

NATIONAL VETERANS EMPLOYMENT & EDUCATION COMMISSION

TOPIC 1: ECONOMY

The U.S. economy accelerated in the second quarter as consumers ramped up spending and businesses invested more on equipment, confirming that the sluggish performance early in the year was temporary. Gross domestic product (GDP) increased at a 2.6 percent annual rate in the April – June period, which included a boost from trade, the Commerce Department said in its advance estimate on Friday, July 28. Growth for the first quarter was revised down to a 1.2 percent rate from the previously reported 1.4 percent pace. First-quarter growth was the weakest in a year. The rebound in growth, together with a tightening labor market, likely leaves the Federal Reserve on course to announce a plan to start reducing its \$4.2 trillion portfolio of Treasury bonds and mortgage-backed securities in September as well as raise interest rates for a third time this year.

The U.S. central bank left rates unchanged on Wednesday and said it expected to start winding down its portfolio “relatively soon.” The dollar fell against a basket of currencies after the release of the data, while prices for U.S. government bonds rose. The economy grew 1.9 percent in the first half of 2017, making it unlikely that GDP would top 2.5 percent for the full year. President Trump has set an ambitious 3.0 percent growth target for 2017. While the Trump administration has vowed to cut corporate and individual taxes as part of its business friendly agenda, Republicans’ struggles in Congress to pass a healthcare restructuring have left analysts skeptical on the prospects of fiscal stimulus. So far, the impasse in Washington has not hurt either business or consumer confidence.

A resurgence in consumer spending accounted for the bulk of the pickup in economic growth in the second quarter. Consumer spending, which makes up more than two-thirds of the U.S. economy, grew at a 2.8 percent rate. That was an acceleration from the 1.9 percent pace logged in the first quarter. But with wage growth remaining sluggish despite the labor market being near full employment, there are concerns that consumer spending could slow in the third quarter. Annual wage growth has struggled to break above 2.5 percent. Business spending on equipment rose at an 8.2 percent pace in the second quarter, the fastest since the third quarter of 2015. It was the third straight quarterly increase.

Spending on mining exploration, wells and shaft grew at a 116.7 percent rate, slowing from the first-quarter’s robust 272.1 percent pace. As a result, investment on nonresidential structures increased at a 4.9 percent pace, moderating from the January – March period’s brisk 14.8 percent rate. Businesses continued to carefully manage their inventories in the second quarter but spent more in some places. Inventory investment was neutral to GDP growth after slicing off 1.46 percentage points in the first quarter. Trade added 0.18 percentage point to growth, contributing to output for a second straight quarter. Housing was a drag on growth in the last quarter, with investment on homebuilding contracting at a 6.8 percent rate, the worst performance since the third quarter of 2010.

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	
	JUN 2016	JUN 2017	JUN 2016	JUN 2017	JUN 2016	JUN 2017
Gulf War-era II veterans						
Unemployed	137	172	109	129	28	43
Unemployment rate	4.4	5.1	4.2	4.5	5.5	8.5

National unemployment rate is 4.4 percent (June 2017). Gulf War II veterans unemployment rate is 5.1 percent.¹ Currently, the unemployment rate for Gulf War II women veterans is 3.5 percent (up from 3.5 percent in May).

¹ U.S. Department of Labor. *Economic News Release: Employment Situation Summary, May 2017.*

TOPIC 2: MEETINGS

On Monday, July 24, the National Veterans Employment & Education Division had a conference call with Toni Giddens, Program Manager of Nevada’s Work for Warriors Program, to discuss different opportunities for collaboration in order to close the unemployment gap for our Nevada National Guardsmen, Reservists and their immediate family, as well as Gold Star families and veterans in need. The program assist candidates through the entire employment process, from start to finish.

