



---

## Uploaded to the VFC Website

▶▶▶ 2020 ◀◀◀

---

This Document has been provided to you courtesy of Veterans-For-Change!

Feel free to pass to any veteran who might be able to use this information!

For thousands more files like this and hundreds of links to useful information, and hundreds of "Frequently Asked Questions, please go to:

[Veterans-For-Change](#)

---

*If Veterans don't help Veterans, who will?*

---

**Note:**

VFC is not liable for source information in this document, it is merely provided as a courtesy to our members & subscribers.



## LEGISLATIVE DIVISION UPDATE

This week both chambers continued consideration of fiscal year (FY) 2017 appropriations legislation. The House began debate on a plethora of amendment to **H.R. 4909**, the FY 2017 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA).

### CONGRESS

Productive Senate deliberations on the FY17 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) came to a screeching halt this week as the Democrats employed several procedural delaying tactics. As a result, real consideration of amendments will not take place until after the Memorial Day recess next week. The delay has also given senators to submit almost 200 amendments, most of which will never see the light of day on the floor.

Sen. John McCain (AZ) will be introducing an amendment to increase the topline spending amount by \$17 billion, for a variety of base budget needs. All of that money would be added as emergency spending (or overseas contingency operations (OCO) funding), in order to avoid limitations imposed by the Budget Control Act (BCA). It is pretty much a guarantee that Democrats will cry foul over that move. The additional funding would pay for, among other items, an increase to servicemembers' pay raise to 2.1%. which is 0.5% above the Administration's request. If that happens, then the Senate Appropriations bill will be the only Defense spending bill to retain the Administration's level.

Other submitted amendments cover the use of simulators and models in military medical training; various studies on PTSD and TBI; special consideration of discharges due to PTSD, TBI, or sexual assault; and requirements for studies to be conducted before the bill's massive TRICARE reforms are implemented. One amendment would increase force end strengths to meet the levels required by the House NDAA and its appropriations bill. Sources say that yet another amendment would strip out the Senate NDAA language requiring women to register for the Selective Service; in the meantime, Sen. Ron Paul (KY) has introduced a measure to simply eliminate the Selective Service altogether.

While the NDAA stuttered to a halt on the Senate floor, the Senate Appropriations Committee on Thursday marked up and reported out its FY17 Defense appropriations bill. As expected, that bill includes over \$950 million in additional military medical research funding. The bill follows the lead of the Senate NDAA and funds only to the BCA level.

Meanwhile, in the House, Speaker Paul Ryan (WI) is reconsidering his decision to have "open" floor consideration of appropriations bills. Under an open rule, Members can introduce any amendment they want on the House floor, rather than having them vetted by the Rules Committee ahead of time. However, a nasty fracas broke out over a Democrat amendment to the MilCon/VA appropriations bill that would prevent federal contractors from discriminating against employees based on sexual identity (under the aegis of religious freedom). The same kind of amendment sank the Energy & Water Appropriations bill on Thursday. Watchers can expect future appropriations bills to be run under new rules after the Memorial Day recess.

## LEGISLATIVE DIVISION UPDATES

On May 24, Assistant Director Matthew Shuman attended the Conservative Working Group on Capitol Hill. The CWG is a meeting of conservative congressional staffers designed to inform

one another on what the plans for the week are in regards to legislation and how they plan to address issues in the Senate.

On May 24, Assistant Director Matthew Shuman conducted a meeting with the Military legislative Assistant for Sen. Pat Toomey (PA). The meeting served as a formal request for Sen. Toomey to co-sponsor **S. 271**, Concurrent Receipt.

On May 24, Assistant Director Matthew Shuman held a meeting with a Senior Advisor for Sen. Joe Manchin (WV) about language they put in the NDAA that would allow any institute of higher learning (colleges) access to all military installations.

On May 24, Assistant Director Matthew Shuman met with the Veterans Education staffer on the SVAC Minority office about striking Sen. Manchin's language from the NDAA.

On May 24, Assistant Director Matthew Shuman met with both Jon Clark and Kelsey Baron of HVAC to inquire the reasons for a recently cancelled hearing before HVAC.

On May 24, Assistant Director Warren Goldstein conducted a meeting with William Ellis, Legislative Correspondent and Dennis Wischemeir, Defense Fellow for Senator Angus King, Jr. (ME). The meeting served as a discussion to request the Senator to co-sponsor **S. 271**, the *Retired Pay Restoration Act of 2015*.

On May 24, Assistant Director Warren Goldstein attended a Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs Pending Legislation Hearing in which Lou Celli Jr., Director of Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation (VA&R), provided the oral and written remarks.

