

NATIONAL VETERANS EMPLOYMENT & EDUCATION COMMISSION

TOPIC 1: ECONOMY

Sales of previously owned homes rose in January, as a shortage of homes for sale continued to push home prices higher. Existing-home sales rose 0.6% in January from December to a seasonally adjusted annual rate of 6.69 million, the National Association of Realtors said Friday. The January sales marked a 23.7% increase from a year earlier.

Economists surveyed by The Wall Street Journal expected a 2.4% monthly decline in sales of previously owned homes, which make up most of the housing market.

Home sales surged in 2020 to the highest level since 2006, as historically low interest rates spurred demand, and buyers looked for more space. While winter is usually slower for home sales, economists say the pandemic disrupted the usual seasonal patterns by pushing home purchases that would have occurred last spring and summer to the fall and winter.

“The housing market continues to remain very strong,” said Lawrence Yun, NAR’s chief economist. “Sales could be even higher, but the inventory is simply not there.”

House prices have climbed rapidly in recent months as buyers competed for a limited number of homes on the market. NAR said the median existing-home price rose 14.1% in January from a year earlier to \$303,900. Heidi Finkelstein and Matthew Sherman bought a four-bedroom home in Plantation, Fla., in January. The new home has more outdoor space than their current house in the same city, and “it made sense for us to do this because the mortgage rates are so low,” Ms. Finkelstein said.

They are renovating the new house and plan to sell their current home in the summer. “I don’t see the market in our neighborhood going down anytime soon,” as people continue to move to Florida from other states, Ms. Finkelstein said.

Existing-home sales rose the most month-over-month in the South, at 3.2%, and in the Midwest, at 1.9%. January sales were down from December in the Northeast and the West. According to NAR, home sales were especially strong at the high end of the market, with the number of sales of homes priced at over \$1 million up 77% in January compared with a year earlier. Homes typically go under contract a month or two before the contract closes, so the January figures mainly reflect purchase decisions made in December or November.

Homes for sale frequently receive multiple offers and sell quickly, real-estate agents say. There were 1.04 million homes for sale at the end of January, the lowest on records back to 1982. According to NAR, the level was down 1.9% from December and down 26% from January 2020. There was a 1.9-month supply of homes on the market at the end of January at the current sales pace.

Demand is also healthy for newly built homes, and many home builders are intentionally limiting sales in some communities due to constraints of materials, labor, or land. In some metro areas,



Heidi Finkelstein and Matthew Sherman, bought a four-bedroom home in Florida, in January, utilizing their V.A. Home Loan benefits

buyers sign up for waitlists or even camping out to buy new homes as they become available, said Ali Wolf, chief economist at Zonda, a housing-market research firm.

“The question today is not how many homes can you sell; it’s how many homes can you build,” she said.

A measure of U.S. home-builder confidence rose in February after two months of declines, the National Association of Home Builders said this week. Housing starts, a measure of U.S. home-building, fell 6% in January from December, the Commerce Department said Thursday. Residential permits, which can be a bellwether for future home construction, rose 10.4%.

Resolution No. 329: Support Home Loan Guaranty Program

[Reported by Ariel De Jesus]

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	
	Jan 2020	Jan 2021	Jan 2020	Jan 2021	Jan 2020	Jan 2021
Unemployed	319	500	282	461	36	38
Unemployment rate	3.5	5.5	3.5	5.8	3.2	3.3

The national unemployment rate is 6.7 percent (January 2020). Gulf War II veterans' unemployment rate is 6.3 percent. Currently, Gulf War II women veterans' unemployment rate is 3.8 percent (down from 5.0 percent in November).

In January 2021, the veteran unemployment rate was 4.9%. The comparable non-veteran unemployment rate was 6.3% in January.

TOPIC 2: VIRTUAL MEETINGS & CONFERENCE CALLS

On Monday, February 15, the National Veterans Employment and Education Division had conversations with HVAC staffers and NASAA leadership. Also, had discussions with some schools on 90/10.

On Tuesday, February 16, the National Veterans Employment and Education Division spoke with Sharon Wong, Executive Director, Strategic Recruitment, Diversity and Inclusion, Department of Homeland Security. The discussion focused on hiring and retaining veterans and spouses,

emphasizing disabled veterans with a 30 percent or more rating stands at 5.4 percent of their total veteran population.

