

NATIONAL VETERANS EMPLOYMENT & EDUCATION COMMISSION

TOPIC 1: ECONOMY

CONSUMER DEMAND DROVE U.S. IMPORTS TO RECORD HIGH IN MARCH

Trade deficit widened to \$74.4 billion as imports were up 6.3% and exports rose 6.6%



*Shipping containers being unloaded at the Port of Long Beach-Port of Los Angeles complex in Los Angeles.
Photo: Lucy Nicholson/Reuters*

Consumers and a fresh round of stimulus money pushed demand for U.S. imported goods to a record high in March, further expanding the trade deficit.

The foreign-trade gap in goods and services expanded 5.6% from the prior month to a seasonally adjusted \$74.4 billion in March, the Commerce Department said Tuesday.

Imports rose 6.3% to \$274.5 billion for the month, fueled by higher shipments of items including toys, furniture, cellphones, automobiles, and semiconductors. The previous record for imports, on a seasonally but not inflation adjusted basis, was recorded in October 2018 when the U.S. purchased foreign goods and services worth \$266.72 billion.

Exports rose 6.6% to \$200 billion in March, following a one-month decline in February, as supply-chain disruptions caused by winter weather eased.

Economists surveyed by The Wall Street Journal had predicted a trade deficit of \$74.8 billion in March.

The increase in March imports and the trade deficit came as the economic recovery in the U.S. gathered steam, thanks to government-stimulus spending, Covid-19 vaccination efforts and a fuller reopening of the economy from pandemic-related restrictions.

U.S. household income rose by 21.1% in March; the Commerce Department reported last week, the largest monthly increase for government records tracing back to 1959. Consumer spending also was up sharply, increasing 4.2%. The federal government in March distributed \$1,400 stimulus checks to individuals as part of a \$1.9 trillion stimulus package signed into law in March.

Exports remained well below pre-pandemic levels in March but are on a recovery path as the global economy continues to emerge from the pandemic's impact. March exports of goods were the highest since May 2018, with the shipments of industrial supplies and materials at the highest level on record.

Economists expect the trade deficit to remain high in the coming months as the U.S. economy recovers more robustly than most other parts of the world. That should keep imports growing vigorously, outpacing recoveries in U.S. exports, economists say.

Port of Long Beach Executive Director Mario Cordero said strong consumer demand for imports from Asia has caused a shortage of containers for American exports as well as a doubling of the cost of trans-Pacific container shipments from a year ago.

“What is happening is international carriers are rushing to have those containers sent back to Asia to bring back more imports,” Mr. Cordero told lawmakers during a House Ways and Means Committee hearing last week. “These containers, which we don't have enough of, are not being held here for American exports.”

In March, the U.S. deficit in trade in goods with China, the largest U.S. trading partner, widened sharply to \$36.9 billion from \$30.2 billion in February. Imports from China surged 19% to \$48.3 billion, while exports to the country rose 8.6% to \$11.3 billion.

As strong consumer appetite for goods kept American factories humming, imports of semiconductors—critical components of products ranging from autos to washing machines—grew 26% from February to \$6.3 billion.

“For all the talk of supply disruptions in the global semiconductor industry holding back U.S. production, particularly in the auto sector, this highlights that much of the problem is instead the huge and unanticipated rebound in demand,” Andrew Hunger, senior U.S. economist for Capital Economics, said in a research note.

U.S. exports of semiconductors to the rest of the world also rose in March to \$5.24 billion, up 8.5% from February.

The strong pickup in U.S. international commerce came despite the impact created from the Ever Given container ship, which was stuck in the Suez Canal in late March, holding up traffic in the busy passageway.

As commerce in goods expanded strongly, trade in services also recovered, albeit at muted paces. With trade restrictions remaining in place, exports of services grew by \$0.8 billion to \$57.1 billion in March from the prior month. Imports of services increased \$1.1 billion to \$40 billion.