On Monday, July 24, the National Veterans Employment & Education Division held a conference call with representatives from Walgreens and DeVry to discuss a collaboration with The American Legion regarding an apprenticeship program for veterans. Walgreens was awarded Tricare's pharmacy network for users nationwide, taking over for CVS pharmacies. As a result, Walgreens is looking to expand its support for military and veteran hiring opportunities. Unfortunately, our division sees numerous problems with Walgreens proposed partnership with DeVry. Most prominently, the VA has several “cautionary flags” placed on DeVry, warning veterans that there are issues they need to be aware of regarding the school’s practices. These are primarily around misleading marketing practices that the school has pledged to change. Nevertheless, there is the potential for disaster if the partnership goes public, as questions will be raised over why Walgreens chose DeVry exclusively over reputable online non-profit institutions such as University of Maryland or Colorado State University.

On Tuesday, July 25, the National Veterans Employment & Education Division had a conference call with Lori Adams, Program Manager for the National Association Workforce Agencies (NASWA), to discuss their upcoming Washington Conference and our participation on one of their panels.

On Tuesday, July 25, the National Veterans Employment & Education Division had a conference call with the office of Representative Lois Frankel (FL) about reintroducing [H.R.1399](#), the *Veterans Education Empowerment Act* from the 114th congress. The bill would authorize

competitive grants for institutions to build veteran centers on college campuses. With veterans resources being built across the country on college campuses, and with testimonials of success that were recently highlighted in the Legion Magazine, federal grants have the potential to be valuable concepts. Our division is continuing our study on the specifics of the bill.

On Wednesday, July 26, the National Veterans Employment & Education Division met with David Molina, Founder & CEO, Operationcode, to discuss their veteran initiative and potential employment opportunities for veterans. Operationcode gets veterans into the tech industry. Their career services team provides resume reviews and technical interview prep. They work with tech companies nationwide to provide job opportunities and support the military community's transition into tech.

On Thursday, July 27, the National Veterans Employment & Education Division met with U.S.VETS and ScoutComms to discuss ways in which U.S.VETS can be marketed in the DC area for all of the programs/services that they provide for at-risk and/or homeless veterans. ScoutComms is the nation's leading communications, advocacy, and philanthropic strategy firm dedicated to providing services that support veterans, servicemembers and military families.

On Friday, July 28, the National Veterans Employment & Education Division had a conference call with Coreena Conley, Director, Veterans Business Outreach Center, in Sacramento, California. Ms. Conley had been assisting The American Legion with the Small Business Summit for the National Convention in Reno. The topic of the meeting was the Small Business Summit logistics and other minor details.

On Friday, July 28- Sunday, July 30, the National Veterans Employment & Education Division will be participating in the 99th Regional Support Command (RSC) Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Preprogram (YRRP). This is a Department of Defense (DOD) effort to promote the well-being of National Guard and Reserve members, their families and communities, by connecting them with resources throughout the deployment cycle. The American Legion will have a speaking role in front of the General assembly, where we will be speaking to 900 servicemembers and their families.

TOPIC 3: EMPLOYMENT

Southland veterans, their spouses and working-age children are invited to attend a free, five-day employment transition seminar from August 14 to August 18 at the Village of Orland Park Cultural Center, 14760 Park Lane. The seminar is open to all honorably discharged veterans, members of the National Guard or Reserve, spouses of veterans, active-duty, National Guard or Reserve, military caregivers, and dependent children of working age. Co-sponsored by the Village of Orland Park and Operation Job Ready Veterans, the seminar includes transition assistance, resume preparation, company research, networking and interviewing skills, and employer introductions. Those who successfully complete the five-day seminar will attend a mini-graduation ceremony and hiring fair.

“The goal is to provide veterans the tools they need to get long-term and meaningful employment,” Orland Park (IL) Mayor Keith Pekau said in a news release. “I have first-hand knowledge about the challenges of transitioning out of the military. Seminars like this are extremely beneficial to veterans and their families as they prepare for life after the military. We

all know veterans and their families have a lot to offer the work force so it's critical to assist them in making this transition." The seminar is run by Operation: Job Ready Veterans, a nonprofit based in Indianapolis dedicated to preparing servicemembers, veterans, military spouses, dependents and caregivers for entry into the workforce. "Many veterans are struggling with the transition from military to civilian life. We spend the first day honing in on what their transitional issues are," said Suzanne Tansel, Community Outreach and Marketing Coordinator for Operation: Job Ready Veterans. "Most veterans aren't aware, so we do a lot of self-reflection and address possible issues."