On Tuesday, February 16, the National Veterans Employment and Education Division met with NCSDDVA officials on SAA in NC. Also, had a conversation with project manager on RBS surveys.

On Tuesday, February 16, the National Veterans Employment and Education Division attended a meeting with Jason Delisle and others on report on 90/15, Collateral Damage. Excellent discussion on this issue with author and participants. Some 300,000 vets potentially impacted and 100,000 could lose benefits.

On Wednesday, February 17, the National Veterans Employment and Education Division spoke with Kathryn Poynton, Veterans & Military Organization Taskforce Director, National Veteran Business Development Council. Ms. Poynton understands that The American Legion had a significant impact on Veterans Owned Business and would like to extend an invite to The American Legion to join their task force to help Service Disabled and Veterans Owned Business (SDVOB.)

On Wednesday, February 17, the National Veterans Employment and Education Division had a conversation with State VA leaders (ELR, ECCS) on state of veterans education in the state. New VA leadership. Future Challenges.

On Wednesday, February 17, the National Veterans Employment and Education Division attended virtual meeting with CECU schools hosted by Assn President and ED Steve Gonzalez on 90/10 impact on good actors and voc/tech training. Concerns voiced and potential harm discussed.

On Wednesday, February 17, the National Veterans Employment and Education Division had conversations with SAAs on bad actors in for profit sector.

On Thursday, February 18, the National Veterans Employment & Education Division attended a stakeholder meeting with VA's Veterans Education Service. The meeting went over the VA's implementation updates for the Isakson & Roe Improvement Act 2020 and an update on the Digital GI Bill acquisition. A contract was awarded for their IT support and will be announced by VA in the second week of March.

On Thursday, February 18, the National Veterans Employment & Education Division attended Bush Institute Stand To 2021. Concerns centered around COVID impact and challenges for veterans. Main areas were education, transition and well being. Terry Tanelion from the White House staff also shared the President's concerns.

On Friday, February 19, the National Veterans Employment and Education Division spoke with Vernetta Shaw, coordinator, Government Office of Accountability (GAO.) GAO would like to set up a meeting with The American Legion to discuss the overall efficacy and effectiveness of the Transition Assistance Program.

On Friday, February 19, the National Veterans Employment and Education Division had discussions with HVAC staffers and congressional members on implementation of Isakson and Roe.

On Friday, February 19, the National Veterans Employment and Education Division met with NASAA and EdCounsel on RBS project. First Day of SVA Conference.

GLOSSARY OF FREQUENTLY USED ABBREVIATIONS

ACE: American Council on Education
ACP: American Corporate Partners, a veterans support organization
ATLAS: Accessing Telehealth through Local Area Stations, a V.A. telehealth initiative
BLS: Labor Department's Bureau of Labor Statistics
C&P: V.A.'s Compensation and Pension exam
CAVC: Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims
COLA: Cost-of-living adjustment
CSAAVE: California State Approving Agency for Veterans Education
DIMO: Defense Security Cooperation Agency/Defense Institute for Medical Operations
DOD: Department of Defense
DOL-VETS: Department of Labor, Veterans Employment and Training Services
EdCounsel: Higher education consulting firm
EIDL program. SBA's Economic Injury Disaster Loans
EIDL: Economic Injury Disaster Loan
GAO: Government Accountability Office
GPD: V.A.'s Grant and Per Diem Program for homeless veterans
GWB: George W. Bush Higher Education Policy Work Group
HEROES ACT of 2003: Higher Education Relief Opportunities for Students Act of 2003. Grants the Secretary of Education the authority to waive requirements that impede military borrowers' access to critical repayment protection during the war, military operation, or national emergency.
HVAC: House Veterans Affairs Committee
MCAI: American Legion's Military Credentialing Advancement Initiative
MSLP: The Federal Reserve's Main Street Lending Program
MSO: Military Support Organization
NAICU: National Association of Independent Colleges & Universities
NASAA: National Association of State Approving Agencies. Responsible for approving school funding for GI Bill
NAVPA: National Association of Veterans Program Administrators
NCA: V.A.'s National Cemetery Administration
NDAA: National Defense Authorization Act
NLD: American Legion's National Legislative Division
OPM: Office of Personnel Management
PPP: Paycheck Protection Program
RBS: Risk-Based Survey Model
RPIC: Rural Placemaking Innovation Challenge
S2S: Service to School, a veterans organization
SAA: State Approving Agency, responsible for approving school funding for GI Bill
SBA: Small Business Administration
STEM: Science, Technology, Engineering, Medical
SVA: Student Veterans of America, a veterans organization
SVAC Senate Veterans Affairs Committee
TAPS: Transition Assistance Program for Survivors, a nonprofit for Gold Star Families
TEAM Act: Senate Bill 4393, to improve the provision of health care for veterans who were exposed to toxic substances from burn pits
TFA: American Legion's Temporary Financial Assistance program
USAID: United States Agency for International Development
USDA: United States Department of Agriculture
USERRA: Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act
VA&R: American Legion's Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation Division

