

NATIONAL VETERANS EMPLOYMENT & EDUCATION COMMISSION

Daniel J. Seehafer, Wisconsin, Chairman
Joseph C. Sharpe Jr., District of Columbia, Director

This report covers the programs, activities and accomplishments of the National Veterans Employment & Education Commission, its two standing committees (Employment and Veterans Preference and Veterans Education, Other Benefits & Homelessness) and the staff from July 1, 2020 through June 30, 2021. Since the commission and the committees always meet concurrently, all future references to the commission in this report will automatically indicate the inclusion of the committees.

The National Veterans Employment & Education Commission is chaired by Daniel J. Seehafer (WI). The division consists of Director Joseph Sharpe Jr., Employment & Transition Policy Associate; Ariel De Jesus Jr., Education & Credentialing Policy Associate; John Kamin, Employment and Education Policy Coordinator; Adam B. Treece; and Administrative Assistant Edwin Cruz.

National Veterans Employment & Education Commission

- Employment & Veterans Preference Committee
- Veterans Education, Other Benefits & Homelessness Committee
- Veterans Employment & Education Council
- Awards Subcommittee
- Employment Innovation Task Force Advisory Board
- Credentialing Executive Task Force Advisory Board
- Small Business Task Force Advisory Board
- Homeless Veteran Task Force Advisory Board

2020-2021 Meetings

During the period this report covers, the commission met for three regularly scheduled executive sessions. A list of those meetings follows:

- (1) The chairman of the commission addressed the National Executive Committee, held at American Legion National Headquarters in Indianapolis, Ind., and virtually on Oct. 14, 2020. A complete report on that meeting appears in the Digest of Proceeding of the National Executive Committee of The American Legion, October 14-15, 2020 & November 17, 2020.
- (2) At the 61st Washington Conference, held virtually from March 1-4, 2021, commission members and guests met to hear the latest on subjects of concern to them.
- (3) The chairman of the commission met May 5, 2021, in the headquarters office of The American Legion in Indianapolis, Ind. A complete report of that meeting appears in the Digest of Proceedings of the National Executive Committee, May 2021.

Legislative Appearances

A vital part of the work of the National Veterans Employment & Education Commission is the preparation and presentation of congressional testimony as well as letters of support on issues affecting the economic well-being of America's veterans. During the period covered by this report, the commission staff testified before Congress and also participated in the preparation of testimony presented by other members of the Legion staff on several occasions.

The following is a synopsis of the congressional hearings and correspondence held from July 1, 2020, to June 30, 2021, on matters about the National Veterans Employment & Education Commission:

- On July 22, 2020, VE&E staff submitted a letter of support for H.R. 7566, a bill to allow the Administrator of the General Services Administration to transfer certain surplus computers and technology equipment to nonprofit computer refurbishes for repair and distribution and for other purposes.
- On July 23, 2020, VE&E staff testified before the Veterans Affairs Committee on H.R. 7111 – Veterans Economic Recovery Act of 2020: To direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to carry out a retraining assistance program for unemployed veterans based on the previous Veterans Opportunity to Work to Hire Heroes Act authorizing the Veterans Retraining Assistance Program (VRAP).
- On Aug. 11, 2020, VE&E staff submitted a letter of support, Verification Alignment, and Service-disabled Business Adjustment Act to streamline and improve the verification process for veteran-owned small businesses.
- On Aug. 27, 2020, VE&E staff submitted a letter of support, Veteran Employment Transition Act “VET ACT,” to provide (VSOs) the contact information of transitioning servicemembers to disseminate information regarding benefits, employment and events for veterans in the area in which they live.
- On Aug. 27, 2020, VE&E staff submitted a letter of support, Veterans Educational Assistance Transparency and Accountability Improvement Act of 2020, improving the GI Bill Comparison Tool requiring VA to include pertinent information of educational institutions.
- On Sept. 16, 2020, VE&E staff testified before the Subcommittee on Investigation, Oversight and Regulation Committee on Small Business Veterans Affairs Committee, Implementation of Sections 1832 and 1833 of the FY17 National Defense Authorization Act, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and explore where the shortages came from.
- On Oct. 13, 2020, VE&E staff submitted a letter of support, Building Credit Access for Veterans Act, a bill aiming to break barriers for those with issues in obtaining a mortgage when they return from service by allowing lenders to use alternative data for approval and formalize the process in VA.
- On Dec. 8, 2020, VE&E staff testified before the Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity, Committee on Veteran Affairs, Identifying Congressional and Administration Priorities for the next Congress: How we can support our veterans through and after COVID-19.
- On Jan. 9, 2021, VE&E staff communicated to Sen. Rosen's staff support for S. 94, the Hire Student Veterans Act.