The seminar includes resume writing, which focuses on translating what veterans did in the service into civilian speak, and re-wording resumes to meet job market standards. Veterans are welcome to bring their resumes, but are not required to have one as they will create one during the seminar. "We spend a lot of time on passions, and what veterans want to do with their life," Tansel explained. "We try to get veterans to think more broadly about what they want to do. Just because you were something in the military, doesn't mean you have to be that in the civilian world."

Veterans will also learn how to network, interview, and give a 30-second elevator speech on themselves. Tansel noted that many veterans are used to speaking about their service from a group perspective and will not talk about themselves. Veterans will be asked to prepare and rehearse their speech so that they become comfortable talking about themselves and what they can offer a company. "It really is a great week. It's interesting to watch the relationships form between the teammates. It's a great thing," said Tansel, who also graduated from the program. "I can't speak more highly of the process. We're so excited to be in Orland Park."

The program has seen 83 percent of graduates get hired within a month of the class and 90 percent retain their jobs. Tansel said it is not uncommon for veterans interviewing at Friday's mini Job Fair to get an offer to come in for an interview or to get a job offer immediately following the graduation. "We're also hoping that veterans will join the VFW or The American Legion and become more involved in the community," said Orland Park Veterans Program Assistant Tom Dubelbeis. "Veterans have a lot to contribute – they're very focused and mission-oriented."

Veterans interested in the free, five-day seminar need to register by noon on Friday, August 11. Register online at [Job Ready Vets](http://JobReadyVets.org), or by calling (312) 636-9777 or (855) 456-2732 or by email at BFitch@jobreadyvets.org.

TOPIC 4: VETERAN HOMELESSNESS

U.S Office of the Marines has issued the following news release: Marines with Marine Wing Support Squadron (MWSS) 373 supported the Veterans Village of San Diego during their 30th Annual Homeless Veteran Stand Down from Friday, July 21 to Sunday, 23, at San Diego High School in San Diego.

The stand down offered homeless veterans shelter and provided services such as medical care, dental care, legal assistance, haircuts and food for three days. "MWSS-373 has been providing support to make this event possible, ranging from building and maintaining tents to setting up cots for over 2,000 homeless participants this year," said 1st Lt. Andrew Wallace, MWSS-373 site officer for the Veterans Village of San Diego. Veterans Village of San Diego was established

in 1981 with the goal of giving back to the community by assisting homeless veterans who face substance abuse or have mental health concerns. The organization is committed to its motto "leave no one behind" and provides services to more than 2,000 veterans each year.

"These are homeless veterans who have nowhere else to go so it is important for us to give them these services, whether it is putting food in their bellies or just providing them with a place to stay for a few days," said Cpl. Eddie Salazar, a communications technician with MWSS-373, and volunteer. Marines with MWSS-373 provided equipment such as cots, tents, chairs and fork lifts; many also volunteered their time by preparing work stations and sleeping quarters, distributing food and drinks as well as greeting veterans attending the stand down.

The purpose of the Veterans Village of San Diego and the reason Marines with MWSS-373 support this event is to help rehabilitate these veterans and get them off the streets, said Salazar. "The entire reason we are here is service, whether that be on the battlefield or serving the community," said Wallace.

TOPIC 5: CAREER FAIRS

This week, work continued on The American Legion's upcoming hiring events to be staged in Arlington, Atlanta, Belle Chasse (LA), Biloxi (MS), Camp Pendleton, Carlisle (PA), Fort Carson, Fort Jackson (SC), Fort Sam Houston, Herndon (VA), Joint Base Andrews, Joint Base Charleston, Lexington Park (MD), Portsmouth (NH), Reno, San Antonio, San Francisco, Springfield (IL) and Washington, DC.

