

NATIONAL VETERANS EMPLOYMENT & EDUCATION COMMISSION

TOPIC 1: ECONOMY

The Senate overwhelmingly approved a revised North American trade pact in a rare bipartisan vote Thursday that hands President Trump a victory on a key campaign promise just as lawmakers are preparing his impeachment trial. The U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement, or USMCA, passed by a vote of 89-10. The trade pact, signed by the president in November 2018, received a similar bipartisan vote in the House last month. A statement by the White House press secretary called the measure "another trade win for American workers," replacing "the job-killing, huge failure NAFTA."



"USMCA, which the President successfully negotiated over a year ago, rebalances trade between the three countries and will lead to significant economic and job growth in the United States," the statement said.

Individual senators touted the benefits of the new agreement for their constituents, including Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., who called it "a major win for Kentucky and all 50 states." Speaking from the Senate floor on Wednesday, he added that the deal is "a major win for our country. A major win for the Trump administration."

The new agreement does offer some modest benefits over the previous pact. According to a report last year by the U.S. International Trade Commission, USMCA would boost gross domestic product by 0.35% after inflation, or \$68.2 billion, creating 175,700 new jobs over six years, fewer on average than the U.S. economy creates in a single month.

"U.S. exports to Canada and Mexico would increase by \$19.1 billion (5.9 percent) and \$14.2 billion (6.7 percent), respectively. U.S. imports from Canada and Mexico would increase by \$19.1 billion (4.8 percent) and \$12.4 billion (3.8 percent), respectively," according to the report.

One key feature would raise the percentage of a vehicle's parts that must be produced in North America to avoid tariffs from 62.5% under the old NAFTA to 75% under the USMCA. The new pact would also require most of those parts to be made by workers earning at least \$16 an hour — a provision designed to offset cheap Mexican labor.

"It will give some relief to our workers," Warren said. "I believe we accept that relief, we try to help the people who need help, and we get up the next day and fight for a better trade deal." The new deal also includes provisions to protect the ozone layer, marine environment and air quality, and it establishes a fisheries management system to prevent overfishing in North American waters.

The USMCA also gives American dairy farmers more access to the Canadian market, especially for "Class 7" milk products such as milk powder and milk proteins. The deal puts some restrictions on how much dairy Canada can export, which could help American dairy farmers edge into foreign markets.

The USMCA also includes new rules for digital trade, something that barely existed when NAFTA was written. Among these, however, is a provision that provides protections to big tech companies by giving legal immunity to Internet platforms over content posted by users.

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	
	DEC 2018	DEC 2019	DEC 2018	DEC 2019	DEC 2018	DEC 2019
Unemployed	124	108	110	91	15	14
Unemployment rate	3.4	3.1	3.7	3.0	3.0	3.1

The national unemployment rate is 3.5 percent (December 2019). Gulf War II veterans' unemployment rate is 3.1 percent.ⁱ Currently, the unemployment rate for Gulf War II women veterans is 3.1 percent (down from 8.0 percent in November).

TOPIC 2: MEETINGS

On Monday, January 13th, the National Veterans Employment & Education Division in collaboration with the Department of Texas, and National Staff of The American Legion Auxiliary hosted and participated in several workshops designed to assist transitioning Soldiers, Veterans, and their spouses for a seamless transition from military to civilian life. The workshops were also designed to help current veterans become more competitive in the job market. Workshops provided were Effective Resume Writing (Civilian & Federal), Financial Literacy, LinkedIn, Networking lunch with Employers, and ended with the Department of Texas, Service Officers that assisted them with their disability claim and the process for submitting a claim.

From Tuesday, January 14th -17th, the National Veterans Employment & Education Division conducted a teleconference with NASAA executive leadership on Winter Conference in Washington. VE&E continued to work with SVAC staff on HR 4625 and followed up with DEVRY on requested information and schedule inspection. We have worked on AL article on new effort in higher education and job training. Continue working on state advocacy kits with John Kamin.

On Tuesday, January 14th, the National Veterans Employment & Education Division met with the National Veterans Small Business Coalition to discuss their new initiatives for 2020, including Federal Acquisition Regulation classes, creation of a legal fund, and collaboration in hosting a forum on the future of VA medical supply chain.