- On Feb. 23, 2021, VE&E staff communicated to Sen. Durbin’s staff support to close the 90-10 rule in the budget reconciliation package.
- On April 21, 2021, VE&E staff testified before the Veterans’ Affairs Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations on the West Los Angeles VA Campus Improvement Act of 2021; VA Supply Chain Resilience Act; and H.R. 1319 - American Rescue Plan Act.
- On April 29, 2021, VE&E staff communicated to Sen. Hassan’s staff support for S.1480, the Recognizing Service in PSLF Act.
- On May 4, 2021, VE&E staff communicated to Rep. Lieu’s staff support for H.R. 711, the West LA VA Campus Improvement Act of 2021.
- On May 28, 2021, VE&E staff communicated to Rep. Franek’s staff support for H.R. 3586, the Veteran Education Empowerment Act.
- On June 5, 2021, VE&E volunteers provided public comment expressing support for the implementation of the 90-10 rule at a Department of Education public hearing.
- On June 16, 2021, VE&E staff communicated to Rep. Levin support for H.R. 1836, the Guard and Reserve GI Bill Parity Act.
- On June 16, 2021, VE&E staff communicated to Sen. Tester’s office support for S. 2172, the Building Solutions for Veterans Experiencing Homelessness Act.
- On June 23, 2021, VE&E staff testified before the Senate Committee on Veterans’ Affairs on Pending Legislation on S.612 – Improving Housing Outcomes for Veterans Act of 2021; S.887 – VA Supply Chain Resiliency Act; and a Discussion Draft – the Building Solutions for Veterans Experiencing Homelessness Act.

Administrative Activities

The National Veterans Employment & Education Commission and its two standing subcommittees – Employment and Veterans Preference, and Veterans Education, Other Benefits & Homelessness – are responsible for ensuring that America’s veterans have the opportunity to provide with honor and dignity the economic necessities of life for themselves and their families. To achieve this goal, the commission and its committees work closely with governmental agencies and liaison to assist the organization’s members.

A staff responsibility is answering the large volume of mail and electronic mail that is received annually from veterans seeking information or assistance on issues that come under the commission's jurisdiction. While the staff can neither place individual veterans in jobs nor represent them in labor disputes, the staff does provide information, guidance and, when appropriate, referral. Besides correspondence from individuals, the staff also receives and answers frequent requests and inquiries from government agencies, members of Congress, congressional committees, private organizations and other groups regarding veterans' economic issues.

Employer of the Year Awards

One of the commission's major programs is its awards program, which is administered by the staff. Through this program, The American Legion pays tribute to those employers across the country who have established outstanding records in the employment and retention of veterans,

workers with disabilities and older workers, and to exceptional members of the state employment security agencies.

Each year since 1969, the Legion's National Veterans Employment & Education Commission has sponsored an Employer of the Year Awards Program. This program seeks to honor those employers across the country that has established an outstanding record in the employment and retention of veterans. Before this year's Washington Conference, the chairman of the National Veterans Employment & Education Commission, Daniel J. Seehafer (WI), appointed a seven-person subcommittee to review all of the nominations that had been received during 2020 in the Employer of Veterans Awards Program.