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	
	April 2020	April 2021	April 2020	April 2021	April 2020	April 2021
Unemployed	1,050	480	898	430	152	51
Unemployment rate	11.7	5.2	11.4	5.4	14.0	4.4

The national unemployment rate is 6.1 percent (April 2021). Gulf War II veterans' unemployment rate is 5.1 percent. Currently, Gulf War II women veterans' unemployment rate is 5.7 percent (no change from February).

In April 2021, the veteran unemployment rate was **4.6%**. The comparable non-veteran unemployment rate was **6.0%** in April.

TOPIC 2: VIRTUAL MEETINGS & CONFERENCE CALLS

On Monday, May 3, the National Veterans Employment and Education Division spoke with Paralyzed Veterans of America and Wounded Warrior Project about their proposals for a VA fourth administration for economic opportunity. VE&E staff shared that the Legion does not have a position on creating a new VA administration but noted the organization's concerns with the structure of the Veterans Benefits Administration.

On Monday, May 3, the National Veterans Employment and Education Division teleconference with Risk-Based Survey (RBS) pilot states, Education Counsel and NASAA RBS team; Discussed new forms to be used and conversation about how virtual RBS visits are different from on-site visits.

On Monday, May 3, the National Veterans Employment and Education Division had conversations with Senate and House Veterans Affairs Committee staffers 90/10 issue, oversight, and future hearings.

On Tuesday, May 4, the National Veterans Employment and Education Division observed a virtual Risk-Based Survey (RBS) visit conducted by the Nevada State Approving Agency (SAA) at the University of Phoenix. The survey was a success with the school providing all requested materials and with the SAA reviewing areas such as enrollment, job placement, advertising, and accreditation. Interesting to note that enrollment is down by over 30% in the last two years. Also, had a conversation about the impact of COVID on the campus and on student learning and retention.

On Wednesday, May 5, the National Veterans Employment and Education Division spoke with Department of Labor VETS (Veterans Employment and Transition Services) staff about concerns with DOD's Troops to Teachers program. VE&E staff reached out to DOL Vets for insight on how the Department of Labor runs their state-based grants programs and any lessons that can be learned for improving Troops to Teachers.

On Wednesday, May 5, the National Veterans Employment and Education Division attended a meeting with the Four Corners (House Veterans Affairs Committee (HVAC) and Senate Veterans Affairs Committee (SVAC) lead staffers) and VSOs on pending legislation. SVAC is holding a hearing this week on toxic exposure legislation. On May 26th, HVAC will hold a hearing on transition and the COVID impact on veteran employment. Veteran Affairs (VA), Department of Defense (DOD), and Department of Labor (DOL) will be testifying.

On Wednesday, May 5, the National Veterans Employment and Education Division expressed concerns about VA handling of 85/15 restriction on enrollment and rounding out allowance for the last term of a GI Bill students' degree program. (Students in the last term of enrollment can take courses NOT in their program if needed to maintain full-time status and draw max benefit.)

On Thursday, May 6, the National Veterans Employment and Education Division attended a Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB) roundtable to review the current state of play with veterans housing complaints related to COVID-19 evictions.

On Thursday, May 6, the National Veterans Employment and Education Division worked on Bush Institute Education policy statements and planned a meeting of distance learning subcommittee for VA Committee on Education.

On Thursday, May 6, the National Veterans Employment and Education Division met with Risk-Based Survey (RBS) Project Manager Woodall on pilot success and challenges for State Approving Agencies (SAAs). Also, discussion of VA involvement and partnership as regards the RBS model development.

On Friday, May 7, the National Veterans Employment and Education Division spoke with the Enlisted Association of the National Guard to learn about standard operating procedures relating to medical discharges at National Guard units. VE&E staff is concerned about instances where National Guard soldiers suffer injuries while on active duty but later receive state National Guard discharges, thereby losing their federal education benefits.

GLOSSARY OF FREQUENTLY USED ABBREVIATIONS

ACE: American Council on Education

ACP: American Corporate Partners, a veteran's 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

CCME: Council of College and Military Educators

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 veteran's 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 veteran's 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 veteran's 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

[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.