On Tuesday, January 14th, The Veterans Employment & Education Division, along with the Department of Texas, attended the MEGA Job Fair at Fort Hood, Texas, with an estimated 3,000 transitioning Soldiers, veterans, and their spouses attended. The Department of Texas was able to provide valuable information to attendees, leading 100 of them to seek additional information on the different programs and services offered by The American Legion, to include membership.

On Tuesday, January 14th, the National Veterans Employment & Education Division attended a Bold, Bipartisan Solutions to the Housing Crisis meeting at the Capitol Visitors Center, with Senator Van Hollen and Senator Young. The focus of the meeting was on two major pieces of bipartisan legislation that were introduced in December: the Eviction Crisis Act and the Family Stability and Opportunity Vouchers Act.

On Tuesday, January 14th, the National Veterans Employment & Education Division attended the Committee on Veterans' Affairs subcommittee on economic oversight hearing, "Making HUD-VASH Work for all Veteran Communities," to address the continued work of field hearings that were held in Ocean Side, CA and New Port Richey, FL during the summer of 2019. The hearing examined access to HUD-VASH in urban, suburban, rural, and tribal communities.

On Thursday, January 16th, the National Veterans Employment & Education Division attended the Broadening the Movement: Housing as a National Priority in 2020 meeting at the National Press Club. The meeting had Opportunity Starts at Home constituents discuss ways to mobilize to solve the nation's housing crisis and the legislation that mandates affordable housing.

On Friday, January 17th, the National Veterans Employment & Education Division met with the CEO of Pop Smoke Media to discuss their work with veteran-owned small businesses like Grunt Style. And their broad range of capabilities in working with nonprofit organizations like Burn Pits 360 to amplify their messaging through traditional and social media channels.

TOPIC 3: EMPLOYMENT

The American Legion is encouraged to see that after three years, the Senate confirmed John Lowry III of Chicago, Illinois as the Assistant Secretary of Labor for the Veterans' Employment and Training Service (VETS).

"I'm thankful that John Lowry has brought his incredible experience, expertise, and passion to the Department of Labor," U.S. Secretary of Labor Eugene Scalia said. "As a Marine Corps veteran who's had a successful career in business, he understands well how military service can lead to exceptional contributions in the private sector. John's conviction is that America's veterans, transitioning service members, and military spouses deserve every opportunity to succeed."



Assistant Secretary Lowry spent 25 years in military service, 15 as a regular Marine Corps officer, and an additional 10 in the Marine Corps Reserve. Decorated for valor while leading a Force Reconnaissance platoon during Operation Desert Storm, Lowry's honors include the Legion of Merit, Defense Meritorious Service Medal, the Meritorious Service Medal, Navy/Marine Corps Commendation Medal (with combat valor device), and the Combat Action Ribbon. He retired in 2009 at the rank of Colonel. In the private sector, Lowry worked his way up to General Manager of Powertrain Operations and became a member of Harley-Davidson's Senior Leadership Group. Also, he was the former Chief Operating Officer of the Allied Recreation Group. Most recently, John led Egon Zehnder's U.S. Supply Chain and Operations Practice.

Assistant Secretary Lowry received his Bachelor of Arts from Princeton University, a Master of Liberal Arts from Stanford University, a Master of Business Administration from Harvard Business School, and a Master of Strategic Studies from the U.S. Army War College.

VETS' mission is to prepare America's veterans, service members, and their spouses for meaningful careers, provide them with employment resources and expertise, protect their employment rights and promote their employment opportunities.

The mission of the Department of Labor is to foster, promote, and develop the welfare of the wage earners, job seekers, and retirees of the United States; improve working conditions; advance opportunities for profitable employment; and assure work-related benefits and rights.

Secretary Lowry III met with the National staff of Veterans Employment & Education Division and reiterated his commitment to continue taking care of veterans by improving all aspects of their programs, and more importantly, to seek input from Veterans Service Organizations (VSOs).

Veterans Employment and Training Service (VETS) is operated in partnership with the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL), providing resources to help veterans start or continue careers or set up new businesses. VETS has an official presence at both the U.S. Department of Labor and the Department of Veterans Affairs. With the Department of Labor, VETS is focused on finding employment for veterans and service members.

Retiring or separating from the military is a major life change. To help veterans and those about to become retired or separated, the Veterans' Employment and Training Service (VETS) offers a large collection of resources for transition, job placement, certifications, and adjusting to life in the civilian workforce.

What Does VETS Do?