The commission's Awards Subcommittee met to select the following national winners:

- **Large Employer:** TriWest Healthcare Alliance, Phoenix, Arizona
- **Medium Size Employer:** Cyber Defenses, Inc., Round Rock, Texas
- **Small Employer:** Nardis Gun Club, San Antonio, Texas

Employment Service Awards

Three awards, beginning in 1993, have been presented to the Local Veterans Employment Representative of the Year, the Disabled Veterans Outreach Program Specialist of the Year and the Employment Service Office of the Year. These awards are given in cooperation with local job Service offices across the country to recognize genuinely outstanding veteran-dedicated staff members.

National winners are as follows:

- **LVER of the Year:** Lee Ware, Fort Worth, Texas
- **DVOP of the Year:** Trevor Wilson, Fort Collins, Colorado
- **Employment Local Office:** Workforce Solutions Borderplex Lower Valley American Job Center, El Paso, Texas

Other Awards:

- **Employer of Older Workers:** Lynden Air Cargo, LLC, Anchorage, Alaska
- **Michael Guty's Homeless Veterans Outreach Award:** Department of Ohio – Ride with Valor, Delaware, Ohio
- **Enhance the Lives of Disabled Person Award:** Veteran Outdoors Inc., Georgetown, Texas

EMPLOYMENT & VETERANS PREFERENCE COMMITTEE

James Fratolillo, Massachusetts, Chairman

Joseph C. Sharpe Jr., Maryland, Director

The mission of the committee is to promote employment and training opportunities for veterans. To accomplish this, the committee works at the national level with Congress and various federal agencies. The committee does not place veterans in jobs, but rather relies on its network

of employment chairpersons to assist individual veterans in finding employment. Their posts and departments appoint these employment chairpersons. Occasionally, departments also appoint them at the county and district levels. Additionally, this committee is charged with promoting veterans' preference throughout the federal government and ensuring that agencies continue to observe all veterans' preference laws.

VETERANS EDUCATION, OTHER BENEFITS & HOMELESSNESS COMMITTEE

Eric W. Measles, California, Chairman

Joseph C. Sharpe Jr., Maryland, Director

This committee is charged with ensuring that veterans' educational benefits provided by the federal government are sufficient and that every generation of veterans has substantially the same as, or better benefits than, the previous generation. Also, this committee is to ensure that all veterans receive the benefits to which they are entitled as recompense for their military service on behalf of a grateful nation while continuing to push for federal and local governments to allocate adequate resources to combat and ultimately eliminate veteran homelessness.

Federal Veterans' Economic Programs

The following is a brief overview of the commission's interactions with those federal agencies and their veterans' programs with which the commission works regularly. The National Veterans Employment & Education Commission addresses employment, education, homeless & housing, and small business concerns regarding veterans and their families. A synopsis of the meetings (and events preceding) follows:

EDUCATION

On Monday, March 1, 2021, Zoom briefings were presented by the Department of Defense (DOD) and Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) about education programs and benefits to the National Veterans Employment & Education Commission.

DOD's Office of Force Education and Training is responsible for service and joint training policy, cyber training policy, professional military education, training capability modernization, voluntary education, credentialing and apprenticeship policy. Boris Kun, the office's Director of Credentialing and SkillBridge Programs, briefed commission members on a new concept for DOD voluntary training: Career Investment Programs.

Career Investment Programs is currently an unofficial portfolio that includes policy and oversight alignment of the Voluntary Education Directorate and the Credentialing and Apprenticeship Programs Office. Specifically, these programs are:

- Voluntary Education, which primarily refers to the Services' Tuition Assistance programs that pay up to \$4,500 a year in college tuition.
- Credentialing – the Services' Credentialing Opportunities On-Line (COOL) programs that pay for civilian certificate exams.

- The United Services Military Apprenticeship Program (USMAP) [all services except the United States Air Force (USAF)], which allows servicemembers to log work hours, leading to a Department of Labor apprenticeship certificate.
- The SkillBridge transition program (Army/Marines: Career Skill Program) which allows servicemembers to participate in employment training, including apprenticeships and internships, beginning up to six months before their service obligation is completed.
- Office of Financial Readiness, which prescribes regulations to implement the Military Lending Act.

