

## NATIONAL VETERANS EMPLOYMENT & EDUCATION COMMISSION

### TOPIC 1: ECONOMY

The benchmark 30-year fixed mortgage rate sank to 4.90 percent from 5.01 percent last week, according to Bankrate.com's weekly mortgage rate survey of the nation's largest lenders. Meanwhile, the average rate for a 15-year fixed mortgage slipped seven basis points to 4.33 percent while the average 5/1 adjustable mortgage rate fell two basis points to 4.38 percent. Mortgage rates take their cues from the 10-year Treasury yield, which has slid considerably, says Mark Hamrick, Bankrate.com's senior economic analyst.

"Chalk some of this up to volatility in the financial markets, in general, including the ongoing debate and confusion over the future actions of the Federal Reserve and the plight of U.S.-China trade discussions," Hamrick says. "All of this suggests that volatility is here to stay. For borrowers, this provides an opportunity to borrow 'on sale.'" With mortgage rates down, mortgage applications are rebounding a bit as buyers capitalize on lower borrowing costs. Total mortgage applications rose 2 percent from one week earlier, according to data from the Mortgage Bankers Association's weekly survey for the week ending Nov. 30.

Purchase applications rose 1 percent, but refinances jumped 6 percent from the previous week, the MBA reported. The refinance share of mortgage activity also rose to 40.4 percent of total applications from 37.9 percent the last week. The adjustable-rate mortgage (ARM) share of activity slipped to 7.4 percent of total applications. Joel Kan, MBA's associate vice president of economic and industry forecasting, agrees that Treasury rates are sliding due to concerns over slowing global economic growth and trade tensions between the U.S. and China. The cumulative effect is driving mortgage rates down — and spurring buyers into action.

"Application activity increased over the week for both purchase and refinanced loans, and were 10 percent and 7 percent higher, respectively than the week before the Thanksgiving holiday," Kan said in a statement. "Additionally, we saw a decrease in the average loan size for purchase applications to the lowest since December 2017 (\$298,000 from \$313,000)." The smaller average loan size is likely due to fewer jumbo borrowers in the market and more first-time buyers getting a foot in the door before the end of the year, Kan says.

The "Bankrate.com National Average," or "national survey of large lenders," is conducted weekly. The results of this survey are quoted in our weekly articles and national media outlets. To perform the National Average survey, Bankrate obtains rate information from the ten largest banks and thrifts in 10 large U.S. markets. In the Bankrate.com national survey, our Market Analysis team gathers rates and yields on banking deposits, loans, and mortgages. We've conducted this survey in the same manner for more than 30 years, and because it's consistently done the way it is, it gives an accurate national apples-to-apples comparison.

**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 2017	Nov 2018	Nov 2017	Nov 2018	Nov 2017	Nov 2018
<b>Gulf War-era II veterans</b>						
<b>Unemployed</b>	155	120	123	98	33	22
<b>Unemployment rate</b>	4.6	3.4	4.3	3.3	6.6	4.1

*National unemployment rate is 3.7 percent (November 2018). Gulf War II veterans unemployment rate is 3.1 percent.<sup>i</sup> Currently, the unemployment rate for Gulf War II women veterans is 4.1 percent (up from 2.7 percent in October).*

**TOPIC 2: MEETINGS**

**On Monday, December 3**, the National Veterans Employment & Education Division spoke with Adam Roche, Vice President, of FASTPORT Inc. We discussed their participation during The American Legion’s Washington Conference. Additionally, FASTPORT is hosting several events in the D.C. area late next week and invited The American Legion to attend any or all of these events. Apprenticeship Accelerator, Transition Trucking Driver Excellence Award, and Pentagon’s ESGR Signing Event will be taking place.

**On Tuesday, December 4**, the National Veterans Employment & Education Division spoke with Roxann Griffith, Director of Veterans Employment and Training Services (DVETS) in Texas. Roxann invited The American Legion to attend the all veteran/military spouse graduation for the non-profit NPower. NPower has done a lot in the community for veterans. They have graduates in several major corporations across the U.S. and a stronghold on veterans in IT in Dallas.

**On Wednesday, December 5**, the National Veterans Employment & Education Division met with Colonel Prescott Farris, Director, Soldier for Life (SFL). Colonel Farris assumed command of SFL early November. We discussed the Director’s vision of SFL and collaboration with The American Legion. SFL has been a valuable partner with the Legion and will continue to work closely on all future events to reach more transitioning servicemembers.