The following bills were discussed:

**S. 2049**, a bill to establish in the Department of Veterans Affairs a continuing medical education program for non-Department medical professionals who treat veterans and family members of veterans to increase knowledge and recognition of medical conditions common to veterans and family members of veterans.

**The American Legion supports this legislation.**

**S. 2487**, *Female Veteran Suicide Prevention Act*, a bill to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to identify mental health care and suicide prevention programs and metrics that are effective in treating women veterans as part of the evaluation of such programs by the Secretary.

**The American Legion supports this measure.**

**S. 2520**, *Newborn Care Improvement Act*, a bill to improve the care provided by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to newborn children.

**The American Legion supports this bill.**

**S. 2679**, *Helping Veterans Exposed to Burn Pits Act*, a bill to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to establish within the Department of Veterans Affairs a center of excellence in the prevention, diagnosis, mitigation, treatment, and rehabilitation of health conditions relating to exposure to burn pits.

**The American Legion supports this legislation.**

**S. 2883**, *Appropriate Care for Disabled Veterans Act of 2016*, a bill to extend the requirement of the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to submit a report on the capacity of the

Department of Veterans Affairs to provide for the specialized treatment and rehabilitative needs of disabled veterans.

**The American Legion supports this measure.**

**S. 2888**, *Janey Ensminger Act of 2016*, a bill to amend the Public Health Service Act with respect to the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry's review and publication of illness and conditions relating to veterans stationed at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, and their family members.

**The American Legion supports this bill.**

**S. 2896**, *Care Veterans Deserve Act of 2016*, a bill to eliminate the sunset date for the Veterans Choice Program of the Department of Veterans Affairs, to expand eligibility for such program, and to extend certain operating hours for pharmacies and medical facilities of the Department.

**The American Legion opposes this legislation.**

**S. 2919**, *State Outreach for Local Veterans Employment (SOLVE) Act of 2016*, a bill to provide greater flexibility to States in carrying out the Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program and employing local veterans' employment representatives.

**The American Legion supports this measure.**

**Draft bill**, a bill to reform the rights and processes relating to appeals of decisions regarding claims for benefits under the laws administered by the VA Secretary.

**Draft bill**, *Veterans Mobility Safety Act of 2016*, a bill to make certain improvements in the provision of automobiles and adaptive equipment by the Department of Veterans Affairs.

**Draft bill**, a bill to expand eligibility for hospital care and medical services under section 101 of the *Veterans Access, Choice, and Accountability Act of 2014* to include veterans in receipt of health services under the pilot program of the Department of Veterans Affairs for rural veterans.

**Discussion draft**, including provisions from the *Construction Reform Act of 2016*, a bill to make certain improvements in the administration of Department medical facility construction projects.

**Discussion draft**, including VA proposal to modify requirements under which the Department is required to provide compensation and pension examinations to veterans seeking disability benefits.

On May 25, Assistant Director Matthew Shuman conducted a conference call with Joe Westcott, the legislative Director for the National Association of State Approving Agencies in regards to universities or colleges that are completely on line and their access to military installations.

On May 25, Assistant Director Matthew Shuman met personally with Rep. Steve King (IA). This meeting served as a formal request for Rep. King to co-sponsor **H.R. 303**, Concurrent Receipt.

On May 25, VA&R Director Louis Celli and Assistant Director Jeff Steele, along with other VSO staff, met with Commission on Care economists to discuss their work on providing economic projections of the costs of various scenarios proposed by the Commissioners.

On May 25, Director Ian de Planque and Assistant Director Jeff Steele attended a Veterans Service Organization roundtable with House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (CA), Rep. Tim Walz (MN), and other Democratic Party Representatives to discuss VSO priorities and alternatives to privatizing the VA through consolidation and coordination of health care providers.

On May 26, Assistant Director Warren Goldstein conducted a meeting with Adrian Snead, Legislative Counsel for Sen. Jeff Merkley (OR). The meeting served as a discussion to request the senator to co-sponsor **S. 271**, the *Retired Pay Restoration Act of 2015*.

On May 26, Assistant Director Warren Goldstein conducted a meeting with Molly Sherlock, Legislative Assistant for Sen. Tammy Baldwin (WI). The meeting served as a discussion to request the senator to co-sponsor **S. 271**, the *Retired Pay Restoration Act of 2015*

On May 26, Assistant Director Matthew Shuman attended a congressional panel focused on employment of military spouses. This congressional panel was created by Reps. Tim Walz (MN), Rep. Jeff Denham (CA) and Asst. Secretary of DOL VETS Mike Michaud.