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

H.R.492: To amend title 38, United States Code, make permanent the Secretary of Veterans Affairs's authority to provide financial assistance for supportive services for very low-income veteran families in permanent housing.

[Resolution No. 340:](#) Support Permanent Authorization for the Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) Program

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.

Status: Passed House Vote, received in the Senate, and referred to the Committee on Veterans Affairs. It did not pass by the end of the 116th Session, will need to be reintroduced.

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.

Status: Did not pass by the end of the 116th Session.

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.

[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.

Status: Became Public Law No: 116-142.

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.

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

Status: Became Public Law No: 116-315

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.

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

HR 4920, Department of Veterans Affairs Contracting Preference Consistency Act of 2020: This 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.

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

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.

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.

[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.

[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.

[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.

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 employment and reemployment rights and other purposes.

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.

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.

[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.

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

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

H.R. 711, West Los Angeles VA Campus Improvement Act of 2021: This legislation would direct the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) West Los Angeles Medical Center campus to use revenues from leases and easements as a dedicated funding source to build additional housing for homeless veterans, offset the high costs of housing construction, and help fund the provision of supportive services for veterans in the community.

[Resolution No. 141: Department of Veterans Affairs Enhanced-Use Leasing](#)

Status: This bill was submitted for the April 21, 2021 testimony.

H.R. 2082, VA Supply Chain Resiliency Act: To make certain improvements relating to the supply chain of the Department of Veterans Affairs, and for other purposes.

[Resolution No. 13: Support "Buy American" Policy within the Federal Government to Create Opportunities for Veterans](#)

Status: This bill was submitted for the April 21, 2021 testimony.

TOPIC 4: EMPLOYMENT

HELP FOR VETS WHO LOST JOBS BECAUSE OF COVID ON THE WAY



Thousands of veterans who lost their jobs because of COVID-related challenges can now apply to be part of a new rapid retraining program designed to prepare them for new careers in high-demand specialties.

The benefit, which is open to about 17,000 veterans, is targeted at those who have already exhausted other job-training opportunities but still find themselves without stable employment because of coronavirus closures, layoffs or health complications.

VA leaders said they coordinated with the Department of Labor on the work, which included identifying high-demand occupations across the country and establishing new guidelines for schools who wish to participate.

VRRAP officials have identified more than 200 high-demand occupations for veterans to consider, including architecture and engineering positions, personal care and service jobs, and construction careers.

To qualify, veterans must be between the ages of 25 and 66, have an honorable or other-than-honorable discharge, and not be eligible for any other VA education benefits or government job-training programs.

In addition, applicants must not be receiving disability compensation for reasons that have led to their unemployability, and not receiving any unemployment benefit when they begin training.

Several lawmakers have touted the initiative as a way to deal with the still-high unemployment levels among American veterans caused by the pandemic.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, about 5 percent of all veterans looking for work in March were unable to find stable employment, up from 2.9 percent a year earlier, before the start of the pandemic.

The Veteran Rapid Retraining Assistance Program (VRRAP) was enacted on March 11, 2021, and was effective, immediately. VRRAP was part of the American Rescue Plan, a \$1.9 trillion economic stimulus package, with aid targeted to assist individuals and businesses recover from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Eligible Veterans participating in VRRAP receive up to 12 months of tuition and fees and a monthly housing allowance based on Post-9/11 GI Bill rates. Covered education programs must provide training for high-demand occupations, which is determined by the Commissioner of Labor Statistics. GI Bill approved programs of education, excluding bachelor's and graduate degrees, and VET TEC approved training are eligible.

VA has 17,250 training spots open for eligible Veterans and will soon announce additional details on how schools can sign-up to participate in VRRAP. See our VRRAP homepage for more information.

VRRAP PARTICIPATION AGREEMENT

Educational institutions must complete and submit a voluntary Participation Agreement as well as VA Form 10091 to VA for review and approval.

HOW DOES IT WORK?

VA will enter into participation agreements with organizations (referred to as “Educational Institutions”) that provide training and job placement outcomes. VA will incentivize these partners with a “pay-for-performance” model that pays these institutions incrementally based on the progress and success of their students.