**On Thursday, December 6**, the National Veterans Employment & Education Division participated in a teleconference call with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation, Hiring Our Heroes. During the teleconference, we discussed future participation in their Career Fairs, Hiring Expos, and Transition Summits.

***On Thursday, December 6***, the Veterans Employment and Education Division attended the SBA's Advisory Committee on Veterans Business Affairs (ACVBA). The Department of Veterans Affairs testified in front of the Committee regarding the statistics from the 2018 NVSBE and the continued problems facing veteran small business applicants in the new VEMS system.

***On Friday, December 7***, the National Veterans Employment & Education Division spoke with Saphyia Vialva, who is a student at Tiffin University. Miss Vialva is part of the Washington Center's volunteer program and would like to volunteer with The American Legion during her winter semester of college.

***On Saturday, December 8***, the Veterans Employment and Education Division will attend SPIRIT Open Equestrian's annual fundraiser. The event will also feature works of art created and donated by SPIRIT's program participants and the veteran community. SPIRIT Open Equestrian is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that rescues horses and gives them new purpose through equine assisted activities. SPIRIT therapeutic programs focus on helping veterans, and others suffering from post-traumatic stress.

### **TOPIC 3: EMPLOYMENT**

#### **Six Things to Update On Your LinkedIn Profile**

The American Legion understands that career fairs and networking events alone may not land your ideal career. Experts say that social media has a significant impact on the hiring manager and recruiters when looking to hire which is why The American Legion stresses to servicemembers, veterans, and their spouses the importance of professional branding. It's documented that recruiters and hiring managers love LinkedIn, which means if you're looking for a job, you should like it too. According to some reports, as many as 95 percent of recruiters admit to using LinkedIn to find, research or connect with candidates at some point during the hiring cycle. So, the vast majority of recruiters will see your LinkedIn as some point if they're considering you for a job. If your LinkedIn profile isn't updated, you're missing out on a tremendous opportunity. Here are some tips for bringing your LinkedIn profile into 2019!

#### **Present your best self(ie)**

Consider your profile photo your first chance to make a first impression. If you don't get it quite right, it can also be the last! Choose a professional photo with a simple background and natural lighting. This is not the place for a shadowy picture that was taken in a bathroom mirror. Nor should it be 'sexy' or 'artistic' – this isn't Instagram. Professional clothing, a simple pose, and a smile will go a long way. (Seriously, smile in your photo! You'll seem more approachable, and it's less likely to end up looking like an unintentional mug shot.) If you need help getting a decent photo, ask a friend, though a professional-looking selfie can work just fine.

#### **Pick your niche and stick to it**

One of the most significant problems job seekers run into on LinkedIn is trying to throw in everything and the kitchen sink when it comes to their skills and experience. Some people think: 'If there's a little bit of everything, it'll appeal to everyone!' Wrong! For the most part, specialists are more sought after than someone who knows a little bit of everything. While it's much more acceptable to pack your LinkedIn with information than it is your resume, you still need to pick a lane. There's no way you're a human resources specialist, with a background in accounting, business development and law, who also happens to be a marketing guru, who knows ten languages and translates documents in your spare time. (If you are, kudos because that's impressive!

However, still, we maintain you should choose one, maybe two, of those areas to focus on in your job search!) This comes down to your branding. What do you want to be known for? It's easier to pick a specific niche and show you're an expert in that field than it is to make yourself stand out as a jack of all trades. Your LinkedIn profile isn't a legal document where you must disclose every work opportunity you've ever had. Pick and choose which professional highlights you include to paint a picture. It's all about framing your experience in the best light which brings us to it.

### **Tell your story**

LinkedIn may be the platform of choice for professionals, but it's still a social media channel. Moreover, on social media, storytelling is how you capture people's attention. Recruiters and hiring managers are no different! Think about how many profiles they must read on a daily basis. They run into the same clichés and buzzwords so often that anything a little outside the box is going to be memorable. People are drawn in by stories that hit us in the feels and paint a picture. If you lay out a vanilla profile that makes you seem 2-dimensional, you'll have a hard time capturing anyone's interest, including from hiring managers. If you tie in a little of your personal background story and professional motivations, suddenly you've got a hook.

### **Share rich media**

Photos, videos, portfolios, a personal website, blogs you've written. All of these things will instantly beef up your LinkedIn profile and make it more engaging. We highly recommend including some visual elements if you can. The majority of people are visible, so photos or examples of your work can be a massive boon to your profile. LinkedIn has a built-in blog platform (it's straightforward to use, we promise!) so even if you're not the type to start your blog, never fear. If something noteworthy happens in your industry, pen a quick blog to share your thoughts, and voila, you've added some rich media to your LinkedIn profile! If that's not for you, at the very least, update your profile photo and cover images.