#### Update on Flag Amendment Bill

On January 7, 2015, **House Joint Resolution (H.J. Res.) 9** was introduced by Rep. Steve Womack (AR). This legislation is a proposed constitutional amendment to protect the American flag from physical desecration. Its text states simply: *"The Congress shall have power to prohibit the physical desecration of the flag of the United States."* In addition to Rep. Womack and the five original co-sponsors of the House joint resolution there are now a total of **39** cosponsors, with the addition of Rep. Christopher Smith (NJ) on May 24.

On July 30, 2015, Sen. David Vitter (LA) introduced **Senate Joint Resolution (S.J. Res.) 21**. The Senate measure now has **8** cosponsors.

Additional cosponsors continue to be sought for both measures. [A listing of all cosponsors for both flag amendment bills is attached to the end of this report.]

**Ian de Planque, Director**  
**The American Legion Legislative Division**  
**ideplanque@legion.org**  
**(202) 861-2700**  
**For Week Ending 05-27-2016**

**HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION 9**

Rep. Steve Womack (R-AR-3) [Sponsor]  
Rep. Jeff Fortenberry (R-NE-1)  
Rep. Kevin Cramer (R-ND-At Large)  
Rep. Bill Johnson (R-OH-6)  
Rep. David Roe (R-TN-1)  
Rep. Marsha Blackburn (R-TN-7)  
Rep. Walter Jones (R-NC-3)  
Rep. Steve Palazzo (R-MS-4)  
Rep. Scot DesJarlais (R-TN-4)  
Rep. Bob Latta (R-OH-5)  
Rep. Rob Bishop (R-UT-1)  
Rep. Jeff Miller (R-FL-1)  
Rep. Michael Simpson (R-ID-2)  
Rep. Patrick Tiberi (R-OH-12)  
Rep. Ralph Abraham (R-LA-5)  
Rep. Tim Huelskamp (R-KS-1)  
Rep. Frank LoBiondo (R-NJ-2)  
Rep. Daniel Lipinski (D-IL-3)  
Rep. Brad Ashford (D-NE-2)  
Rep. Mark Amodei (R-NV-2)  
Rep. John Kline (R-MN-2)  
Rep. Jason Smith (R-MO-8)  
Rep. David Young (R-IA-3)  
Rep. Adrian Smith (R-NE-3)  
Rep. Joe Wilson (R-SC-2)  
Rep. Steve King (R-IA-4)  
Rep. Charles Boustany (R-LA-3)  
Rep. Brian Babin (R-TX-36)  
Rep. Pete Olson (R-TX-22)  
Rep. John Duncan (R-TN-2)  
Rep. Rodney Frelinghuysen (R-NJ-11)  
Rep. John Fleming (R-LA-4)  
Rep. David Rouzer (R-NC-7)  
Rep. Tom Cole (R-OK-4)  
Rep. Vicky Hartzler (R-MO-4)  
Rep. Bill Flores (R-TX-17)  
Rep. Greg Walden (R-OR-2)  
Rep. Pete Sessions (R-TX-32)  
Rep. Dan Newhouse (R-WA-4)  
Rep. Christopher Smith (R-NJ-4)

**SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION 21**

Sen. David Vitter (R-LA) [Sponsor]  
Sen. Orrin Hatch (R-UT)  
Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-SC)  
Sen. Jeff Sessions (R-AL)  
Sen. Chuck Grassley (R-IA)  
Sen. John Cornyn (R-TX)  
Sen. Dean Heller (R-NV)  
Sen. Deb Fischer (R-NE)  
Sen. Lisa Murkowski (R-AK)

Most recent addition to list of cosponsors in the House.

Nearly half of ISIS-controlled territory in Iraq and Syria has been recaptured by allied forces, according to a Pentagon report released this week. The number right now in Iraq is about 45 percent of the territory they once held has been recovered. While, the number in Syria is anywhere between 16 to 20 percent.

The percentages of territory lost is based off the amount of territory ISIS held in 2014. In recent weeks, U.S.-aided Iraqi forces pushed militants out of towns in western Iraq's Euphrates River valley as they consolidated gains made last December, when Iraq's army retook the city of Ramadi. Iraqi forces have begun operations around Mosul, Iraq's second largest city, in preparation for a major offensive to drive the militants out. Successes in the civil war-torn nation of Syria have been less impressive, due in part because of a weaker anti-IS presence.

1.

## **2. Women Veterans Outreach**

Tuesday, Rhonda Powell participated in two meetings to discuss issues related to women and minority veterans. One meeting was hosted by Dr. Betty Moseley Brown, Associate Director of the Center for Women Veterans at the Department of Veterans Affairs. The meeting regarding minority women veterans was with Ms. Barbara Ward who also works for the Department of Veterans Affairs.