All the above programs are designed to produce servicemember outcomes, either while on active duty, post-active duty or as part of a lifelong learning continuum that starts with active-duty.

This alignment builds and expands upon the concept that education opportunities are historically among the top three reasons people cite for choosing to enlist for military service. It further allows DOD to elevate the recognition, importance and value of obtaining credentials and in-demand skills while simultaneously supporting recruiting, retention, and skills improvement while on active duty. Ultimately, it sets up our servicemembers for a successful transition and acquisition of post-service employment. Director Kun stated, "Because at the end of the day, the Department of Defense, we're a workforce machine,"

DOD's presentation was followed by a briefing from VA's Education Service Director Charmaine Bogue on improvements to VA's education benefits. With a greater budget for IT improvements, VA is focused on modernizing claims processing and customer service for GI Bill users by providing direct, online, one-stop access to GI Bill benefits and information. VA has coined this initiative "Digital GI Bill," with a vision of moving beyond the technical modernization of claims processing by transitioning to a holistic service that improves user experiences across VA's entire ecosystem.

This vision rests on four pillars:

- Improved Customer Service to provide world-class customer and financial services to enable timely and accurate calculation of awards, real-time eligibility, benefits information and first contact resolution.
- End to End Management, to create a management perspective to ensure proper compliance and oversight of GI Bill programs and the use of data and business intelligence to monitor and measure school and student outcomes.
- Electronic Outreach, to allow for GI Bill students to engage with VA through electronic outreach, intake and communication tools for point-of-inquiry service.
- Legislative Compliance to support new legislative requirements and adapt to policy changes. Increase capacity to meet legislative/program requirements to determine eligibility, entitlement and benefits levels based on complex business rules. 64 Proceedings of Wednesday, May 5, 2021: while the Digital GI Bill will be an ongoing multi-year project, VA Education Service is in the process of gathering resource requirements to determine a measurable timeline of execution.

Bogue also shared their first update on the implementation of the Johnny Isakson and David P. Roe, M.D. Veterans Health Care and Benefits Improvement Act of 2020 (Isakson Roe Act),

signed by President Trump on Jan. 5, 2021. The 133-page bill contains 32 provisions affecting veteran's education benefits, with 15 of them having implementation deadlines within the first year.

As of the commission meeting, VA had implemented 7 of the 15 "date of enactment" provisions and is working to have the remainder accomplished by Aug. 1. With much of these changes affecting school certifying official procedures, VA staff have worked to regularly communicate with external stakeholders. Real-time updates to the Isakson Roe Act implementation will be shared online at <https://benefits.va.gov/gibill/isaksonroe.asp>.

Also, the following curriculum was presented featuring prominent speakers such as Richard Trumka, President, American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO); James D. Rodriguez, Acting Assistant Secretary, Veterans Employment and Training Services (ASVETS) of the Department of Labor (DOL); and Sen. Tammy Duckworth (IL), an Iraq War veteran and Purple Heart recipient. The meeting was moderated by Dr. Joseph Wescott, American Legion National Higher Education Consultant. This event highlighted the many obstacles that veterans and their families face when separating from the military and, specifically, the need for greater action to ensure veterans achieve financial stability as they enter the civilian workforce.

LICENSING & CERTIFICATION

The National Veterans Employment & Education Commission planned and executed a virtual SkillBridge roundtable on June 29, 2021. The roundtable facilitated a discussion between relevant stakeholders to support hiring initiatives for transitioning servicemembers by bringing together key leaders from government, military, and industry. The roundtable was attended by over 50 stakeholders and featured presentations by the DOD Military-Civilian Transition Office (MCTO), the U.S. Department of Labor's Acting Assistant Secretary for Veterans' Employment and Training Service (VETS), Solutions for Information Design (SOLID), ABF Freight, the Dixon Center for Military and Veterans Services, the International Brotherhood of Teamsters and many other supportive organizations. The keynote speaker for the event was Daniel C. Dailey, 15th Sergeant Major of the Army.