### **Focus on keyword**

Keywords are the main topics and phrases that you want to be associated with as a professional. For instance, if you're a copywriter who is interested in working in the insurance industry in Toronto, some of the keywords you'll want to include throughout your profile will consist of 'copywriter,' 'writing' 'insurance' and 'Toronto.' You'll want to repeat these keywords at least a few times throughout your profile to ensure that your profile pops up when a recruiter searches for similar candidates on LinkedIn's recruiter tools. Hard skills are also important as keywords on LinkedIn because many recruiters are looking for particular skills, competencies, and software proficiency. So say you're an expert in 'branding,' 'event marketing' and 'event planning' - you'll want to make sure these terms appear sprinkled throughout your profile as well.

### **List your skills and get endorsed**

LinkedIn allows you to tag skills. Make sure you select any that align with your brand, as they're a prime way recruiters connect with matching candidates on LinkedIn. You can also collect endorsements from friends, colleagues and professional contacts. Don't be afraid to ask for skill endorsement from colleagues or customers who use your services and see your skills in action. Just make sure you're willing to offer an endorsement or two in return, as reciprocation is often an expectation. If you can swing it, collecting a few written LinkedIn recommendations is even better.

These can be trickier to obtain, however. Again, don't be afraid to ask if you do something above and beyond for a colleague or customer. If you don't ask for a written recommendation, it's unlikely anyone will think to do it themselves. It's worth the added effort, though, as LinkedIn recommendations hold almost as much weight as a reference. Recruiters and hiring managers live on LinkedIn. So ensuring your LinkedIn profile conveys the message you intend can be invaluable when you're on the hunt for a new job. If you're looking for even more tips on improving your job search, follow us on LinkedIn for more job seeking tips and advice.

#### **TOPIC 4: VETERAN HOMELESSNESS**

For a Yaphank shelter helping homeless veterans get back on their feet, Giving Tuesday this year is all about giving them a little more elbow room. The 23-bed county-funded shelter known as The Veterans Place has been run out of a converted motel on Mill Road since 1999. The shelter's staff began raising money a year ago to expand and renovate its cramped dining, kitchen, reception and staff sleeping areas, and to install an elevator. There were boxes of pasta overflowing from shelves, pots, and pans stacked up in a corner and no quiet space for new residents to sit when they arrive. So shelter director Wilkens Young said adding more room was an obvious choice for the facility's next capital investment. The facility is usually between 90 and 95 percent full and often has a waiting list, said Suffolk County United Veterans Director of Development Ruth McDade.

The facility, which takes in homeless veterans but also has spots for nonveterans, is run by United Veterans of Suffolk County, a subsidiary of the nonprofit Association for Mental Health and Wellness, with funding from the Suffolk County Department of Social Services. The renovation project will take at least \$200,000 in cash and in-kind donations. So far, about \$62,000 has been raised, McDade said. To get closer to that goal, this year the shelter took advantage of Giving Tuesday, an online campaign that started in 2012 as a day for charitable donations after the consumption holidays of Black Friday and Cyber Monday that come after Thanksgiving. For a week and a half before Tuesday, McDade set out to raise \$5,000 toward the renovations. Shelter staff turned to Facebook and its email list, posting pictures with the hashtag #GivingTuesday every day for two weeks, hoping to illustrate the stories of the people who live in, work at and donate to the shelter.

On Tuesday, Air Force veteran Alan Mercado, 61, was preparing to cook halibut fillets for his fellow residents in the shelter's cramped kitchen. Mercado, who has lived at the shelter since August, walked past a new stove to open overstuffed cabinets and gestured to a pile of pans on a metal shelf. "Right now [stuff is] being thrown anywhere they can put it," Mercado said. "There's much disrepair that needs fixing." New clients at The Veterans Place walk in the front door to find a dining room that can be chaotic and full of people. The expansion will mean that men arriving at the shelter, often in distress, will have a quiet office to meet with the staff. "Some people are paranoid schizophrenic, other people ... can't be in social environments. So we try to rearrange everything so we can make accommodations for those needs, and also for our staff," Young said.

The Giving Tuesday fundraising started Nov. 16. Pictures of donors, shelter staff and residents all made it onto the Facebook page over the following days. Those included a post about Marcelle Leis, the shelter's program director, in her Air Force uniform, and a post about the leather-clad members of the Long Island chapter of the Teamster Horsemen Motorcycle Association, whose members occasionally raise money for the shelter.