VACO: Veterans Affairs Central Office
VBA: V.A.'s Veterans Benefits Administration
VE&E: Veterans Employment and Education Division
VES: Veterans Education Success, a veterans organization
VSO: Veterans Service Organization

TOPIC 3a: TRACKING LEGISLATION

GI Bill Repair Act of 2020: To extend to black veterans of World War II, their surviving spouses, and direct descendants eligibility for specific housing and educational assistance programs administered by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs

(Tracked by John Kamin)

[Resolution No.: None on file](#)

Status: Currently on hold, has not been introduced

Homeless Veteran Coronavirus Response Act: The bill allows V.A. to use existing funds for a broader range of services; authorizes the Department to collaborate with outside organizations to facilitate shelters on its properties; loosens restrictions on Grant and Per Diem (GPD) payments, and requires V.A. to ensure veterans participating in V.A. homeless programs have access to V.A. telehealth services.

(Tracked by Ariel De Jesus)

[Resolution No. 326: Support Funding for Additional Housing for Homeless Veterans with Families](#)

HR 6800, the Heroes Act: Allows VA to provide transport and purchase food, shelter, phones, clothing, blankets, and toiletry items for homeless veterans; Authorizes VA to set up temporary encampments on the grounds of V.A. Medical Centers to allow homeless veterans to shelter on V.A. parking lots temporarily; Allows VA to provide reimbursements to social service providers receiving grants for the costs of services for minor children.

(Tracked by Ariel De Jesus)

[Resolution No. 324: Support Funding for Homeless Veterans](#)

HR 1615: The American Legion supports legislation that would streamline and improve the verification process for veteran-owned small businesses and veteran-owned small businesses.

(Tracked by Joe Sharpe)

[Resolution No. 155: Support Verification Improvements for Veterans' Business](#)

Status: Passed at the 2016 National Convention.

HR 2224: To direct the Secretary of Labor to prioritize services to homeless veterans with dependent children in carrying out homeless veterans' reintegration programs and for other purposes.

(Tracked by John Kamin)

[Resolution No. 326: Support Funding for Additional Housing for Homeless Veterans with Families](#)

HR 1196, Jobs for Veterans Act of 2019: This bill allows an increased work opportunity tax credit for employers who hire veterans who have been certified as discharged or released from active duty in the Armed Forces after September 11, 2001, and who begin working for the employer after December 31, 2019, and before January 1, 2024. This increased credit is in addition to any work opportunity tax credit allowed to a veteran with a service-connected disability.

(Tracked by John Kamin)

[Resolution No. 354: Work Opportunity Tax Credit Program](#)

HR 7010, Paycheck Protection Program Flexibility Act of 2020: This bill significantly changes the PPP loans' terms to be more advantageous to small businesses. Including more flexibility in applying the loan to other expenses besides payroll and benefits and extending the time frame for expending the loan.

(Tracked by Joe Sharpe)

HR 4625: To require education programs to be approved by the V.A. to abide by the Principles of Excellence to include a ban on deceptive or misleading recruiting, clear information about total costs and program requirements, accommodation for deployments, ensuring a point of contact for veterans, and not being under a punitive action by an accreditor.