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

TOPIC 6: SMALL BUSINESS

This week, the U.S. House passed Representative Neal Dunn's (FL) bill giving more federal contracts to small businesses owned by veterans. Last month, Dunn unveiled the *Ensuring Veteran Enterprise Participation in Strategic Sourcing Act*, which would make the VA and the General Services Administration (GSA) send more federal contracts to small businesses owned by veterans, closing a loophole left by the *Veterans Benefits, Health Care, and Information Technology Act* passed in 2006. Earlier this month, the House Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, which held a hearing on the bill, passed it without opposition. The American Legion testified in favor of this bill during the hearing. On Monday, July 24, the House passed the bill on a voice vote. Representative Phil Roe (TN) was also a champion of the bill, bringing it through the House Veterans' Affairs Committee which he chairs. The bill was received in the U.S. Senate on Tuesday, July 25, and sent to the Veterans Affairs Committee. So far, there is no Senate sponsor.

Additionally, Representative Jack Bergman's (MI) bill, H.R. 2749, *Protecting Business Opportunities for Veterans Act of 2017*, passed unanimously in the House on July 24. The American Legion had previously testified in support of this bill during the Subcommittee on

Oversight & Investigation's June 29th hearing. Bergman said the bill closes a loophole that was being exploited by companies abusing the system and wasting taxpayer dollars. The program is meant to support veteran-owned and service-disabled veteran-owned small businesses. The bill cracks down on "improper pass-throughs"...or the selling of an awarded contract to a larger company for profit. *The Protecting Business Opportunities for Veterans Act of 2017* requires participants in the Vets First Program to certify they are performing the percentage of work already required by law and directs the VA to refer suspected violators to the Office of the Inspector General for investigation. The bill also directs the VA Secretary to consider whether existing administrative and criminal penalties for fraudulent representation would apply in each case.

The Committee on Veterans' Affairs receives complaints nearly every week from veteran-owned small businesses regarding "improper pass-throughs," where a small business obtains a certain contract but then gives all, or substantially all of the work, to a larger company while still collecting the profit. In some instances, multiple companies will pass through the work while adding price markups. Even though this has long been prohibited by the law, in practice the federal government has little ability to stop it from occurring. This improper practice by some bad actors in the system leaves many veterans who abide by the law unable to receive the contracts they are willing and capable of doing.

TOPIC 7: EDUCATION

Major reforms to veterans' education benefits are one step closer to becoming law after the House of Representatives unanimously voted in favor of the legislation Monday, July 24 – and the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee followed up with a unanimous vote supporting it just two days later.

The Harry W. Colmery Veterans Education Assistance Act of 2017, known as the "Forever GI Bill" would make significant changes to the Post-9/11 GI Bill. Altogether, it combines 18 bills and is expected to increase GI Bill costs by \$3 billion in 10 years. To offset costs, the legislation calls for reducing the annual growth of GI Bill recipients' living stipends to fall in line with active-duty servicemembers' basic housing allowance. The decrease would not apply to people now using the GI Bill.

These provisions include eliminating a requirement that veterans use their benefits within 15 years of active-duty service and expanding benefits for Reservists, Purple Heart recipients and surviving dependents. The bill would also retroactively restore benefits to veterans affected by recent school closures and provide additional funds to GI Bill users pursuing degrees in science, technology, engineering and math. There has been a lot of momentum for the bill since it was unveiled by the House Veterans' Affairs Committee a week and a half ago, receiving bipartisan support and the backing of several prominent veteran service organizations.

"This bill and how it got to this point today is a shining example of how well Congress can and should work together," Committee Chairman Representative Phil Roe (TN), said before the vote. Committee Ranking Member Representative Tim Walz (MN) called the GI Bill legislation "a real historic piece of work" and "just smart legislation... The Senate is going to pick this up, and I

think and look forward to that day when President Trump, hopefully towards the end of summer, early fall picks that pen up and signs this and makes a difference in veterans' lives today.”

On Wednesday, July 26, the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs followed up with its own hearing for its own identical plan for GI Bill reform, and voted unanimously to advance the legislation onto the Senate floor for a vote. Now that the healthcare vote has concluded, the possibility for a motion for unanimous consent in the Senate appears possible before the mid-August recess.

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