The Department of Defense (DOD) SkillBridge program enhances the separation process for service members as they transition from the military to the civilian workforce. The program promotes civilian job training and employment for transitioning servicemembers by partnering with public and private organizations that provide apprenticeships, internships and on-the-job training. Servicemembers who are within six months of being released from active duty are eligible to apply for the SkillBridge program. Since its inception in 2014, the DOD SkillBridge program has expanded to serve more than 25,000 servicemembers at over 100 different employer locations. The continued demand for the unique skills servicemembers bring to an organization and, likewise, the demand for civilian training opportunities for those transitioning, has made the SkillBridge program an undeniable success.

EMPLOYMENT AND CAREER FAIRS

The National Veterans Employment & Education Commission also found ways to adapt to the pandemic, which derailed its annual career fair normally conducted during the national convention. On Sept. 15, 2020, nearly 800 veterans and military family job seekers from across the nation participated in a free virtual employment event with more than 220 hiring companies, presented by the National Veterans Employment & Education Commission, the American Legion Department of Texas, the Texas Veterans Commission and the Texas Workforce Commission.

National Commander James W. “Bill” Oxford welcomed job hunters with a video message, as did VE&E Commission Chairman Daniel Seehafer, from their homes in North Carolina and Wisconsin respectively. Earlier in the summer, the VE&E Commission organized an online workshop featuring the leader of military and veteran services for LinkedIn, Sarah Roberts, who offered tips to set up effective professional profiles on the social media platform. The American Legion’s national LinkedIn page saw a surge in followers, to nearly 20,000 by the end of the summer, as social media connections grew in importance during the time of self-isolation.

Following the success in Texas, the Veterans Employment & Education Commission worked with the Department of North Carolina to host a job fair on Nov. 17, 2020, which drew 176 job seekers from 19 different states, the District of Columbia and Japan.

In 2021, the National Veterans Employment & Education Commission of The American Legion collaborated with the Department of Texas and the Texas Veterans/Workforce Commission to host a virtual career fair on Feb. 9 through the Premier Virtual platform. There were 260 employers from various industries and 910 preregistered job seekers. Job seekers consisted of active-duty servicemembers, veterans, spouses and family members. Applicants came from across the nation, overseas (Italy, Germany, Japan, Australia, Botswana, Guam, Ghana, Bahrain), and two active-uty sailors out to sea aboard a U.S. destroyer. Overall, the employers and participants at this event were pleased with the outcome. The employers noted the participants’ professionalism and overall high level of qualifications. The participants commented that they were impressed with the variety of employers from different industries and their willingness to hire veterans.

On June 10, 2021, The National Veterans Employment & Education Commission of The American Legion once again supported the Department of Texas and the Texas Veterans/Workforce Commission in hosting a virtual career fair through the Premier Virtual platform. The event gathered 322 local, nationwide and international employers as well as 838 preregistered job seekers. In honor of women veterans, Past National Commander Denise Rohan and Deputy Assistant Secretary for Policy for the U.S. Department of Labor’s Veterans’ Employment and Training Service, James D. Rodriguez, welcomed job hunters with a video message.

The American Legion’s National Veterans Employment & Education Division, through its established partnerships, continues to play a vital role in assisting American Legion posts in their production of successful job fairs, small-business development workshops and employment training services throughout America. Also, the staff of the National Veterans Employment &

Education Division is involved in several advisory committees, such as the Small Business Administration's Advisory Committee; aside from advisory committees, The American Legion is also a stakeholder and active participant in numerous government agencies and private businesses' veteran initiatives. The American Legion has a representative on the Interagency Task Force on Veterans Small Business Development. Lastly, The American Legion participates in the Veterans Entrepreneurship Task Force (VET-Force) business forums and the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau's Service Member's Affairs meetings.