For a program of education to qualify for VRRAP, it must meet the following criteria:

- Be approved for GI Bill or VET TEC
- Not lead to a bachelors or graduate degree
- Provide training for a high-demand occupation

The payment model for VRRAP tuition and fees (paid directly to the participant's educational institutions) is milestone based:

- 50% when the Veteran begins the program
- 25% when the Veteran completes the program
- 25% when the Veteran finds employment in the field of study
- You can find more information, and apply for the program, by visiting <https://www.va.gov/.../veteran-rapid-retraining-assistance/>.

Educational institutions can also participate in this program.

For more information, visit https://benefits.va.gov/.../vrrap_educational

Veterans apply online <https://www.va.gov/.../apply-for-vrrap-form.../introduction>

TOPIC 5: EDUCATION



Active Duty vs. National Guard

As tens of thousands of troops deployed in response to the pandemic and to protests last summer, as well as to secure the U.S. Capitol after a pro-Trump mob assault in January, the National Guard has arguably become the military's most relevant and high-profile component.

Typically, the force is delegated to respond to areas devastated by wildfires or hurricanes, along with missions abroad in combat zones, which it still had to juggle during the past year.

National Guard troops have become a normal sight in many parts of the country. The yearlong stress test of domestic missions underscored what some consider to be weak or outdated laws affecting the force, particularly the confusing rules around accruing GI Bill benefits.

"What we're seeing now is more of an operation reserve, rather than a strategic one," Rep. Mike Levin, D-Calif., said in an interview with Military.com. "It really has become an integral part of our defense planning. With the sacrifices that are being made, we need to make sure the benefits are appropriate. It's simply not right that members of the Guard are taking on these risks, doing the same job as their active-duty counterparts, yet not having access to the same benefits."

Congress moved swiftly last year to protect the benefits of students who were impacted by the pandemic, including a bill signed into law from Sens. Jerry Moran, R-Kan., and Jon Tester, D-Mont., which allowed GI Bill students to continue to receive their full tuition and housing allowances as universities shifted to online learning.

But even with more protections in place for students, the pandemic supercharged a simmering debate on Capitol Hill regarding the benefits disparity between active-duty and National Guard troops.

Levin recently introduced a bill that would count every day of National Guard service toward accruing GI Bill benefits. During a normal year with no domestic missions, Guardsmen serve roughly 60 days per year, none of which count toward education benefits -- largely seen as a veteran's most powerful benefit.

Similarly, not all domestic missions count either. It's a tangled bureaucratic web of confusing fine print on a soldier's orders. State activations don't earn any benefits for troops, due to Guardsmen ultimately being considered state employees -- to the point that troops fill out new W-4 forms, precluding them from claiming disability from the Department of Veterans Affairs and relinquishing legal protections against civilian employer discrimination.

Even commonly used federal orders don't automatically count unless the president declares a state of emergency. For domestic missions, the Guard often operates under what's known as Title 32, meaning governors are in command of the troops, but the federal government covers the costs. This also entitles troops to all benefits associated with active-duty service.

Title 32 and Title 10 largely work the same way in terms of accrual of benefits and pay. Both count as federal, active-duty orders. The only significant difference is that, with Title 32, Guard troops are under the command of their home state. Title 10 is used for active-duty orders, such as a deployment abroad, for which service members fall under the command of the president.

To earn Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits, service members need to serve at least 90 aggregate days of active-duty service, aside from basic training, or at least 30 consecutive days if discharged for a service connected injury. This timeline has brought up issues previously with Guard missions ending close to the 90-day mark, setting up two scenarios in which the federal government could either artificially extend a mission to enable troops to earn benefits, or end the mission early, cutting them out of thousands of dollars' worth of entitlements.

With the post-9/11 wars winding down, it could be difficult for a Guardsman to earn their full GI Bill benefits, which requires 36 months of active duty for a full scholarship, and not every day in typical Guard duty not counting.

