our potential virtual workshop (LinkedIn).

On Thursday, April 2nd, the National Veterans Employment & Education Division touched base with its counterpart at the VFW to review Coronavirus policy questions. VFW shared that they were concerned that VA was not waiving disability benefits as waived non-taxable income concerning Coronavirus relief checks, therefore requiring disabled veterans to report their VA payments before receiving any relief checks.

On Thursday, April 2nd, the National Veterans Employment & Education Division Participated with V.A. leaders in fixing the improper move in V.A. to remove a National Guard student from the law school due to his activation. Briefed the NASAA Executive Board on new and pending legislation to assist student Veterans during the pandemic. They alerted SVAC and HVAC staffers to issue involving program closures at schools that DO NOT close. Students in those programs will not be covered until the new bill passes the Senate.

On Friday, April 3rd, the National Veterans Employment & Education Division attended a webinar discussion with the Housing and Urban Development (HUD) COVID-19 Planning and Response for Homeless Assistance Providers to cover the Special Needs Assistance Program (SNAP).

On Friday, April 3rd, the National Veterans Employment & Education Division Weekly Meeting with EdCounsel/Lumina Risk-Based Survey Executive Team to discuss Risk-Based Survey Advisory Committee work, including a new flow chart on how to determine which schools receive an RBS. Conversations with Hill Staffers on issues involving implementation of legislation by the V.A.

On Friday, April 3rd, the National Veterans Employment & Education Division teleconference with Richard Siks, a reporter from Military.com. We discussed the latest unemployment rate for veterans as well as the increase in new unemployment claims by new veterans. The Legion is monitoring the situation closely

On Friday, April 3rd, the National Veterans Employment & Education Division conference call with DOL, the Department of N.J., TAL HR, and Wounded Warrior Transition Unit, we discussed the feasibility for holding a resume and LinkedIn workshops. In these uncertain times, we need to ensure that our veterans are prepared for the challenges and struggles they will face when looking for suitable employment.

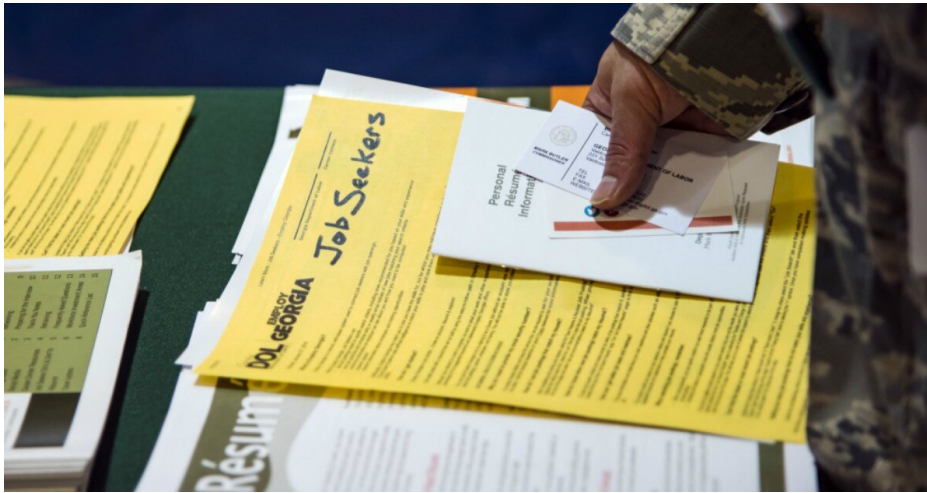
TOPIC 3: EMPLOYMENT

[Veterans unemployment](#) rose sharply in March amid massive business closures and widespread layoffs connected to the [ongoing coronavirus outbreak](#).

Officials from the [Bureau of Labor Statistics](#) reported Friday that the unemployment rate for all veterans jumped from 3.6 percent in February to 4.1 percent in March, the highest that number has reached in two years. The national unemployment rate similarly rose from 3.5 percent in February to 4.4 percent in March.

The nearly 1 percent jump in the national unemployment rate was the largest recorded by BLS since January 1975.

However, those figures are a sampling of workers throughout the month. It likely does not reflect the full scope of the ongoing pandemic. Surveys conducted by BLS begin mid-month, and public social distancing and non-essential business closures did not take place in many states until after March 16.



The report says that the number of unemployed individuals across America rose by 1.4 million last month, to more than 7 million people. The number of unemployed veterans rose about 40,000 people to just

under 370,000.