(Tracked by John Kamin)

[Resolution No. 318: Ensuring the Quality of Servicemember and Veteran Student's Education at Institutions of Higher Education](#)

HR 6957: To direct the Secretaries of Defense and Veterans Affairs to treat a period of full-time National Guard duty, performed in response to the national emergency declared on March 13, 2020, by the President concerning COVID-19, as not shorter than 90 days.

(Tracked by John Kamin)

[Resolution No.: Currently studying for appropriate resolution.](#)

HR 4920 Department of Veterans Affairs Contracting Preference Consistency Act of 2020: is a bill that would allow AbilityOne companies to keep their preferential treatment at the Department of Veteran Affairs after 2016 with some compromises. The Senate initially sent it back to the House after it was passed for changes. Those changes have been reconciled, and the bill cleared its last hurdle before it is sent to the White House.

(Tracked by Joe Sharpe)

S. 2594: To amend title 5, United States Code, to modify specific requirements concerning service and retirement for veterans' Preference for federal hiring.

(Tracked by Ariel De Jesus)

[Resolution No. 317: Enforcing Veterans' Preference Hiring Practices in Federal Civil Service](#)

S. 3745, Coronavirus Emergency Borrower Defense (E-BD) Act: to require the Department of Education to grant full student loan discharges to three specific emergency categories of defrauded borrowers—specifically borrowers covered by:

- (1) Department of Education findings against Corinthian.
- (2) Department of Education findings against ITT Tech; and
- (3) State attorneys general group discharge applications made before the date of enactment.

(Tracked by John Kamin)

[Resolution No. 82: Preserve Veteran and Servicemember Rights to Gainful Employment and Borrower Defense Protections](#)

TOPIC 3b: ACTION TAKEN ON LEGISLATION

Building Credit Access for Veterans Act: A bill to require the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to carry out a pilot program to establish an automated process for obtaining alternative credit rating information and other purposes.

(Tracked by Ariel De Jesus)

Status: Draft Bill / Letter of Support submitted on October 13

HR 8426: Protecting Apprenticeship Training for Veterans Act: Currently, veterans must meet a minimum number of apprenticeship hours to receive their Housing Allowance. Due to pandemic work shortages, veterans in those programs now face a reduction or suspension in their stipend. This would allow veteran apprentices who were laid off to roll over excess hours from a previous month to meet the hourly requirement.

(Tracked by John Kamin)

[Resolution: Resolution No. 25: Support and Expand Apprenticeship Opportunities for Servicemembers](#)

Status: Letter of Support drafted

HR 4941: Veteran Employment Transition Act” or the “VET Act” was sponsored by Representative Andy Kim. The bill's last action was in the House on 12/02/2019; it was referred to the Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity. The bill's goal is to improve the Transition Assistance Program. The bill would allow certain veterans' service organizations to contact veterans regarding benefits and better inform veterans of employment opportunities. The Service groups would inform veterans of the benefits and employment opportunities with the Federal, State, and local governments. The groups inform veterans of events in the area.

(Tracked by Ariel De Jesus)

[Resolution No. 70: Improve Transition Assistance Program](#)

Status: Letter of Support submitted

HR 7003: is a bill sponsored by Rep. Takano, Mark D-CA-41, and was introduced 05/22/2020. The bill would authorize a pilot program in the Department of Defense to enhance efforts to provide job placement assistance and related employment services directly to the National Guard, Reserves, and veterans of the Armed Forces. The last action on the bill was 05/22/2020 and referred to the Committee on Armed Services.

(Tracked by Ariel De Jesus)

[Resolution No. 81: Transition Assistance Program Employment Workshops for National Guard and Reserve Members](#)

Status: Pending Letter of Support

Draft Bill: Veterans Educational Assistance Transparency and Accountability Improvement Act, improve the G.I. Bill Comparison Tool ensures veterans, servicemembers, and their families are better informed when choosing what educational institution is best for them.

[Resolution No. 327: Support Further Assessment and Evaluation of Institutions of Higher Learning to Enable Veterans to Make Informed Education Choices](#)

Status: Letter of Support submitted

Draft Bill: JSF - To amend title 38, United States Code, to clarify the scope of procedural rights of members of the uniformed services concerning their employment and reemployment rights, and for other purposes.

(Tracked by Ariel De Jesus)

Status: We submitted written testimony for the July 23, 2020 hearing.

