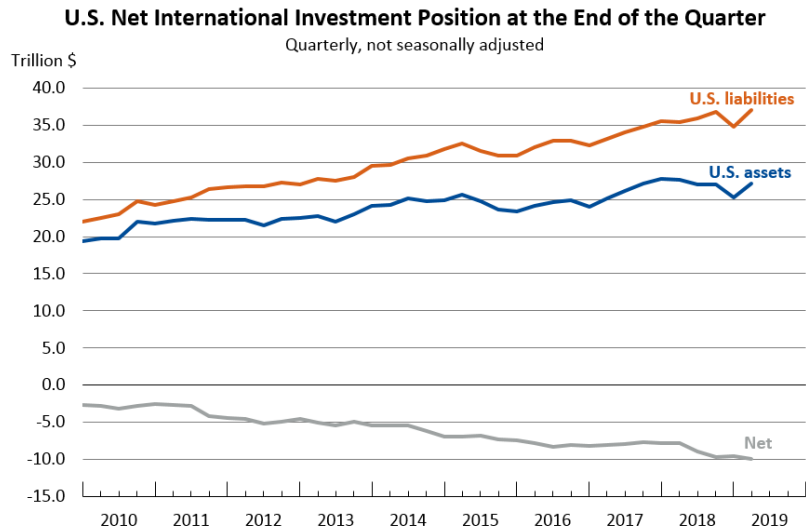


NATIONAL VETERANS EMPLOYMENT & EDUCATION COMMISSION

TOPIC 1: ECONOMY

The United States economy is growing moderately as of August 2019. Bits and pieces of economic information are released over the course of a quarter, and it's human nature to recall the items that reinforce our prior beliefs, while ignoring those contrary to our preconception. For that reason, I periodically roll through many of the indicators that I track to assess our current condition. Right, now, we're doing okay. Not exceedingly well, but certainly not in recession.

Real gross domestic product grew by 2.1% in the second quarter, in line with estimates of the growth of potential GDP. Potential is estimated based on the available labor force and productive capital in the economy. It's a soft number, but worth looking at. To continue growing along with our potential is better than it sounds, because we are now running above potential. We should expect some decline to return to potential. The 2.1% growth figure is less than the historical average, but that average covers a period with population growth much greater than it is today. Our recent number is just fine.



U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis

The second-most-popular aggregate statistic for the economy is job growth, which at 164,000 net new jobs is just a little below the recent trend. The percentage gain in employment is well above the growth of population, though, indicating a tightening labor market. The number of job openings edged down recently, as did employee quits, but both are coming off very high levels. Call this area not quite as good as recently.

Starting through the major sectors of the economy, consumer spending has been a solid foundation for our economic growth. Consumer spending has increased by 3.9% over the past 12 months, with the most recent four months even better. Disposable income grew even faster, up 4.7%, bringing the savings rate up. This sets the foundation for solid growth in the future. Total consumer spending includes retail sales as well as services, with retail being more discretionary and thus volatile. Retail sales increased by only 3.4% over the past 12 months, but a good bit of the gain came in the most recent four months. Car and light truck sales were 17.3 million units last month, a typical level for the last few years. Measures of consumer confidence are high, but I don't place much stock in them, as they generally reflect underlying fundamentals of the economy, primarily unemployment, inflation and interest rates. I assess the consumer sector as moderate.

Residential construction is light at 1.253 million housing units. We used to think of 1.5 million as normal, but today's slower population growth has pushed normal downward. Home prices are still rising, though not as fast as last year. If the recent mortgage rate decline stimulates new construction and sales, developers will only be borrowing from the future. This sector is weak.

Business spending on equipment and software was up just a little last quarter. A more useful measure is orders for non-defense capital equipment. The normal form of this indicator excludes aircraft order, because they are highly volatile and a substantial portion of them are foreign. (Foreign orders are important to American manufacturers, of course, but not indicative of U.S. economic strength.) The usual measure has increased a little over the past year, 2.0%, not adjusted for inflation. With Boeing's 737MAX troubles, it's worth looking at the total including aircraft orders: they are down a whopping 6.6% over the past 12 months. The drop in aircraft orders is not an indication of weakness at airlines, but a particular problem of one corporation.

Total government spending is increasing significantly, with federal up 7.0% and state plus local government up 3.5%. The federal side is roughly 5/8 of the total. Neither Congress nor the White House has a taste for fiscal discipline, so this spending is likely to continue.