The VETS official site acts as a clearinghouse for services aimed at those separating from military service. There is a job board administered by CareerOneStop.org, as well as a variety of training resources, but the VETS site also offers help for veterans in finding local, one-on-one assistance through American Job Centers. Job seekers can search their local area by zip code on the "Find Local Help" page.



VETS also features a page for employers who want to hire veterans. Additionally, VETS protects the employment rights of service members and veterans.

The DOL also has approximately 3,000 American Job Centers that provide job services to all veterans.

HVRP/VWIP Grant Programs

The Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program & the Veterans Workforce Investment program; the purpose of the Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Program (HVRP) is to provide services to assist in reintegrating homeless veterans into meaningful employment. The Veterans Workforce Investment program is a competitive grant program offered by the VETS. VWIP-funded programs are intended to meet the workforce investment needs of veterans and to perform outreach and public information activities to develop and promote employment and job training opportunities.



Transition Assistance Program

The VETS site features a gateway for transitioning service members who need to access the Transition Assistance Program (TAP) training, and VETS also has dedicated resources especially for women veterans.

VETS Programs and Services

Newly separated service members should become familiar with the section on USERRA-the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act.

Do you know your rights if you left a civilian job to serve in uniform? Do you need to know if those rights have been violated? This section of VETS has important information, including how to file a claim under USERRA.

Military Skills Translator

The Military Skills Translator is one of the most helpful resources listed on VETS for transitioning service members. You'll find it linked under the heading "Quick Resources."

The skills translator allows you to search by military occupation code or by keyword. A search for "dental assistant," for example, shows a description of the job, and offers a list of resources for civilian certification and matching these military-related skills to a civilian career.

TOPIC 4: CAREER FAIRS

On Monday, January 13th, the National Staff, in collaboration with the Department of Texas, conducted several workshops where 119 Soldiers, veterans, and their spouses registered to attend.

The workshops were designed to help current veterans become more competitive in the job market. Workshops provided were Effective Resume Writing (Civilian & Federal), Financial Literacy, LinkedIn, Networking lunch with Employers, and ended with the Department of Texas, Service



Officers that assisted them with their disability claim and the process for submitting a claim.

This was followed by a MEGA Job Fair that took place the following day. This gave them the opportunity to fine-tune their resumes, LinkedIn page, and brush up on their networking skills.

During the networking lunch, we had employers (KBR, U.S. Census, DynaCorpe, Texas Workforce, and Strike) sitting with the attendees; the intent was to create a relaxed environment where employers and job seekers were able to speak to one another, allowing for cross-pollination giving the job seekers critical advice on what employers are looking for in potential applicants.

Ariel De Jesus gave the LinkedIn class with Kashi Russell, where it was reiterated the importance of maintaining not only a LinkedIn profile but a strategically crafted profile — identifying key areas for those who are actively looking for employment. Finally, how to create and maintain an effective networking connection.

Rodney Rolland, Human Resources, Director, The American Legion, conducted the Civilian resume workshop, where he highlighted the three different types of resumes and each of its intended purpose. Additionally, it covered the pitfalls that plague most veterans when they are drafting their resume for the first time.



Margret Watson, who is a veteran as well went over key points and the major differences between a civilian resume and a federal resume. Additionally, Mrs. Watson discussed the process for submitting a federal resume which is vastly different from a civilian resume, and how to navigate through the convoluted website, USAJob.gov since nearly half of the attendees were seeking employment within the federal government. She also emphasized the importance of maintaining a strong network.

Furthermore, the Department of Texas covered and assisted all attendees on the submission of their disability claims. This is a very vital portion of their transition, ensuring that they complete their claim while still on active-duty, instead of after leaving the military. During the class, it was asked how many had begun the VA process and roughly 50 percent have not begun the claims process or was unaware how to start a claim. In some cases, this can determine a veteran's quality of life after military service.



Finally, during all the workshops, the common denominator was "NETWORKING." All presenters honed in and re-emphasized the importance of networking and having a strong network.

The following day The American Legion National and Department staff participated in Fort Hoods MEGA Job fair, where the Legion had the opportunity to get in front of 3,487 transitioning servicemembers, veterans, and their spouses.