Draft Bill: USERRA Protections for State Active Duty - To amend title 38, United States Code, extend particular employment and reemployment rights to members of the National Guard who perform State active duty. Submitted written testimony to the Legislative Division.

(Tracked by Ariel De Jesus)

[Resolution No. 315: Support Employment and Reemployment Rights of National Guard and Reservists Returning from Deployment](#)

Status: We submitted written testimony for the July 23, 2020 hearing.

HR 7111: Veterans Economic Recovery Act of 2020: Require the Secretary of V.A. to carry out a rapid retraining program that provides eligible veterans up to 12 months of retraining assistance for in-demand occupations. These 12 months of benefits would be equivalent to students' and schools' payments through the Post 9/11 GI Bill.

(Tracked by John Kamin)

[Resolution No. 316: Support Employment of Veterans in the Public and Private Workforce](#)

Status: This bill was submitted for the July 23, 2020 testimony.

HR 7445: To expand eligibility for home loans from the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to individual members of the Armed Forces reserve components.

(Tracked by Ariel De Jesus)

[Resolution No. 329: Support Home Loan Guaranty Program](#)

Status: This bill was submitted for the July 23, 2020 testimony.

TOPIC 4: EMPLOYMENT

The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) provided new guidance related to the employment discrimination challenges that face our nation's veterans. More specifically, the EEOC issued three revised documents that address how the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act (USERRA) apply to veteran employees and those employing them.



New ADA & USERRA Guidelines for employers

The updated guidance is significant because post-9/11 veterans have suffered from higher unemployment than other veterans and civilians. Scholars and political leaders have acknowledged that the terrorist attacks on Sept. 11, 2001, and the protracted wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have put many veterans in a problematic employment situation. First, and most notably, U.S. Reserve and National Guard members must balance civilian employment with their military obligations, including combat deployments. Achieving this balance is particularly challenging when veterans face mental health treatment for afflictions such as post-traumatic stress disorder. Second, civilian employers can often be insensitive or downright hostile to their veteran employees' wartime experiences. Third, stereotyping frequently occurs when veterans are perceived as "damaged" from their wartime experiences. Popular culture reflects and reinforces this stereotype by regularly portraying veterans as broken and unstable in movies and television shows.

Fortunately, a few essential laws are designed to protect veterans against employment discrimination, most notably USERRA and ADA. Under USERRA, it is unlawful for employers to discriminate against service members based on their military service. USERRA expressly forbids retaliatory and related adverse discriminatory actions based on military status. USERRA is enforced by the U.S. Department of Labor and the U.S. Department of Justice. The ADA, a law, enforced by the EEOC, prohibits an employer from

treating an applicant or employee unfavorably in all aspects of employment because the individual has a disability, a history of having a disability, or because the employer regards the individual as having a disability.

Some of the key takeaways from the EEOC's recent guidance include:

- Any veteran with a disability who meets the ADA's definition is covered, regardless of whether the veteran's disability is service-connected;
- If a veteran has a military disability rating or disability rating from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, the veteran is probably covered by the ADA;
- A veteran may request a variety of reasonable accommodations for the application process or on the job, including modified equipment or devices, physical modifications to the workplace, and leave for treatment, recovery, or training related to the veteran's disability;
- After requesting a reasonable accommodation, the veteran and employer will engage in an informal interactive process to determine whether the veteran has a disability as defined by the ADA (when this is not obvious or already known) and identify accommodation solutions;
- The ADA does not require veterans to disclose that they have any medical condition on a job application or during an interview; and
- What steps veterans can take if they feel that an employer has violated the ADA by not hiring them or providing a reasonable accommodation.

Even though we have strong laws like ADA and USERRA to protect veterans against employment discrimination, the EEOC's recent guidance underscores the importance of engaging in targeted outreach to ensure that veterans know about these laws and how to seek enforcement. Likewise, the guidance stresses that employers should understand how veteran anti-discrimination laws apply. Veterans should know that the EEOC has designated staff in offices across the country to assist veterans facing disability discrimination. The EEOC's updated guidance is undoubtedly a positive step forward, even though more must be done.

Over the years, the American Legion has advocated for strengthening USERRA, ensuring full protection for those called up to serve this great nation of ours.