## **3. Women in Military Service for America Memorial**

On Wednesday, Rhonda Powell attended the Women in Military Service for America Memorial for an event that is part of the Memorial Day events taking place in Washington, D.C. this weekend and the thousands of events taking place across the country.

## **4. Office of the Secretary of Defense Staff Conference**

On Thursday, Rhonda Powell will participate in a conference call with the Senior Enlisted Advisor to the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Manpower and Reserve Affairs at the Office of the Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness and Manpower and Reserve Affairs. The purpose of the meeting will be to discuss an array of issues to include the stress on the force from increased operations tempo while force manpower end strength continues to decrease. Budgetary restraints from congressional continuing resolutions and the FY 2017 forecast will also be topics of discussion.

## **5. POW/MIA Update**

U.S. Air Force 1st Lt. Donald W. Bruch, Jr., 24, of Montclair, New Jersey, will be buried May 29 in East Petersburg, Pennsylvania. On April 29, 1966, Bruch was assigned to the 333rd Tactical Fighter Squadron, as a pilot of an F-105D aircraft. Bruch was flying en route to attack a target north of Hanoi, Vietnam, when his aircraft was struck by enemy anti-aircraft artillery. Witnesses saw Bruch's aircraft impact the ground, and no ejection or parachute was noted. Bruch was declared missing in action after the crash. On May 4, 1966, a military review board amended his status to deceased.

After numerous joint U.S./Socialist Republic of Vietnam (S.R.V.) investigations dating back to 1988, excavation of a crash site believed to be Bruch's began during a joint U.S./S.R.V. mission in October and November 2011, finding some human remains and material evidence. Subsequent recovery missions were necessary in October and November 2012, and November and December 2013, to complete the excavation of this difficult crash site and a burial site.

To identify Bruch's remains, scientists from DPAA and the Armed Forces DNA Identification Laboratory used mitochondrial DNA analysis, which matched his sister, as well as circumstantial and material evidence.

The support from the government of Vietnam was vital to the success of these recovery missions. Today there are 1,620 Americans that are still unaccounted for from the Vietnam War.

**May 23-27, 2016**

**Health Policy Unit**

1. The Semiannual Report to Congress summarizes the results of OIG oversight, provides statistical information, and lists all reports issued October 1, 2015–March 31, 2016. During this reporting period, OIG audits, investigations, inspections, evaluations, and other reviews identified over \$783 million in monetary benefits for a return of \$13 for every dollar invested in OIG oversight. This reduction in return on investment from the preceding reporting period is not unexpected given that OIG continues to focus a significant portion of our resources on reviewing allegations related to wait time manipulation. This work generally does not result in a monetary benefit; rather, it focuses on improving access to health care for veterans. During this reporting period, OIG issued 158 reports and work products on VA programs and operations, made 741 recommendations, and conducted investigations that led to 185 arrests.
2. A veteran who served in Iraq is the latest person to file a lawsuit accusing a former physician assistant at a Veteran's Administration hospital in Kansas of sexual abuse. The suit filed Monday in federal court is the seventh this year against Mark E. Wisner. He is accused of performing unnecessary and improper genital examinations at the Leavenworth VA Medical Center. The hospital has said it stopped Wisner from seeing patients and began an investigation after the allegations surfaced. Wisner surrendered his medical license last year after at least seven patients accused him of abuse. Criminal charges that include sexual battery are pending in Leavenworth County. Wisner is seeking to have the civil proceedings halted until the criminal case is resolved.
3. The House on Tuesday unanimously passed a series of bills geared toward improving services for military veterans, including one that would require the Department of Veterans Affairs to allow military funerals on weekends. The bill would require national cemeteries administered by the VA to hold military burials on the weekend if requested by families for religious reasons. Few are held on weekends currently. Lawmakers also passed a bill requiring the VA to fill management positions typically held by temporary workers, a situation that has resulted in frequent turnover and reduced services in the already strapped system.
4. From May 23-25, 2016, April Commander, Assistant Director for Health Policy conducted a site visit in Las Vegas VA Medical Center. April conducted a town hall meeting at Vietnam Veterans of America Chapter 17 on May 23, 2016. On May 25, 2016, April visited the Salvation Army Homeless Shelter in Vegas. The shelter was a renovated hotel with 69 rooms and surrounding hotels donated their used furniture.