<https://www.legion.org/careers/photos/248095/texas-legion-assists-fort-hood-service-members>

<https://www.legion.org/careers/248079/legion-aims-help-ease-transition-servicemembers>

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

TOPIC 5: VETERAN HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS

On 13 January 2020, the House overwhelmingly passed the bipartisan Veteran Housing Opportunities and Unemployment Support Extension Act of 2020 (or the Veteran HOUSE Act of 2020), introduced by Rep.



Scott Peters (CA-52), by a vote of 362-31. The bill will help tackle veteran homelessness by expanding the Department of Housing and Urban Development-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) program to ensure chronically homeless veterans discharged under conditions other-than-honorable (OTH), but not dishonorable, are eligible for HUD-VASH housing vouchers and supportive case management. The HUD-VASH program is a proven tool to help end chronic

veteran homelessness. Since the creation of the program, the rate of veteran homelessness has been cut in half.

“Thousands of veterans are not currently eligible for the vital resources the HUD-VASH program provides due to their other-than-honorable discharge status, often received for administrative reasons. Veterans with other than honorable discharges make up 3 percent of the veteran population – but they compose 15 percent of the homeless veteran population. Expanding housing assistance and services to these men and women would allow homeless veterans who have slipped through the cracks access the support they have earned through their service to our country,” said Rep. Peters.

“Should this bill become law, about 1,300 veterans will eventually be served by HUD-VASH, taking a major step towards addressing homelessness not just in San Diego but across America.”

The following organizations have expressed support for the bill: the City of San Diego, the San Diego Chamber of Commerce, the San Diego Downtown Partnership, San Diego Military Advisory Council, the American Legion, Paralyzed Veterans of America, Veterans of Foreign Wars, AMVETS, National Alliance to End Homelessness, National Coalition for Homeless Veterans, Community Solutions, National Housing Law Project, and Disabled American Veterans.

“The Veteran HOUSE Act is a significant step to help address chronic homelessness among military veterans in the San Diego region by making more veterans eligible for rental assistance and supportive services through the HUD-VASH voucher program. I commend and thank Representative Peters for his leadership on this issue. I look forward to continuing to work with HUD, the VA, the City of San Diego and additional partners to end veteran homelessness in the City of San Diego,” San Diego Housing Commission President & CEO Richard C. Gentry said.

“The Regional Task Force on the Homeless has strongly supported HR2398, legislation that would expand eligibility for our veterans to HUD-VASH benefits for homeless veterans who have received an ‘other than honorable’ (OTH) discharge. The OTH discharge should not be confused with a dishonorable (‘bad conduct’) discharge. This will be lifesaving for our chronically homeless veterans who have been other than honorably discharged and currently are not eligible for receiving the housing and services that would allow them to get off the streets permanently, stabilize and recover from homelessness. This expansion is timely and critical for our communities,” said Tamera Kohler, CEO of the Regional Task Force on the Homeless.

“Lowering barriers for veterans experiencing homelessness is an important part of addressing the issue of homelessness in our region, which is of critical importance to local businesses,” said Jerry Sanders, San Diego Regional Chamber of Commerce President and CEO. “The San Diego Regional Chamber of Commerce is supportive of this bill and appreciative of its progress, recognizing its role in getting people off the streets and into safe and stable housing.”

“Our organization continues to hear from concerned providers that there are homeless veterans in their communities who need the more intensive treatment provided by the HUD-VASH program but who are denied access because of the status of their discharge, even though being discharged OTH is neither a bad conduct discharge nor a dishonorable discharge,” said Nan Roman, President and CEO of the National Alliance to End Homelessness. The next step is for the Senate to support Representative Peters’ legislation.”

TOPIC 6: SMALL BUSINESS

From the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA):

Jovita Carranza now serves as the 26th Administrator of the U.S. Small Business Administration. Administrator Carranza will lead the only federal agency exclusively dedicated to assisting small business owners and entrepreneurs in starting, growing, and expanding their businesses. Additionally, the SBA provides targeted recovery support in the event of a declared disaster. This is Administrator Carranza's second tenure at the SBA. She served in the George W. Bush Administration as Deputy Administrator, from 2006-2009. The President nominated Administrator Carranza to lead the SBA while she was serving as the 44th Treasurer of the United States. The U.S. Senate confirmed her in a strong bipartisan vote of 88-5.

"I want to thank the President for his confidence in me to be an advocate in the Cabinet for our country's 30 million small businesses, and I want to express my sincere gratitude to the U.S. Senate for confirming me in a bipartisan fashion," Administrator Carranza said. "I look forward to helping elevate female entrepreneurs and our military veterans, expanding access to SBA resources among entrepreneurs in disadvantaged communities, and continuing to prioritize disaster relief."