Resolution No. 85: Support Employment and Reemployment Rights of National Guard and Reservists Returning from Deployment

[Reported by Ariel De Jesus]

TOPIC 5a: VETERAN HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS

Several months after COVID-19 first posed a threat to the veterans who find refuge in a small Daytona Beach homeless shelter, resident Sharon Naumaiskis had the first dose of the coronavirus vaccine injected into her arm. The side effects of the vaccine weren't too harmful. Naumaiskis, who is in her late 60s, had served as a master sergeant in the Army, mainly complained of a sore arm. She likened the discomfort to the pain that comes with a flu shot.



Homeless veterans waiting for their first or second COVID dose

"My arm got a little sore, but it wasn't that bad," Naumaiskis said. "I've handled a lot worse. The next morning when I got up, I felt a little jittery and had an upset belly. But at about 11 o'clock, it was like all my symptoms went away. I felt pretty good and had no problems."

More than half of the homeless veterans who reside at the Barracks of Hope shelter have now received their second dose of coronavirus vaccine. Eleven of the 20 shelter residents have cast their fears of the vaccine aside and have gone to get their shots at the nearby Veterans Affairs clinic.

"There are people that for whatever reason are concerned about the vaccination," said Buck James, executive director of Halifax Urban Ministries, the nonprofit that runs the Barracks of Hope shelter. "We're trying to get the word out to people that it's safe to take it and encourage them to take advantage of it when they have the opportunity."

For homeless veterans with serious medical problems, the offer was hard to turn down. Naumaiskis, who has asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, had long worried about how the virus would affect her.

"I was more concerned about getting COVID than getting the vaccine," Naumaiskis said. "I think what they're doing is a good thing. I have health complications, and it makes me breathe a little easier."

COVID-19 safety measures are hard to enforce. While some residents have been vaccinated, other safety measures are still being enforced at the shelter. Homeless veterans who go places where others fail to protect themselves from potential infection are often reminded to wear face masks. Residents are also encouraged to stand six feet away from each other, but that expectation remains hard to uphold in the small shelter.

"If they're not in their rooms, it's tough to social distance," said Derick Brown, a case manager for Barracks of Hope. "There's no way we can calculate the social distance at our dining room table or in the common area. If more than four residents watch the TV, it's hard to the social distance in that area. It'd be ideal to have another preventative measure, so the residents don't catch the virus. A lot of them are high risk because of their old age or medical issues." More: Daytona Beach Shores woman, 92, gets COVID vaccine after desperate plea Despite fears, COVID vaccine a smart choice some residents, like David Wheeler, have weakened immune systems that made it wise to get the vaccine. Wheeler, in his early 60's, had served as a seaman in the Navy. He chose to be vaccinated after he underwent surgery to remove a cancerous nodule in his left lung.

"We all had the option to decline if we didn't want to do it, but I figured I would give it a try," he said. "I had lung surgery, so I can't afford to get the virus. I was kind of pushed into it by my health, but I will admit that it was a little bit scary. We didn't know if it was going to work."

Although fears about the vaccine crept into his mind, Wheeler felt no pain or illness after the first shot went into his arm. But it hurt the next day, he said. "When I got my first shot, it didn't hurt," Wheeler said. "I came back here and did some work. But when I woke up the next morning, my goodness, my left arm hurt. I hadn't had that kind of pain since boot camp inoculations."

"I did get everything they gave me in boot camp, including Rubella. But that was back in the day when they shot you with the live virus. They don't do that anymore, which was part of why I went ahead and did it. You can't get it from the shot."

With the first and second doses of the vaccine behind her, Naumaiskis heaved a sigh of relief. She hopes more people get access to the vaccine while the coronavirus still rages beyond the doors of the small homeless shelter for veterans.

"I feel blessed that I was able to get it," Naumaiskis said. "I hope everyone else out there gets it and takes the time to understand that Covid is nothing to mess around with, especially if you have health problems and you're older." "If they're not in their rooms, it's tough to social distance."