It's so confusing that even top brass have a tough time explaining when a Guardsman is entitled to benefits. Maj. Gen. Dawne Deskins, then the director of manpower and personnel at the National Guard Bureau, told lawmakers at a House Veterans Affairs Committee hearing on benefits in 2019 that she didn't know the criteria for how benefits are decided for Guard troops at the border. They were eventually placed on federal orders, earning them GI Bill benefits, after scorn from lawmakers.

Yet dramatically expanding who is eligible for federal education benefits could bring steep costs for the government. The VA spends roughly \$10 billion on the 700,000 GI Bill beneficiaries per year, [according to the Congressional Budget Office](#).

"Some people are concerned with cost, but it's a priority to get equal benefits for equal work," Levin said. "It's a matter of finding the balance to make sure we address the benefits disparity and be cost-effective."

There's another bill on the table from Rep. Barry Moore, R-Ala., which could be a cheaper alternative. He said he hopes it would "remove bureaucratic hurdles" by eliminating the need for Title 32 orders to require an emergency declaration from the president.

"As a former member of the Alabama National Guard, I am well aware of the inequity surrounding benefits provided to servicemembers compared to those on active duty," Moore, a member of the House VA committee, said in a statement.

Moore's bill also has the backing of Rep. Mike Bost, R-Ill., the ranking member of the VA committee, and Rep. Nancy Mace, R-S.C., who also serves on the committee.

TOPIC 6a: VETERAN HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS



The Biden Administration recently released its 2020 Point-in-time count results, which notably saw a slight pre-pandemic increase in veteran homelessness. The long-term economic impact of the pandemic has left many Americans, including veterans, struggling, and it is clear that the fallout in terms of housing instability may not be known until well after the end of the public health emergency.

The increasing availability of vaccinations in this country is creating optimism that we will turn the corner on COVID-19 and eventually be able to reopen much of the country after over a year of social distancing. However, that world looks very different for veterans now experiencing and at risk of homelessness and the organizations that serve them.

Among the bright spots are increased access to vaccinations at VA for veterans, their spouses, and caregivers; and communities that are purchasing hotels and or motels to repurpose them for permanent supportive housing. Yet other challenges remain.

Congress generously provided increased assistance for organizations that serve homeless veterans. It also gave VA the ability to provide new types of assistance such as food, telecommunications equipment, and other items as needed to veterans. These types of assistance have been crucial during the COVID-19 pandemic; however, VA is currently only able to offer this assistance through the end of the public health emergency. It is clear that some of these issues will persist for providers and veterans beyond the emergency, so Congress must take action to extend these authorities.

Many veterans access services in shelters that have congregate layouts. While VA was able to issue a capital grant to help organizations transition, their estimates indicate that funding currently available may be enough to cover one in eight of the shelter beds that could be converted to safer, less congregate footprints. Additional resources will be needed to ensure all organizations have the opportunity and resources to transition their facilities for long-term safety.

Most importantly, our country is still amidst a housing affordability crisis. In order to end veteran homelessness, one of the biggest needs is both a short-term pipeline of affordable housing, and a longer term development pipeline to replace lost affordable housing for extremely low-income households. There have been new investments in the Housing Trust Fund, via the American Rescue Plan, but more must be done to invest in Low Income Housing Tax Credits and other key funding sources such as voucher programs that provide developers with operating dollars to improve the availability of veteran affordable housing nationwide.

With leadership at the national and local levels, paired with resources, we can make a major impact on the lives of veterans now experiencing and at risk of homelessness.

Visit [www.nchv.org] to learn about the National Coalition for Homeless Veterans.

TOPIC 6b: VETERAN HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS



New changes passed by Congress and signed by the President have expanded Veteran eligibility and access to VA's home loan program.

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is announcing it is implementing expanded eligibility and access to the VA home loan program.

Recently, Congress passed Public Law 116-315, “The Johnny Isakson and David P. Roe, M.D. Veterans Health Care and Benefits Improvement Act of 2020.”