**Regional Office Action Review:**

Zachary Hearn and Mike Spinnicchia (NVLSP) conducted a Regional Office Action Review (ROAR) of the Boston VA Regional Office (VARO) May 10-12, 2016. Through the evaluation, it was noted that VA was failing to schedule examinations when necessary and frequently failed to address reasonably raised claims for total disability based on individual unemployability. Through May, The American Legion has visited Buffalo, St. Petersburg, Cleveland, Roanoke

and Boston. These failures have been noted at each location and will be included in the final report at the end of the year. Additionally, VA personnel assigned to the appeals team suffer from morale issues due to neglect of the appeals in recent years. This too has been a common complaint and will be included in the final report at the end of the year. The next ROAR will be at the Portland VARO the week of June 6<sup>th</sup>.

### **VBA Quarterly Meeting:**

Matt Labozzetta attended the VBA Quarterly Meeting on May 24, 2016. Below is the agenda for the meeting:



**Veterans Service Organizations Quarterly Forum**  
**Veterans Benefits Administration**  
**1800 G Street NW, Washington, DC**  
**Room 542**  
**May 24, 2016**

Dial-in 1-855-767-1051 and follow the voice prompts.  
When asked, enter the Participant Code: **12947806**

**9:30 - 10:00**

**Office of General Council**

*Christa Shriber, Deputy Chief Counsel*

- VA Accreditation

**10:00 - 11:00**

**Office of Field Operations**

*Beth McCoy, Deputy Under Secretary for Field Operations*

- OFO Updates
- Appeals Updates
- Call Centers
- NWQ Update
- Introduction of the District Directors

**11:00 - 11:45**

**Insurance Service**

*Vince Markey, Insurance Service Director*

- Insurance Services

**11:45 – 12:30**

**Lunch Break**

**12:30 - 1:30**

**Veterans Relationship Management (VRM)**

*Matthew Kim*

- SEP & D2D Update

**1:30 – 2:00**

**Policy Staff**

*Stephanie Li, Chief, Part 3 Regulation Staff*

- Nationwide Initial Traumatic Brain Injury Exam Review

**2:00 – 2:05**

**Compensation Service**

*Mary Glenn, Acting Deputy Director, Operations*

- Welcome

**2:05 – 2:10**

**Business Management Staff**

*Frank Kush, Chief, Business Lab (HINES)*  
*Jaminez Garrett, Senior Business Applications Analyst (HINES)*  
*Saad Siddiqui, Business Applications Analyst (HINES)*

- Private Medical Records Program Update

**2:10 - 2:25**

**Training Staff**  
*James Dyer, Training Manager*

- Training, Responsibility, Improvement and Preparations (TRIP) of Claims Portal Update

**2:25 - 2:55**

**Mandatory Contract Examination Staff**  
*Pamela Miller, Acting Assistant Director*

- Mandatory Medical Disability Examination Program Office

**2:55 - 3:25**

**Procedures Staff**  
*Christi Greenwell, Assistant Director*

- Notification Letter Improvement Initiative

**3:25 - 4:00**

**Collaboration Strategies**  
*Lucas Tickner, Senior Collaboration Strategist*

- C&P Exam Experience Project Update

### **Department Service Officer School:**

Preparations for Department Service Officer (DSO) School to be conducted July 28-30, 2016 are continuing. The approval from the National Adjutant has been granted; department adjutants and DSOs have been notified. Individuals wishing to attend must RSVP by June 24<sup>th</sup>.

### **Insurance, Pension and Debt Management Week of May 25, 2016**

The VA&R VA Insurance unit began review and processing of 118 applications for new insurance coverage, of which 3 were for Supplemental insurance for totally disabled veterans in the Service-Disabled insurance program, along with 43 disability and settlement claims on veteran's VA policies. Further case development included 18 phone calls with veterans, family members and VSOs, 46 insurance inquiries / transactions, and 49 veteran insureds were contacted by mail on their policies, insurance options and action deadlines. There were 27 direct contacts with VA personnel in regards to policy information or having additional actions taken on veteran's accounts.

The Philadelphia VA&R Pension unit processed 10 new claims for Veterans or Death pensions, along with reviewing and preparing 300 case actions for support of on-going pension benefits. Casework included processing 153 additional transactions and case inquiries to VA, and 25 phone contacts with claimants and VSOs, along with 4 personal contacts, 1 Appeal and 3 waiver cases.

The VA&R Pension office in St. Paul processed 146 new claims for Veteran's pensions and Death pensions, and presented supporting casework material on 75 claims already in progress, while also processing 159 inquiries and pension transactions, and 126 rating review audits. Contacts with claimants and VSOs amounted to 159 calls and e-mail contacts, and 2 Appeals handled for the week ending May 25, 2016.