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	
	SEP 2018	SEP 2019	SEP 2018	SEP 2019	SEP 2018	SEP 2019
Unemployed	131	157	98	122	33	35
Unemployment rate	3.9	4.5	3.5	4.0	6.0	7.0

The national unemployment rate is 3.4 percent (September 2019). Gulf War II veterans unemployment rate is 4.5 percent.ⁱ Currently, the unemployment rate for Gulf War II women veterans is 7.0 percent (up from 3.4 percent in September).

TOPIC 2: MEETINGS

On Monday, September 30th, the National Veterans Employment & Education Division will meet with Renata Bradford, Program Coordinator for Veterans Affairs Employment Outreach. Discussed opportunities for collaboration to help reduce the veteran unemployment while filling the thousands of vacancies plaguing the VA.

On Monday, September 30th, the National Veterans Employment & Education Division hosted a Capital Access Small Business Roundtable to discuss issues and problems veterans encounter and explore opportunities and solutions for veterans.

On Tuesday, October 1st, the National Veterans Employment and Education Division met with the National Industry for the Blind to discuss market based solutions for AbilityOne companies participating in contracts at the VA.

On Tuesday, October 1st, the National Veterans Employment & Education Division facilitated a conference call with Scott Stephens, Program Manager, Transunion. We have discussed opportunities to collaborate with The American Legion to assist our homeless veterans or veterans who may have been subjected to unfortunate circumstances which resulted in diminishing their credit score and making it much more challenging to obtain economic stability.

On Tuesday, October 1st, the National Veterans Employment & Education Division held a meeting with Dane Linn, Vice President of Education & Workforce for the Business Roundtable (BRT) about participation in the Legion's Credentialing Roundtable.

On Friday, October 4th, the National Veterans Employment and Education Division met with House Veteran Affairs Committee Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations regarding our recent letter of opposition sent to the House Committee on Appropriations.

On Friday, October 4th, the National Veterans Employment & Education Division attended a Homeless Veterans Working Group, hosted by the National Coalition of Homeless Veterans and the National Alliance to End Homelessness. We discussed policies and legislation that are important to us, including common concerns directly affecting homeless veterans.

On Saturday and Sunday, October 5th and 6th, the National Veterans Employment and Education Division will attend the Great American Franchise Expo and participate on the International Franchise Association's supplier forum.

TOPIC 3: EMPLOYMENT

Military Spouses

The American Legion has made conservative strides to ensure spouses of servicemembers, reservists, and veterans are given every opportunity to obtain suitable employment (Resolution No: 81, Military Spouse Employment)

How many military spouses are actually getting hired by federal agencies under a special hiring authority that's been in effect for more than a decade?

The Office of Personnel Management is in the process of finding out, after sending a memo to the human resources directors of all federal agencies on Sept. 27. The agencies must submit detailed information by Dec. 31 to OPM about how many spouses have been hired in fiscal year 2019.

The hiring authority gives agencies the ability to appoint military spouses to jobs without using the traditional competitive examining procedures. The authority was originally provided through an executive order in the Bush administration in 2008, but data hasn't been available from federal agencies on how many spouses have been hired through this non-competitive, faster process.

MILITARY



SPOUSE



Additional resources can be found at www.Military-Transition.org

Employment in the federal sector is just one option for military spouses, who often face many challenges in finding meaningful employment because of the frequent relocations to new duty stations. A number of efforts are under way by DoD, nonprofits and others to increase the opportunities for spouses in a variety of sectors.

In August 2018, a law was enacted to temporarily expand the eligibility for the hiring authority — to include all spouses of service members on active duty. That expansion ends in 2023, when it will revert to the previous criteria, which limited the eligibility to spouses of service members who have relocated due to a change of station.

As it did previously, the hiring authority also applies to spouses of 100-percent-disabled veterans, and un-remarried spouses of service members who were killed while performing active duty (not necessarily combat related.)

The August 2018 law also requires federal agencies to report to OPM annually on how many spouses have been appointed under the hiring authority in the previous fiscal year. That law, along with President Trump’s executive order in May 2018, lays out the requirements for reporting these numbers. OPM will provide the numbers to the president, along with recommendations for improving the hiring of military spouses.

Military family advocates have long asked for more information and data about how this and other programs are helping military spouses seeking employment.