"I would like to thank former Administrator Linda McMahon for her leadership at the SBA, and the dedicated professionals at the Agency during this transition," said Administrator Carranza.

Administrator Carranza's experience includes a remarkable 30-year career with United Parcel Service, where she began as an hourly dock worker, rose to oversee operations in Latin America and the Caribbean, and ultimately retired as the highest-ranking Latina in the company's history.



In testimony on December 11, 2019, before the U.S. Senate Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship, Administrator Carranza discussed her hands-on experience in the private sector, public service, and the life-changing potential of entrepreneurship:

"Throughout my life – as a young girl in a working-class community, as an executive leader at a global company, and as a government official – I've seen the transformative power entrepreneurship can have on individuals, communities, and the global economy."

Administrator Carranza pledged to preside over an Agency focused on creating more opportunities for women and historically underrepresented entrepreneurs while ensuring the SBA remains prepared to assist displaced homeowners and small businesses impacted by disaster:

"Members of this Committee, whatever success I achieved in life, has been a function of not only hard work, but also opportunity, guidance and advocacy I received from others."

"... I will leverage the power of this agency to continue to provide the same kind of support that I received, to entrepreneurs who need it most. I intend to put particular emphasis on opening more doors for women and entrepreneurs in underserved communities, including military families and veterans. And I intend to prioritize disaster preparedness."

Administrator Carranza earned her MBA from the University of Miami in Coral Gables, Florida, and received executive, governance, management, and financial training at the INSEAD Business School in Paris, France; Michigan State University; and the University of Chicago.

TOPIC 7: EDUCATION

Federal officials have just a few weeks to decide whether to go along with a court ruling giving thousands of veterans an extra year of college tuition benefits or appeal the order in hopes of reversing the potential billions of dollars in new payouts.

Last week, the U.S. Court of Appeals for Veterans Claimed issued its final ruling on the case of "BO vs. Wilkie," letting stand an earlier decision that the Department of Veterans Affairs practice of making veterans relinquish their Montgomery GI Bill eligibility to receive Post-9/11 GI Bill payouts is improper.



Federal officials argued in court that the arrangement is designed to make sure veterans aren't doubling up on their government benefits for personal profit. But the court rejected that argument, saying that instead veterans eligible for both programs should receive each set of payouts, just not simultaneously.

That means that veterans who use up their 36 months of Post-9/11 GI Bill

education benefits would still have access to 12 months of Montgomery GI Bill benefits if they paid into the program while they were serving. Under the existing federal statute, any government higher education payouts are capped at 48 months.

VA officials appealed the ruling of a three-judge panel to the full veterans' claims court but were denied. That started a two-month clock on appealing the case to the Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit or allowing the ruling to stand.

Department officials in past court filings have indicated that they intend to appeal. A VA spokesman referred questions on the case to the Department of Justice. Justice officials did not respond to requests for comment.

Tim McHugh, an associate with the legal firm Hunton Andrews Kurth who led the legal fight against the VA, said if the higher court accepts an appeal, he is hopeful they could get a ruling on an expedited basis, possibly early enough for resolution before the 2020 fall semester.

"When they are looking at the timing of a case like this, it is appropriate for the court to consider the impact on not just the plaintiff but also everyone else," he said.

Under current rules, the Post-9/11 GI Bill provides 36 months of tuition assistance and living stipends to veterans (or their family members) who served at least three years on active duty after Sept. 10, 2001. The total value of those payouts can top \$20,000 a year, depending on where individuals attend school.

That benefit has largely replaced the Montgomery GI Bill as veterans' primary education benefit. That program requires servicemembers to pay \$1,200 in their first year after enlisting to be eligible for the program. Individuals who did so could receive 36 months of education payouts of nearly \$2,000 last semester.

The Montgomery GI Bill still has an average of more than 130,000 new enrollees annually, but fewer than 6 percent of veterans eligible for both education benefit programs chose the Montgomery program in recent years.

VA officials have until March 9 to appeal but are expected to announce a decision sooner than that date.

Joseph C. Sharpe, Jr., Director
Veterans Employment & Education Division
202.861.2700 ext. 2989
Week Ending: 1/17/20