### **Benefits Delivery at Discharge (BDD)**

The Western BDD Office reviewed 16 claims with 109 issues. Each claim required reviewing the rating, C&P examination, and Service Treatment Records. Additional research was required on some cases. The BDD office also received 6 phone calls from Veterans and Department Service Officers throughout the country requesting the status of claims or had questions concerning a rating. The office provided an update to the status of the claim or provided options concerning the rating. Two Veterans visited the office. The office received and reviewed 20 pieces of VA correspondence.

LaKeisha Bracey, Assistant Director, BDD Winston-Salem Regional Office was on travel to the San Juan, PR Regional Office representing veterans during their hearing before the Department of Veteran Affairs.

### **Department of Defense Discharge and Correction Boards**

53 emails were received and 59 emails were sent out. 22 phone calls were received into the office and 7 packages for discharge upgrade were sent out to applicants.

Additionally, the DOD Review Boards Section reviewed an upcoming case to be heard at the Army Board of Corrections for Military Records and is currently writing the brief for said case. The DOD Review Boards Section will be reviewing at least one case, next week, at Andrews Air Force Base.

The DOD Review Boards Section finalized its appeal for a case to the Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Army (DASA) in charge of Review Boards. An applicant was voted by the Army Discharge Review Board to get an upgrade. However, the Board President overruled the decision of his own Board, despite signed confessions from the individual who perpetuated the crime the Veteran was later separated for. The American Legion may have an upcoming appointment with the new DASA as a meet and greet.

Finally, the DOD Review Boards Section will be participating in the placing of The American Legion wreath at Arlington National Cemetery on Memorial Day.

**NATIONAL VETERANS EMPLOYMENT & EDUCATION COMMISSION**

**TOPIC 1: ECONOMY**

Despite better-than-expected economic data released this week, mortgage rates barely budged. The consumer-price index, a closely watched inflation gauge, increased 0.4 percent last month – the biggest jump in three years. Housing starts rose 6.6 percent in April, beating expectations and indicating positive momentum in new home construction. The data bolsters the case for the Federal Reserve raising its benchmark rate next month. That sentiment was reflected in the minutes from the Fed’s April meeting, which were released Wednesday. The document left open the possibility of a rate increase in June.

News that a rate increase was on the table did not affect this week’s mortgage survey by Freddie Mac because the survey was completed before it broke. The government-backed mortgage-backer aggregates current rates weekly from 125 lenders nationwide to come up with a national mortgage rate. But economists are predicting mortgage rates will move higher. Nearly three-quarters of the experts surveyed by Bankrate.com, which puts out a weekly mortgage rate trend index, said that home loan rates are likely to rise this week. None believe they will fall.

According to the latest data released Thursday by Freddie Mac, the 30-year fixed-rate average crept up to 3.58 percent with an average 0.6 point (points are fees paid to a lender equal to 1 percent of the loan amount). It was 3.57 percent a week ago and 3.84 percent a year ago. The 15-year fixed-rate average held steady at 2.81 percent with an average 0.5 point. It was 3.05 percent a year ago. The five-year adjustable rate average ticked up to 2.8 percent with an average 0.5 point. It was 2.78 percent a week ago and 2.88 percent a year ago.

The 10-year Treasury yield saw minimal movement over the past week, despite encouraging news from April’s consumer spending and CPI data. Although there was minimal change in rates this week, the hawkish tone of Wednesday’s Fed minutes release had an immediate impact on Treasury yields, and could possibly shake up next week’s survey results. Meanwhile, mortgage applications were down this week, according to the latest data from the Mortgage Bankers Association. The market composite index - a measure of total loan application volume - fell 1.6 percent from the previous week. The refinance index inched up 1 percent, while the purchase index dropped 6 percent. The refinance share of mortgage activity accounted for 54.7 percent of all applications.

<b>HOUSEHOLD</b>		<b>DATA</b>					
<b>Table A-5. Employment status of the civilian population 18 years and over by veteran status, period of service, and sex, not seasonally adjusted</b>							
[Numbers in thousands]							
<b>Employment status, veteran status, and period of service</b>	<b>Total</b>		<b>Men</b>		<b>Women</b>		
	<b>APR 2015</b>	<b>APR 2016</b>	<b>APR 2015</b>	<b>APR 2016</b>	<b>APR 2015</b>	<b>APR 2016</b>	
<b>Gulf War-era II veterans</b>							
<b>Unemployed</b>	184	191	156	165	27	26	

**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	
	APR 2015	APR 2016	APR 2015	APR 2016	APR 2015	APR 2016
<b>Unemployment rate</b>	6.9	4.1	6.9	3.8	7.0	5.1

*National unemployment rate is 5 percent (March 2016). Gulf War II veterans unemployment rate is 4.1 percent.<sup>1</sup> Currently, the unemployment rate for Gulf War II women veterans is 5.1 percent (down from 5.4 percent in March).*

**TOPIC 2: MEETINGS**

*On Monday, May 23*, the National Veterans Employment & Education Division met with a small veteran friendly company called Guide-On. This company has created an IT platform that, by using behavioral science, translates a service member’s military life cycle into a professional civilian identity, matches veteran candidates to employer job opportunities, and provides data analytics on veteran job placement optimizing and tailoring veteran transition services. This platform could be a welcome addition to the Legion’s career web site, further discussions on this possibility will take place in the following weeks.