“We’re very encouraged they’re following up to get this data,” said Jen Davis, government relations deputy director for the National Military Family Association. “The data will be a progress report of sorts to highlight what federal agencies are doing well, in addition to where they could boost their efforts for better results. This data will be helpful for each agency to see and understand, as well as military spouses who are interested in pursuing a career in the federal government.”

“We can’t fix what we don’t understand,” said Sue Hoppin, founder and president of the National Military Spouse Network, which focuses on a number of issues of military spouse employment. “This will help us understand the bigger picture by assessing trends of what’s working, what’s not, what’s on the rise.

“Specifically, it’ll be interesting to see what agencies outside of DoD have been effective at hiring military spouses and which agencies have been effective at helping military spouses maintain their jobs through PCSs, if any.”

The agencies’ reports for fiscal 2019 related to the military spouse hiring authority will include:

- the number of positions available
- the number applications submitted by spouses
- the number of spouses appointed
- the types of positions filled, and the number of positions filled for each type of position
- a summary of the effectiveness
- a summary of the agency’s actions to advertise and promote the hiring of military spouses
- a point of contact for military spouse hiring

TOPIC 4: VETERAN HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS

According to the 2019 Point in Time Report, there are 1,273 people experiencing homelessness in Oklahoma City, an increase of 8% from last year. This includes than 100 veterans, more than 70 families and almost 90 unaccompanied youth. Considering over half a million people reside in the city, it's easy to ignore the small number of citizens without a home.

However, an entire community can experience consequences of homelessness such as an increased risk of disease outbreaks and a higher burden placed on public services. Due to the risk factors associated with homelessness and especially because of the increase seen in Oklahoma City, this isn't an issue to be disregarded. To put a decline in the fluctuating percentage of homeless people within the city, attention needs to be turned to a solution that can prevent homelessness altogether: improved mental health services.

Mental illness is a leading cause of disability, according to the Mayo Clinic, so when someone becomes disabled due to untreated, poor mental health, they are no longer able to seek and maintain employment. Besides being disabling, mental illness can cause problems in personal relationships, physical health and substance abuse, which can isolate a person from their support groups and require large amounts of money for


rehab facilities and medical treatment. The Point in Time Report stated that 31% of homeless people in Oklahoma City are living with mental illness. Having no support system, financial troubles or coping with substance abuse make it almost impossible to carry out daily activities required to earn a stable income and maintain a household. However, most plans to combat homelessness focus on providing affordable housing and employment services.

While these solutions deliver immediate and effective results in reducing the homeless population, the focus should be on efficient prevention of the issue to ensure that it does not reoccur. A study on homeless and housed (below the poverty line) youths of Worcester, Massachusetts, was done to examine mental illness, mental health service use and homelessness. The study found that 32% of homeless and housed youths exhibited a mental disorder, and 20-35% had used mental health services. The study showed that the prevalence of mental illness among the sample was high, but use of services was low. This could be due to lack of knowledge of mental health services, the stigma about mental health in today's society, or the absence of resources to use the services.

If Oklahoma City wants to see a decline in the percentage of the homeless population, different action plans need to be placed. Not only should public health officials focus on one of the most vulnerable groups within our community, they should focus on implementing mental health services that will prevent future families, veterans and children from experiencing homelessness. This can be done with increased awareness, the destigmatization of mental disorders, and the increase of resources that can be used by our population. Nee is a community health/pre-medicine major at the University of Oklahoma.

Impact of Homelessness

- Homelessness impacts an *individual* with extreme sadness, fearfulness, hopelessness, lost of self-esteem, substance abuse, behavioral problems, suicidal tendencies
- Homelessness can impact the *family* by increasing the likelihood of family separation, stress on children, behavioral problems, violence, truancy, fearfulness, emotional distress, trauma, malnutrition, neglect, sexual molestation
- Homelessness can impact the *community* by costly upkeep of shelters, day centers and community medical services, cost of panhandling to tax payers, cost of high crime rates to neighborhoods, environmental impact on society due to, trash, waste, etc.