[Reported by Ariel A De Jesus Jr]

Resolution No. 319: Expanding Veterans Employment and Homeless Services within the Department of Veterans Affairs

TOPIC 6: SMALL BUSINESS



The Buy American Act requires the United States to contract with U.S. businesses whenever possible. By increasing the required threshold for how much of a product must be made in the U.S. to qualify as "Made in America" and changing how domestic content is defined and measured, the Biden administration aims to close loopholes and allow for direct federal spending on American goods and services.

Administrative officials have said that "when we use taxpayer money to rebuild America, we buy American and we support American jobs." However, critics of the executive order claim that positive impacts to American production and manufacturing will be minimal when compared to the increase in costs to taxpayers and the federal government caused by this policy.

The economic implications of the Buy American Act are:

- A rise in domestic manufacturing as well as a possible reshoring effect within some industries.
- An increase in government spending due to higher acceptable preferential rates

- Shifting away from imports and the economic trade-off that accompanies this shift
- The nation gains in gainful employment and GDP

China's Technological Predation Threatens U.S. Security: Article from the CATO Institute

For many years, China has been funneling hundreds of billions of dollars annually into technology research, development and production. It has been underwriting technology theft on a grand scale. And it has been extorting technological knowhow and other assets from U.S. businesses, as the price of entry into the Chinese market. These practices have made a mockery of the rules-based international trading system and have subverted the proper functioning of markets.

But what compels a firm and committed policy response from Biden is that Beijing's pursuit of technological supremacy presents an intolerable threat to U.S. security. The U.S. government restricts the export of fissile materials as a matter of national security. Lockheed Martin is prohibited from selling F-35 fighter jets to China. Advanced technology is essential to national defense, and in the wrong hands, could be used against Americans—to spy, extort, sabotage and conduct warfare. Technology is already employed in the service of repression in China and there is a clear case for restricting its flow.

Economic protectionism is never a solution. But no less sacred than the rights of individuals to exchange freely the fruits of their labor is the obligation of government to protect its citizens from threats foreign and domestic. The obligation to conceive and execute appropriate measures to restrict the flow of technology has been summoned by Beijing's technological predation. Tightening export controls, expanding the list of entities with which U.S. companies are prohibited from transacting, instituting investment restrictions and sealing off other conduits for theft of intellectual property are among the ways the Trump administration tried to keep cutting edge U.S. technology—and the advantages it bestows—out of the wrong hands. More recently, Congress began to appropriate funding for semiconductor research and development, as well as for export finance agencies to influence the sourcing of technology in communications infrastructure abroad. The case for prudence is obvious, but the measures that have been taken are not optimal or especially effective.

Overly broad restrictions can become exceedingly costly without even purchasing any security. Restrictions on exports of U.S. technology that is available from other countries buys no security and at great expense to U.S. suppliers. Haphazard subsidies are distortionary and a recipe for waste and abuse.

Surely, security measures can be made more surgical, less distortionary and more effective. They can be debated, transparently, among experts. They can be subject to cost-benefit analyses. And they can be designed and implemented to minimize collateral damage and encourage the support and cooperation of allies. This is the task before the Biden administration. In fairness, it's hard to fault Beijing for its technology power play. After all, what government wouldn't pursue technological preeminence if it were considered realistic and essential to national security? Being king of the technological hill confers all sorts of strategic advantages—commercial, cybersecurity, intelligence and military—including, perhaps most importantly, a head start in the race to develop the next generation of technology. For the same reasons, Washington shouldn't be faulted for trying to thwart Beijing's progress. Staying ahead of China in the technology race—or getting ahead as the case may be with respect to 5G—is simply a U.S. national security imperative and must be

treated as such. Primacy in the next generation of technology could lock in advantages with very serious security implications for years and decades to come.

Preeminence in space technology, for example, may be necessary to protect and ensure the operability of satellite systems, which enable global communications, weapons guidance and electronic warfare capabilities. The capacity to deter aggression may be lost without that edge. Today's technology race shares similarities with yesterday's arms race. Imagine how different the world would be if Nazi scientists had beaten us developing the atomic bomb. This is about Americans' expectations of security. It's about U.S. policymakers doing what is necessary to preserve and augment advantages that contribute to the strength and security of the United States. It's about the responsibility of the U.S. government to protect its citizens and not foolishly squander the advantages the United States has accumulated over the years through diligence, determination and dumb luck. Yet, some favor inaction.