But agency officials reported earlier that more than 10 million Americans filed initial claims for unemployment benefits in the last two weeks, meaning the unemployment figures are likely to increase substantially when the next estimates are released in May.

Late last month, Congress passed a \$2 trillion stimulus package designed to ease the financial impact of the coronavirus outbreak, which has sickened more than 220,000 people across America and resulted in at least 6,000 deaths.

Among the hardest-hit sectors of the economy where the leisure and hospitality industry (which lost an estimated 459,000 jobs) and professional services (which lost about 52,000 jobs).

On Thursday, in a report analyzing the impact of the coronavirus outbreak on veterans, officials from the Bob Woodruff Foundation warned that former military members might be more frequently employed in industries likely to be impacted by the sudden recession.

More than a third of the unemployed veteran workforce is individuals who served after Sept. 11, 2001. While their unemployment rate dropped from February to March (4.5 percent to 4.1 percent), advocates have warned those younger workers could be among the most vulnerable to sudden layoffs and have the least savings available to weather financial woes.

TOPIC 4: CAREER FAIRS

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

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

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

TOPIC 5: VETERAN HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS

The National Low Income Housing Coalition (NLIHC)-led Disaster Housing Recovery Coalition is pushing for a broad array of resources and protections, including emergency rental assistance and eviction prevention assistance, a national moratorium on evictions and foreclosures, and emergency funds for homelessness service providers, housing authorities, and housing providers, among other recommendations. On March 30th, 2020, a webinar was held covering federal updates by U.S. Senator Jack Reed (D-RI) and U.S. Congresswoman Maxine Waters (D-CA), among other leaders of organizations advocating for recovery relief.



Congressional leaders enacted the “Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act),” to respond to the coronavirus pandemic. This response package included \$12 billion in housing and homelessness resources to help prevent an outbreak of the virus among people experiencing homelessness, as well as needed resources and protections for America’s lowest-income renters. This spending bill was an essential first step. Still, Congress must provide far more resources – and the administration should take immediate regulatory action – to meet the dire and urgent needs of people who are experiencing homelessness or those individuals who are right on the brink.

Recommendations for the next Coronavirus spending package included:

Emergency Solutions Grants (ESG): At least \$11.5 billion. Congress provided \$4 billion in ESG funds in the CARES Act; **additional funds**

are needed to respond to Coronavirus among people experiencing homelessness. People who are homeless and contract coronavirus are twice as likely to be hospitalized, two to four times as likely to require critical care, and two to three times as likely to die than others in the general public. If unchecked, as many as 20,000 people who are homeless could require hospitalization, and nearly 3,500 could die. This has enormous implications for individuals, their communities, and our already overstretched hospital systems. Funds are needed to minimize the number of people living in homeless encampments and congregate shelters and identify alternative space, including hotels, for isolation and self-quarantine, as well as funding for short-term rental assistance and housing stabilization services. ESG funds should also be used to provide medical respite care, outreach, and street medicine for people experiencing homelessness.

National and uniform moratorium on evictions and foreclosures.

In the CARES Act, Congress instituted a temporary moratorium on new filings for foreclosures and evictions due to nonpayment for renters and homeowners in all federally subsidized housing, including the Low Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC), and people living in properties covered by Fannie Mae, Freddie Mac, Federal Housing Administration (FHA). Several **states and localities have instituted eviction and foreclosure moratoriums**. This patchwork of responses provides relief to only some and creates confusion for all. Congress should implement a uniform policy that assures each of us that renters will not lose their homes during a pandemic where our collective health depends on each of us staying home. Although tenants will be responsible for paying back unpaid rent, the law should prohibit rent arrears accumulated during the period covered by the moratorium, from forming the basis of an eviction.

Emergency rental assistance and eviction prevention: \$50 billion to \$90 billion.

A moratorium on evictions, on its own, is not enough. Congress must also provide tens of billions of dollars in rental assistance to avoid creating a financial cliff for renters. Will fall off of when eviction moratoria are lifted, and back-rent is owed, and to ensure the continued viability of our country's essential affordable housing infrastructure. This assistance can be provided through a combination of Emergency Solutions Grants, Housing Choice Vouchers, Section 521 Rural Rental Assistance, or the Disaster Housing Assistance Program (DHAP). That was used by past Republican and Democratic administrations to address short-term rental assistance needs after previous disasters.

TOPIC 6: SMALL BUSINESS

The \$2 trillion coronavirus relief law signed by President Trump last week has several incentives



for struggling businesses to retain their employees instead of laying them off. The financial help in the CARES Act includes forgivable loans for small businesses, tax credits and deferrals, and measures around unemployment. They come as employers are getting walloped by the economic fallout from COVID-19.