By Tuesday night, United Veterans of Suffolk County had surpassed its goal for the shelter, raising \$5,740. The Long Island chapter of the Teamster Horsemen motorcycle club donated about \$250 toward the Giving Tuesday effort. Brian Fredrickson, the chapter's vice president, said the Horsemen support the shelter because the effects of their donations are visible in the lives of the veterans who come to the shelter. "Actions speak louder than words, and there's much action going on over there," he said.

## **TOPIC 5: CAREER FAIRS**

This week, work continued on The American Legion's upcoming hiring events to be staged in Oklahoma (OK), Fredericksburg (VA), Shaw AFB (SC), Wright Patterson AFB (OH), Washington Wizards (DC), Joint Base Andrews (MD), Lexington Park (MD), and Fort Bliss (TX).

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

## **TOPIC 6: SMALL BUSINESS**

The HeroZona Foundation's HeroPreneur National Veteran Business Summit returned to Phoenix from Nov. 14 to Nov. 16 to empower veterans through entrepreneurship, employment, and education.

A record number of more than 1,500 U.S. veterans attended the summit over the course of the three-day engagements, and more than 75 organizations participated in the career fairs and business fairs to network, hire and do business with veterans.

The summit also recognized individuals and organizations that support the veteran community with a HeroPreneur Awards Luncheon on Thursday, Nov. 15. The luncheon was hosted by CNN Military Analyst and U.S. Army Maj. Gen. (R), James A. "Spider" Marks; and Co-Chairman of Arizona Corporate Council on Veteran Careers and U.S. Navy Rear Adm. (R), Hal Pittman.

Last year, U.S. Senator John McCain accepted the Lifetime Service Award at the inaugural ceremony. This prestigious award was renamed this year to the Maverick Award in honor of the late, great senator. The recipient of the 2018 HeroZona Foundation Maverick Award was President and CEO of Pinnacle West & Arizona Public Service, Donald E. Brandt. During the ceremony, the Mission Continues Award was given to the organization, Archer-Ragsdale Arizona Chapter Tuskegee Airmen, Inc.

During the summit, the HeroPreneur NVBS also gave out awards to individuals under the summit's three pillars: entrepreneurship, employment, and education. The HeroPreneur Entrepreneur Award recipient was Robson Resort Communities Founder and Chairman, Edward J. Robson; the HeroPreneur Employment Award recipient was Intel Corporation's Interim Chief Executive Officer, Robert H. Swan; and the HeroPreneur Education Award recipient was Arizona State University's President, Dr. Michael M. Crow. During the ceremony, Eric Eversole, vice president at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and president of Hiring Our Heroes, provided opening remarks.

Other summit highlights included The Bridge Forum U.S. Veteran Edition; Fireside Chat with the "People's Shark", Daymond John and HeroZona Co-Founder, Entrepreneur-In-Residence at Singularity University and Managing Director for [Kittyhawk.io](http://Kittyhawk.io), Aaron Bare; keynote speaker and veteran advocate, Justin Constantine; career fair for veterans and their spouses and a business fair

for veteran-owned businesses. Also in attendance was Arizona State University, Maricopa Community Colleges, Institute for Veterans and Military Families, and U.S. Small Business Administration, who hosted workshops for veterans and veteran-owned businesses.

The HeroPreneur National Veteran Business Summit was spearheaded by the HeroZona Foundation and Arizona Department of Veterans' Services, in conjunction with the State of Arizona, City of Phoenix and Arizona Corporate Council on Veteran Careers. A portion of the proceeds from the HeroPreneur week of experiences benefited veteran organization programs such as the HeroZona Foundation, Arizona Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, Honoring Arizona's Veterans and the Arizona Department of Veterans' Services veteran programs.

For more information about the HeroPreneur National Veterans Business Summit, visit [HeroPreneur.com](http://HeroPreneur.com). To learn more about the HeroZona Foundation's programs, visit [herozona.org](http://herozona.org).