They suggest the threat is exaggerated or that most U.S. restrictions will be ineffective and will only hasten China's pursuit of self-sufficiency. Better to turn the other cheek. Besides, they rationalize, China will be too preoccupied with its own demographic and economic problems to present any real threat to the United States. Maybe.

Differences of opinion are crucial to crafting the right policies, but it would be a dereliction of duty of the greatest magnitude if the U.S. government—presiding over the richest, most powerful country in history—failed to muster the wherewithal to at least try to secure essential U.S. technological advantages and protect the U.S. position because it didn't take the threat seriously or appreciate the implications of ceding leadership. Like a successful business that spends to reinforce its incumbent advantages, the United States must reinvest to protect its strategic advantages. Think of it as an insurance policy.

Managing the U.S.-China relationship will be a monumental task for Biden and his successors. It will require adjusting expectations and behavior to the realities of a changing power balance. It will require humility, compromise and deft diplomacy. But it will also require the strength to stand down China's technological predation and the security threat it represents.

The American Legion supports the Buy American Act as it is in line with **Resolution No. 13: Support "Buy American" Policy within the Federal Government to Create Opportunities for Veterans.**

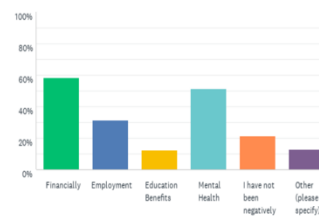
[Reported by Joseph Sharpe]

TOPIC 7: EDUCATION

Student veterans report the increased need for support due to the pandemic, suggesting a study from Operation College Promise and the Texas A&M University System. The survey sampled 75 institutional respondents and 230 student veteran respondents.

Students reported difficulties studying and learning and a lack of community presence due to the COVID-19 pandemic. While the online shift has been preferential for some military students, others have said that their “educational experience” has been diminished. Student veterans are more likely to have children than other student populations, and several respondents said they struggled to balance their children’s online learning with their own.

Q10 During the COVID pandemic, please indicate if you have been negatively impacted in the following ways (check all that apply)



Question from Operation Promise Impact survey responded to by 230 military-connected students from 75 colleges

The survey also found growing gaps in institutional support for military students, likely caused by financial challenges brought on by the pandemic. Thirty percent of institutional respondents reported cuts in support services to student veterans. While a majority reported that their staffing had remained the same, more institutions reported staffing decreases than reported staffing increases. Nearly 40 percent noted a reduction in communication between student veterans and staff.

“This is troubling, as this interaction is often the linchpin to a successful transition and the persistence necessary to maximize education benefits. Historically, military students who stop out’ are unlikely to return to campus,” the report said. “Schools’ ability to adapt to these shifting circumstances cannot be overstated as we strive to keep our military-connected students not only on the track but thriving in higher education.”

Only about 20% of answering military-connected students replied that they had experienced "no negative impact" from circumstances related to the pandemic. Nearly 60% reported a financial impact. About 32% noted an impact on employment, while 13% identified a negative effect on education benefits. A majority, 52%, noted mental health implications

Both educators and military-connected students stated the various effects of the pandemic. Among the specifics provided by the student, respondents were that there was "difficult learning," "diminished study time," "clinical rotations reduced or postponed," "military withdrawal or activation," "difficulty completing assignments without support," and "lack of presence in the community." The report closed with a critical summary:

The pandemic will continue to impact institutions financially, organizationally, and structurally for years to come. Schools' ability to adapt to these shifting circumstances cannot be overstated. We strive to keep our military-connected students not only on track but also thriving in higher education. Consistent and appropriate campus support is often a precursor of success and bridges the next mission's gap—a fruitful reintegration to civilian life.

Much will need to be accomplished with fewer resources and limited person-to-person contact due to COVID restrictions in the short term. Schools should continue to track essential data to be prepared to justify a strong support structure for their military-connected students. Campus task forces and other coordinated efforts will be essential to reignite discussion of these students' value and the benefit of supporting them “To, Through, and Beyond” their higher education life cycles.

[Reported by John Kamin]

TOPIC 8: CAREER FAIRS

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

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

Newly discharged veterans claiming benefits totaled 8,329, a decrease of 842 from the prior week.

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

[Reported by Ariel De Jesus]

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