The new law benefits Veterans in several ways:

1. Broadens the timeframe for Vietnam War era Veterans to qualify for the VA home loan benefit and has been revised to include those who served from November 1, 1955. The previous date was February 28, 1961.
2. Authorizes VA home loan benefit access for those Service members and Veterans mobilized to perform full-time Guard duty for not less than 90 cumulative days, of which at least 30 days must be consecutive.
3. Service members, Veterans, and certain Surviving Spouses with VA-guaranteed home loans in areas that have been declared major disasters by the President of the United States, and whose residences have been substantially damaged, are now eligible to be charged a first time use funding fee on a new VA-guaranteed loan rather than a subsequent use funding fee. The new VA-guaranteed loan must be for the repair of the damaged or destroyed residence or purchase or construction of a new home.

For more information about the VA Home Loan Program, visit <https://www.va.gov/housing-assistance/home-loans/>

Veterans and Service members interested in exploring VA home loan options or applying for a loan are encouraged to contact a mortgage lender of their choosing.

The American Legion reaffirms its strong support for the Department of Veterans Affairs Loan Guaranty Service and its program's to serve America's veterans as found in our **Resolution No. 329: Support Home Loan Guaranty Program.**

TOPIC 7: SMALL BUSINESS



*President Biden signing a law in March to extend the Paycheck Protection Program through May 31.
Doug Mills/The New York Times*

Four weeks before its scheduled end, the federal government's signature aid effort for small business ravaged by the pandemic — the Paycheck Protection Program — ran out of funding on Tuesday afternoon and stopped accepting most new applications.

Congress allocated \$292 billion to fund the program's most recent round of loans. Nearly all of that money has now been exhausted, the Small Business Administration, which runs the program, told lenders and their trade groups on Tuesday. (An earlier version of this item misstated that the actions it described occurred Wednesday.)

While many had predicted that the program would run out of funds before its May 31 application deadline, the exact timing came as a surprise to many lenders.

"It is our understanding that lenders are now getting a message through the portal that loans cannot be originated," the National Association of Government Guaranteed Lenders, a trade group, wrote in an alert to its members Tuesday evening. "The P.P.P. general fund is closed to new applications."

Some money — around \$8 billion — is still available through a set-aside for community financial institutions, which generally focus on lending to businesses run by women, minorities and other underserved communities. Those lenders will be allowed to process applications until that money runs out, according to the trade group's alert.

Representatives from the Small Business Administration did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Some money also remains available for lenders to finish processing pending applications, according to a lender who was on a call with S.B.A. officials on Tuesday.

Since its creation last year, the Paycheck Protection Program has disbursed \$780 billion in forgivable loans to fund 10.7 million applications, according to [the latest government data](#). Congress renewed the program in December's relief bill, expanding the pool of eligible applicants and allowing the hardest-hit businesses to return for a second loan.

Lawmakers in March extended the program's deadline to May, but they have shown little enthusiasm for adding significantly more money to its coffers. With vaccination rates increasing and pandemic restrictions easing, Congress's focus on large-scale relief effort for small businesses has waned.

The government's recent efforts have been focused on the most devastated industries. [Two new grant programs run](#) by the Small Business Administration — for businesses in the [live-events](#) and [restaurant](#) industries — began accepting applications in recent weeks, though no grants have yet been awarded.

TOPIC 8: CAREER FAIRS

Virtual Job Fair

May 20, 2021, 1pm - 5pm

VIRTUAL JOB FAIR-FOCUS ON SECURITY, LAW ENFORCEMENT, CYBERSECURITY

1-3pm: Reserved for candidates who have active security clearances

3-5pm: Open to all job seekers

Presented by [JobZone](#)

[More information](#)



THE AMERICAN LEGION

VIRTUAL CAREER FAIR



JUNE 10, 2021



10am - 11am Central: Honoring Women Veterans with a 1 hour early entry

11am - 3pm Central: Open to all Transitioning Service Members, Veterans, Military Spouses and their dependents.

Job Seeker Registration:

<https://tinyurl.com/3j5td23a>



Employer Registration:

<https://tinyurl.com/recshb>



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.

Joseph C. Sharpe, Jr., Director
Veterans Employment & Education Division
202.861.2700 ext. 2989
Week Ending: 5/7/2021