To help hiring managers understand veterans' unique skill sets, we've also released our landmark 60-page report, "The Future of Credentialing Servicemembers and Veterans: Leveraging Partners, Policies, and Resources," to empower employers to make successful veterans-hiring pipelines happen.

Also, the National Veterans Employment & Education Division has participated in numerous career fairs throughout the nation, allowing The American Legion to connect with more than 25,000 veterans and their families. The American Legion has been invited to participate in over 12 Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program (YRRP) events. The YRRP 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 is the only veterans service organization that participates in these events; as a result of our presence, the Legion was tasked with coordinating and moderating the YRRP employer panel. The panel consisted of employers sharing advice and information to help servicemembers land their dream job. The recruiters were asked a variety of questions to help understand what runs through the mind of hiring managers or HR professionals while interviewing them and what it takes to get the job. Locations for the YRRP included but were not limited to Florida, California, Maryland, Virginia, the District of Columbia and Hawaii.

NATIONAL VETERANS EMPLOYMENT & EDUCATION COMMISSION FORUM

On March 1, 2021, the Veterans Employment & Education staff and National Security held a panel titled "Securing the U.S. Industrial Base: Economic Security is a Matter of 21st Century National Security," co-hosted with the Institute of Technology, Economics, and Diplomacy (INTED), a globe-spanning organization that serves as a platform to discuss global issues, exchange ideas and implement solutions. Distinguished panelists, including former U.S. ambassadors, discussed the impact of economic security on international relations, particularly regarding the vulnerable U.S. industrial base, and explored what actions could be taken to strengthen national security in the 21st century. The panel was made up of Brad Markell, Executive Director, AFL-CIO Industrial Union Council; Thomas Pickering, Vice Chairman, Hills and Company; Dr. Joshua Walker, President & CEO of Japan Society; Richard Passarelli, National Director of Veterans Affairs, Utility Workers Union of America (UWUA); and was moderated by John Berry, President, American Australian Association and former U.S. Ambassador to Australia.

VETERAN ENTREPRENEURSHIP

VE&E staff is continuing its relationship with the SBA Office of Veterans Business Development to increase participation in the Boots to Business entrepreneurial education and training program. VE&E is also promoting the establishment of at least two new Veteran Business Opportunity Centers to expand access to business training and counseling for veteran-owned small businesses. VE&E is collaborating with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to establish a procurement advisory board to provide feedback on current VA procurement policies, procedures and practices; encourage competition at VA; and ensure VA procurement officials are using procurement best practices to maximize procurement competition. Also, VE&E is in the process of addressing small business development in rural areas. We are currently identifying federal, state and local resources throughout the United States that can be accessed by veterans, such as business loan guarantees and counseling services.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, two companies owned by members of the American Legion Business Task Force – Global Procurement Solutions and Aldevra – worked around the clock to manufacture and deliver needed PPE to health-care facilities as the supply chain continued to weaken in April. Legionnaire-owned companies in California and Ohio also swiftly transformed their business to manufacture masks and meet the urgent nationwide need.

VETERAN HOMELESSNESS

VA and HUD reported roughly 580,466 homeless veterans on a single night in 2020 (2020 Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress). VA has taken decisive action toward its goal of ending homelessness among our nation's veterans. To achieve this goal, VA has developed a plan to assist every homeless veteran willing to accept services to retain or acquire: safe housing; needed treatment services; opportunities to retain or return to employment; and benefits assistance. Also, VA has implemented a prevention initiative - the Supportive Services for Veterans and Families (SSVF), which is VA's primary prevention program designed to help veterans and their families rapidly exit homelessness or avoid entering homelessness.

The American Legion continues to place special priority on the issue of veteran homelessness. With veterans making up approximately 11 percent of our nation's total adult homeless population, there is plenty of reason to give the cause special attention. Along with various community partners, The American Legion remains committed to seeing VA's goal of ending veteran homelessness come to fruition. Our goal is to ensure that every community across America has programs and services in place to get homeless veterans in the housing (along with necessary healthcare/treatment) while connecting those at-risk veterans with the local services and resources they need.