TOPIC 5: CAREER FAIRS & ROUNDTABLES

This week, work continued on The American Legion's upcoming hiring events to be staged in Fort Carson (CO), Aurora (CO), JBLM (WA), King George (VA), Fort Meade (MD), Lexington Park (MD),

National Veterans Employment & Education Division hosted a small business round-table with members of the Small Business Task Force on Access to Capital. Representatives from the U.S. Small Business Administration and the U.S. Department of Agriculture; as well as, representatives from educational institutions, trade associations, and lenders. The ten most impoverished states, and the District of Columbia, were identified:

1. Mississippi
2. New Mexico
3. Louisiana
4. Kentucky
5. Arkansas
6. Alabama
7. West Virginia
8. Arizona
9. District of Columbia
10. Georgia
11. Tennessee

The Task Force discussed the distressed communities and the correlation between income and life expectancy within those communities. The organizations shared the challenges they found to cause barriers for veterans accessing capital and recommendations on how to overcome them.

In the process of identifying where the resources are in the veterans geographic eco-system within these Top 10 impoverished states; to include, military bases, American Legion posts, federal, state and local agencies

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 6: SMALL BUSINESS

The U.S. Small Business Administration makes the American dream of business ownership a reality. As the only go-to resource and voice for small businesses backed by the strength of the federal government, the SBA empowers veteran entrepreneurs and small business owners with the resources and support they need to start, grow or expand their businesses, or recover from a declared disaster.

The U.S. Small Business Administration announced this week that more than 100,000 current and aspiring veteran business owners have participated in the Boots to Business training course since the program began in January 2013.

The Boots to Business program provides entrepreneurial education and training to transitioning service members, veterans and military spouses (including members of the National Guard and Reserve) via the U.S. Department of Defense's Transition Assistance Program.



The program is administered as a collaborative effort between SBA district offices and resource partners, which include Veterans Business Outreach Centers, Women's Business Centers, SCORE, America's Small Business Development Centers and grant partners.

Each year, SBA helps more than 200,000 veterans, service-disabled veterans, members of the National Guard and Reserve, and military spouses start, grow and expand their businesses.

Celebrate the veteran small business community during National Veterans Small Business Week this November 4-8, 2019. To find an event near you, visit www.sba.gov/vetbiz. To learn more about Boots to Business, visit sbavets.force.com.

TOPIC 7: EDUCATION

A trio of Democratic senators are pushing to overhaul transferability rules with the current [GI Bill benefits](#) program in response to a [pending Defense Department](#) policy to limit troops' ability to share those education payouts with their spouses and children.

Sens. Jon Tester of Montana, Sherrod Brown of Ohio and Richard Blumenthal of Connecticut introduced legislation this week which would guarantee that that all service members with 10 years of service are eligible to [transfer their benefits to dependents at any time](#), either before or after they leave the military.

“The law should make it easier, not harder, for service members to use the benefits they’ve earned in a way that makes the most sense for them and their families,” Tester said in a statement, adding that the new plan would get rid of “unnecessary hurdles” in the current program.

It’s unclear how many families could benefit from the change. More than 773,000 individuals have used Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits since the program began in 2009.

GI Bill Currently, troops must register all eligible dependents in Defense Department systems before separating from the military in order for them to be able to receive Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits in the future.

That means the children born after individuals retire from the service are not eligible for the education payouts, which include 36 months of full in-state tuition and monthly living stipends. Same for the spouses of veterans who get remarried after leaving the ranks.

Last year, military officials announced plans to refine the Post-9/11 GI Bill program even further, in the interest of maintaining it as retention benefit. They would shift the deadline for registering dependents up even earlier, blocking troops with more than 16 years of service from adding any new names to their accounts.

Advocates argued that change amounted to punishing troops for having long, productive military careers.

House Democrats in June included language in their chamber's draft of the annual defense authorization bill to block the change, which was set to go into effect last July. That measure is still pending before Congress.



However, on the eve of that deadline, Defense Department leaders announced they planned to delay the controversial change until January 2020.

The three senators backing the new legislation say they want the issue settled once and for all, and believe that the military's approach to the benefit is flawed.

"The Department of Defense's confusing new policy moved the goalpost for transfer eligibility, breaking our promise to military families," Blumenthal said in a statement. "Disqualifying service members with more than 16 years of military services penalizes the men and women who have served this country in uniform for the greatest length of time.

"This policy change is fundamentally illogical and unfair."

The legislation would be retroactive to 2001, meaning that thousands of veterans' dependents who were previously ineligible could take advantage of the program if the measure becomes law (provided the veteran has not already exhausted all available benefits).

No potential price tag for the Senate legislation has been released.

A joint House and Senate conference committee is currently negotiating the final draft of the defense authorization bill, to include whether the GI Bill policy repeal will be included. That work is expected to finish in coming weeks, with full chamber votes on the compromise measure sometime this fall.

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