*On Tuesday, May 24*, the National Veterans Employment & Education Division had a conference call with the National League of Cities to discuss potential activities regarding veteran homelessness during the National Convention in Cincinnati.

*On Thursday, May 26*, the National Veterans Employment & Education Division attended the 2016 Private Public Partnership 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Day with the Army Reserve hosted by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and the Department of the Army. The Army Reserve established the Employer Partnership in 2008 in response to an unemployment rate among veterans and Reserve Component members that was greater than that of the comparable civilian population. The EP partnered with more than 5,000 employers to build and leverage mutually beneficial partnerships between the civilian and military communities with a focus on developing career and training opportunities for Soldiers, veterans, and Family members. The American Legion is looking to develop a closer relationship with this program and will have a number of meetings with representatives of this organization in the near future.

<sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of Labor. *Economic News Release: Employment Situation Summary, November 2015.*

**On Friday, May 27**, the National Veterans Employment & Education Division met with the Small Business Administration (SBA) regarding programmatic expansion of the Boots to Business Reboot program. Boots to Business Reboot is a two-day training program that provides participants an overview of business ownership as a career vocation, an outline and knowledge of the components of a business plan, a practical exercise in opportunity recognition, and an introduction to available public and private resources. Step one is the Introduction to Entrepreneurship course eligible to veterans of all eras, servicemembers (including National Guard and Reserves) and their spouses. This course is instructed by SBA and its partners who are skilled business advisors. Step two is an eight-week online Foundations of Entrepreneurship course instructed by a consortium of professors and practitioners led by the Institute for Veterans and Military Families at Syracuse University. SBA and their resource partners are playing a critical role in bringing this program to our National Convention in Cincinnati.

**On Tuesday and Thursday, May 24 and 27**, the National Veterans Employment & Education Division attended a two part House Small Business Committee Hearing on *The Sharing Economy: A Taxing Experience for New Entrepreneurs*. Unlike the two millennia that separate the ancient agora from the 20th century flea market, technological advances occur so rapidly that first generation platforms, such as eBay, have themselves dramatically evolved. Today, these businesses have further evolved, expanding beyond the purchase and sale of goods into the service industry, allowing consumers to find everything from chefs to handymen to car services to short-term residential rentals. As with all significant evolutions, these developments do not come without growing pains. The Committee is looking at legislative solutions to define the phenomenon and to fully understand and adapt to the changing nature of the American worker.

### **TOPIC 3: SMALL BUSINESS**

This week, the House has passed and sent to the Senate legislation aimed at increasing contracting opportunities for small businesses.

The legislation is part of the National Defense Authorization Act, which would fund the Defense Department for the fiscal year beginning Oct. 1. In recent years, lawmakers have attached small business contracting bills to Pentagon spending legislation.

One provision in the current bill would require government agency employees to increase opportunities for small businesses to be prime contractors. Prime contractors are awarded contracts and then search for subcontractors to help do the required work. Under the legislation, if an agency employee believes small businesses aren't suitable candidates for a contract, the employee must recommend alternatives to make more prime contracts available to small companies.

Another provision would require the head of the Small Business Administration to provide to Congress examples of prime contractors who failed to make good faith efforts to award subcontracts to small businesses. Lawmakers and small business groups have contended for years that large companies don't comply with federal laws requiring them to use small business subcontractors.

### **TOPIC 4: EMPLOYMENT**

U.S. Sen. Pat Toomey and Congressman Ryan Costello are partnering on a bill that will give states more ability to help veterans find employment.

The bipartisan bill, introduced by Toomey (R-PA) in the Senate and Costello (R-PA-6) in the House would give governors more flexibility in directing federal funds from the U.S. Department of Labor's Veterans Employment and Training Services Program to better help connect veterans with good jobs.

Under the Toomey-Costello proposal, entitled the State Outreach for Local Veterans Employment (SOLVE) Act, governors would have the ability to change which agency within its state administers the federal funds. For example, a state could move funds from its labor department to its veterans' agency to improve coordination and more efficiently use resources to help veterans find jobs.

"We must help veterans to find good jobs, especially as the economy continues to stumble along," Toomey said in a news release. "The courageous men and women who serve in our armed forces deserve to return home to a steady job, a paycheck, and a promising future."