Small business loans

The provision that may be most effective is a \$350 billion loan program for sole proprietors, independent contractors, self-employed individuals, nonprofits, and businesses with fewer than 500 employees, experts said. The low-interest loans, created under the Paycheck Protection Program, offer up to \$10 million to fund certain business expenses incurred between February 15th and June 30th.

Business owners may qualify to have some or all of their loan forgiven for the portion used to cover payroll costs (excluding wages over \$100,000), rent, utilities, and mortgage interest — over eight weeks. But the amount of canceled debt, which would occur via a grant, largely depends on how many workers the business retains and the extent to which it reduces their salaries.

The Small Business Administration website has more details on the Payroll Protection Program and other loan assistance programs. The agency is expected to provide additional PPP guidance in the coming days, experts said.

Employee retention tax credit

Businesses and nonprofits that retain workers during the coronavirus health crisis can get a refundable payroll tax credit. The credit, available through 2020 to ailing businesses, is equal to 50% of wages (including qualified health plan expenses) of up to \$10,000 per worker. (So, the maximum credit per employee is \$5,000 this year.) It's not available for businesses that also get a loan through the Paycheck Protection Program. The credit can be claimed against quarterly payroll taxes. The Treasury can make advance payments of the tax credit and waive penalties for employers who don't pay applicable payroll taxes in anticipation of receiving the credit.

Tax deferral

The CARES Act also allows small businesses to defer some payroll taxes this year. Employers can defer their portion of the Social Security payroll tax — a 6.2% rate in 2020. The measure won't necessarily save firms money because they must pay the tax later. But it could help free up cash for struggling businesses, and firms only get the benefit to the extent they have workers on the payroll, experts said.

Unemployment

The CARES Act gives federal money to states to pay unemployment benefits through "short-time compensation programs." These programs pay benefits to workers whose hours are reduced, typically by around 40% to 60%, depending on the state. Short-time compensation programs are currently available in around half of the states. Businesses offer them voluntarily. But federal reimbursement gives an incentive for the remainder of states to quickly adopt these programs, and for employers to then offer them, Houseman said. That would prevent outright layoffs and give a financial backstop to supplement employees' part-time income.

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TOPIC 7: EDUCATION

1LT Frances Skardon is a student at the University of Virginia Law School (UVA Law) who serves in the New York National Guard. She was called by Governor Andrew Cuomo on March 17 to the front lines of the NYC Coronavirus outbreak. This should have been an opportunity for UVA Law to highlight the selfless sacrifice of one of their students... instead, they tried to force her to withdraw. The American Legion made sure that did not happen.

Upon informing the UVA Law of her activation orders, 1LT Skardon was subsequently informed she violated UVA [Academic Policy I.H.](#), which states “*No full-time student may be employed for more than 20 hours per week or receive financial compensation or financial award for activities requiring more than 20 hours per week*”. 1LT Skardon requested an exemption to this policy to complete her final classwork online but was informed that UVA would instead freeze her registration due to the “compensation” she received from the Army.

1LT Skardon detailed this ordeal in a [Letter to the Editor](#) of Virginia Law Weekly that was published on the morning of April 1; by the afternoon, the Legion's National Higher Education Consultant Joe Wescott had determined that UVA's actions were outright illegal, in violation of Executive Order 13607. Concurrently, VE&E staff reached out to 1LT Skardon to offer support and advocacy on her behalf.



Wescott immediately notified Virginia's Department of Veterans Affairs of the illegality. After review, the Department forwarded the situation directly to Virginia Governor Ralph Northam's office for action.

By the evening of April 2, 1LT Skardon reached out to Legion staff with the following message:

***From:** Frances Skardon
Sent: Thursday, April 2, 2020, 7:08 PM
To: Kamin, John J. <JKamin@legion.org>
Subject: Re: American Legion inquiry into a letter to the editor*

Good evening,

Thank you for your email. I was [granted an exception](#) today in part because of your efforts. I really appreciate it!

*Best,
Frannie*

At the time, VE&E staff were preparing an alert notification to the Department of Virginia for immediate action on April 3rd. While ultimately, the UVA Law Academic Review Committee came to an immediate independent decision to grant an exception to Ms. Skardon, with the full force of The American Legion Department of Virginia standing by, we would not expect anything else.

**Joseph C. Sharpe, Jr., Director
Veterans Employment & Education Division
202.861.2700 ext. 2989
Week Ending: 4/3/20**