## TOPIC 7: EDUCATION

### **Another For-Profit College Chain, Popular with GI Bill Users, Closes Suddenly**

One of the nation's largest for-profit college chains announced Wednesday that it was abruptly closing in dozens of locations nationwide after its accrediting agency suspended approval. Birmingham, Alabama-based Education Corp. of America said it was closing schools operating as Virginia College, Brightwood College, Brightwood Career Institute, Ecotech Institute and Golf Academy of America in more than 70 locations in 21 states. The company said in October that it had more than 20,000 students, although more recent documents indicate the number may be closer to 15,000. ECA schools enrolled about 4,000 students using the Post-9/11 GI Bill in fiscal 2017, the latest year for which federal data is available. A Military Times analysis of Department of Veterans Affairs data shows more than \$41 million went to pay for the education of veterans at these schools. The company, backed by investors including private equity firm Willis Stein & Partners of Chicago, is the latest in a series of for-profit colleges to close after allegations that they were loading students up with debt while not providing them with marketable skills.

In some cases, students told local news outlets Wednesday that operations ceased immediately, while in other cases students said they were told to return for meetings later. ECA spokeswoman Diane Worthington noted that at most locations, Friday would be the last day of classes, and students would get academic credit for this term. One ECA institution, New England College of Business, is not closing. The company mostly offers professional certificates in subjects like cosmetology, culinary arts and medical and dental assisting. In a letter to students, ECA CEO Stuart Reed said the company's impending loss of accreditation, along with added requirements from the U.S. Department of Education, made the company unable to raise more money to operate the schools while it sought to reorganize.

"It is with extreme regret that this series of recent circumstances have forced us to discontinue the operation of our schools," Reed wrote. In October, the company sued the U.S. Education Department seeking to maintain its federal funding, which was in jeopardy over its dire financial situation. A judge later dismissed the suit. Court documents filed by the company said its lagging revenue left it unable to make payments on its debt or rental fees, and that it faced eviction at several campuses. ECA estimated it owed \$66 million at the time. Even before then, ECA was planning to shutter 26 campuses to cut costs. Another federal judge in Georgia later granted a bankruptcy-like receivership meant to protect the company from creditors.

ECA largely blamed falling enrollment on an upswing in the economy, which left fewer adults heading to school for job skills, and on increased federal regulation of the for-profit college industry. The sudden closure drew criticism from the U.S. Education Department, which said it had been working with the company to arrange a shut-down that gave students time to transfer. “Instead of taking the next few months to close in an orderly fashion, ECA took the easy way out and left 19,000 students scrambling to find a way to finish the education program they started,” Liz Hill, an Education Department spokeswoman, said in a statement. Like the recently shuttered Corinthian Colleges and ITT Technical Institute chains, Education Corporation of America was overseen by the Accrediting Council for Independent Colleges and Schools, one of the watchdog groups the federal government appoints to ensure colleges offer a quality education.

The council, known as ACICS, wrote a Tuesday letter to Reed saying it was suspending accreditation immediately at all the institutions, citing “rapidly deteriorating financial conditions,” a failure to make required payments to the council and a wide variety of academic concerns. ACICS was shut down by the Obama administration over allegations of lax oversight but was later reinstated on Nov. 21 by Education Secretary Betsy DeVos, who found it was “substantially in compliance” with federal standards. Virginia Rep. Bobby Scott, the top Democrat on the House Education and the Workforce Committee, urged DeVos to rethink her decision on ACICS after the Wednesday closure. “We have repeatedly warned about the risks low-quality, for-profit education companies and irresponsible accreditors pose to students and taxpayers across the country,” Scott said in a statement. “Today’s announcement is another painful reminder of those risks.” Corinthian and ITT Tech educated thousands of student veterans when they closed in 2015 and 2016, respectively, and became the impetus for a provision in the Forever GI Bill law passed last year that restores GI Bill benefits to victims of abrupt school closures.

In many cases, students and teachers were in class when they got the news about the ECA closures Wednesday. Melissa Zavala, who was studying to be a medical assistant at a San Antonio, Texas, campus of Brightwood, told KSAT-TV students were taken to an auditorium. “The director was there, and she was like, ‘I have bad news. The school is closing down,’” Zavala said. “Everyone was like, ‘What about our student loans? We’re almost done.’” Zavala said campus officials couldn’t provide additional information and told them to look online for other colleges they could attend. “They took our money, they shut the school down, and that’s it for us,” Zavala said. Toby Merrill, who directs the Project on Predatory Student Lending at Harvard Law School, said students could ask the U.S. Department of Education to cancel loans if a school closes. However, that opportunity doesn’t apply if a student transfers credits or if a school hires a successor to offer students classes to complete their programs.

**Joseph C. Sharpe, Jr., Director**  
**Veterans Employment & Education Division**  
**202.861.2700 ext. 2989**  
**Week Ending: 12/7/18**

---

<sup>i</sup> <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/empsit.t05.htm>