A statement issued by Costello, whose district includes parts of Lebanon County, echoed Toomey's remarks.

"The SOLVE Act is commonsense legislation that will allow states to better assist veterans in finding sustainable employment. Through state flexibility, the legislation will result in Pennsylvania veterans getting the assistance they need to find a good job," he said.

The SOLVE Act is endorsed by The American Legion.

## **TOPIC 5: VETERAN HOMELESSNESS**

Santa Clara County (CA) residents are ready to impose higher taxes on residential and commercial properties to finance a \$750 million bond measure to build affordable housing in the region, according to a new poll. Affordable homes would be offered to veterans, senior citizens, disabled people and the homeless with the bond measure, which the Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors is considering for approval to be placed on the November ballot. The measure would finance the construction, development, purchase and preservation of housing that would be set aside for the target population. "We have an epidemic of homelessness and people who can't afford to live in Santa Clara County," Carl Guardino, president of the San Jose-based Silicon Valley Leadership Group, said Thursday. The leadership group commissioned the survey. Guardino added, "Rather than simply trying to treat the symptoms, this is an attempt to develop a cure."

If two-thirds of voters approve the bond measure, property taxes throughout the county would increase \$14 for every \$100,000 of assessed valuation. For a home with a \$700,000 assessed value, that comes to about \$98 a year. For homes with an assessed value that matches the current median home price of \$1 million, that comes out to about \$140 a year in additional property taxes. About 65 percent of voters in Santa Clara County support the proposal, even at the cost of higher property taxes, according to the survey commissioned by the leadership group. The poll of 600 voters, conducted during the last week of April by Sacramento-based Moore Methods, also found that 26 percent would vote no and 9 percent were undecided. The margin of error was plus or minus 4.2 percentage points.

While the numbers show a big group who would vote yes, they still fall short of the two-thirds margin that would be required to approve the bond measure. Increases in property taxes usually require approval from two-thirds of the electorate. That means supporters and opponents of the

measure would likely concentrate on the approximately 9 percent of the electorate that is undecided. "This is a very good idea," said Stephen Levy, director of the Palo Alto-based Center for Continuing Study of the California Economy. "Yes, this will be a tax increase. But Bay Area residents have been a generous lot when it comes to these kinds of bond measures." About 73 percent of voters approved a similar measure last November in San Francisco. "I wasn't surprised by the results of the poll in Santa Clara County," Guardino said. "The San Francisco measure received a 73 percent yes vote. I believe folks here in Santa Clara County are just as concerned and compassionate as people in San Francisco."

Officials with the Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Association, one of the principal authors of the 1978 California tax-slashing initiative Proposition 13, were skeptical about whether the poll results would result in success at the ballot box. "I would take any poll results like this with a huge grain of salt," said Jon Coupal, president of the Howard Jarvis taxpayers group. Voters in California may be getting burned out by high taxes and could be reluctant to voluntarily increase taxes even further, Coupal suggested. "California has the highest sales taxes in the nation, the highest income taxes, the highest fuel taxes," Coupal said. "We will have a vote coming up shortly, Measure AA, a bay restoration proposal, and that might be telling about the appetite for higher taxes." That measure would impose a parcel tax on property.

The Santa Clara County supervisors commissioned their own poll with similar wording. The county board's poll determined that 62 percent of those surveyed would support such a bond measure for housing, according to Guardino, who has seen the survey results. When the county poll added those who were leaning toward voting yes on the measure, the number rose to 67 percent. The job boom in Santa Clara County and other parts of the Bay Area has fueled big increases in home prices throughout the region. That's set off a scramble to snap up homes that are anywhere close to the office parks and research campuses where tech employees are working. "Companies are finding it difficult to hire low-wage workers because they live so far from their places of employment," Levy said. "By adding a greater supply of housing for people who are service workers, that preserves our quality of life."

## **TOPIC 6: CAREER FAIR**

This week, work continued on The American Legion's upcoming hiring events to be staged in Atlanta, Belle Chase (LA), Biloxi (MS), Boston, Chesapeake (VA), Detroit, El Paso, Fort Belvoir (VA), Fort Indiantown Gap (PA), Fort Jackson (SC), Fort Worth, Huntsville (AL), Houston, Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam, Latham (NY), Los Angeles, Memphis, Montgomery (AL), Omaha (NE), Pensacola (FL), Pinellas Park (FL), Rochester (NY), Seattle, Springfield (IL) and Washington, DC. The mission of The American Legion's National Employment & Education Commission is to take actions that affect the economic well-being of veterans, 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: 5/27/16