



AMVETS LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

NOVEMBER 9, 2020

News Driving the Week

- [Veterans unemployment rates](#) saw another sizable drop in October, the latest sign that some of the economic effects of the ongoing coronavirus pandemic may be softening. But jobless claims among veterans — and much of the rest of workers in America — still remain significantly above rates from one year ago. And increasing numbers of coronavirus cases and deaths could cause additional negative effects in months to come. Officials from the Bureau of Labor Statistics announced that the unemployment estimate for veterans in October was 5.5 percent, down almost a full point from the month before (6.4 percent in September) and less than half of its highest point in 2020 (11.7 percent, in April).
- The Federal Communications Commission is set to launch its [Connected Care Pilot Program](#), a three-year, \$100 million project aimed at expanding telehealth access for low-income Americans, veterans and other vulnerable populations. The agency announced today that it would accept applications for the program November 6 through December 7. The program is open to eligible non-profit and public healthcare providers, and will use money from the Universal Service Fund to help defray the cost of connected health services. The program will offer grants to cover 85 percent of the connectivity costs for telehealth programs, including broadband access, internet connectivity for patients and some network equipment. It will not fund the purchase of telemedicine devices.
- After a long Election Week, all but two Congressional races featuring [women veteran candidates](#) have been decided. So far, all challengers have lost their races, but four incumbents secured re-election and Arizona saw one major upset. In all, 28 women veterans ran for Congressional seats on Tuesday -- a significant increase over prior years. So far, the Associated Press has called 26 of those races, according to unofficial election results. Vote counts must still be certified by state elections officials after all votes are tallied. Sen. Martha McSally lost her bid for re-election to a fellow veteran. McSally, a former Air Force colonel with 22 years of service, was the first female fighter pilot to fly in combat. She was appointed to her seat after Jon Kyl resigned after being appointed successor for the late Sen. John McCain and so was never officially elected to the Senate. McSally was defeated by Mark Kelly, a former Navy captain and pilot and NASA astronaut. As of Wednesday morning, with about 83% reporting, Kelly held about 52.6% of the vote compared to McSally's 47.4%, leading by more than 140,000 votes, according to unofficial results.
- More states voted to [legalize marijuana](#) to differing degrees during the 2020 election and as the tide of public policy turns at the state level, advocates hope it will change at the federal level, too, clearing the way for more veteran access. As of Election Night, 15 states

had legalized adult use of cannabis in some form, representing about a third of the U.S. population, "including millions of veterans," Eric Goepel, founder and CEO of Veterans Cannabis Coalition, said. Arizona, Montana and New Jersey voters all passed measures to legalize adult-use, South Dakota voters approved both medical and recreational use and Mississippi allowed medical use. Some veterans fear their use or potential use of marijuana could jeopardize their Department of Veterans Affairs benefits and lawmakers have even introduced bills to prevent exactly that. But VA says on its website that "veterans will not be denied VA benefits because of marijuana use." None of the bills filed to codify that and ensure that VA could not take benefits from veterans for their marijuana use have passed so far.

- Over the past decade, there's been no doubt that [AI is positively impacting a number of industries](#), with medicine and healthcare being no exception. In particular, the US federal government has focused on AI in a variety of ways to address pressing needs. The Department of Veterans Affairs, a US Federal agency that provides healthcare services to eligible military veterans, and is the largest integrated health care system in the United States, is adopting AI to help address the wide ranging impacts of the global pandemic on the lives of patients and their families. At the recent Data for AI 2020 conference, Dr. Gil Alterovitz who is the Director of Artificial Intelligence at the Department of Veterans Affairs shared the AI experience at the VA including several case studies from the work of the National Artificial Intelligence Institute at the VA and collaborations.

Upcoming Events

Rolling Stone Roundtable on Veteran Mental Health Awareness

Thursday, November 19 3:00 PM

RSVP [here](#)

AMVETS Legislative Priorities

[H.R. 1715](#) Charitable Equity for Veterans Act of 2019 introduced by Rep. Ron Kind of WI and Rep. Brad Wenstrup of OH

[H.R. 1997](#) Veterans Posttraumatic Growth Act introduced by Rep. Tim Ryan of OH

[S. 1906](#) Improve Well-Being for Veterans Act introduced by Rep. John Boozman of AR

[S. 785](#) Commander John Scott Hannon Veterans Mental Health Care Improvement Act of 2019 introduced by Sen. Jon Tester of MT

[H.R. 4154](#) Leave No Veteran Behind Act introduced by Rep. Susie Lee of NV and Rep. Steve Watkins of KS

[H.R. 3025](#) You Are Not Forgotten Act introduced by Rep. Mark Meadows of NC and Rep. Susie Lee of NV

Continued News

- The Bob Woodruff Foundation announced a partnership with the Wells Fargo Foundation to address [veteran homelessness and housing instability](#) exacerbated by COVID-19. For many veterans, their ability to maintain safe and stable housing is threatened by legal, mental health, employment, and financial issues, made worse due to the current crisis. With the

support of Wells Fargo, BWF will address urgent financial needs and invest in long-term solutions to help vulnerable veterans keep a roof over their heads. In addition to providing financial assistance, BWF will leverage the support of Wells Fargo to address big-picture barriers to housing stability, including access to quality legal and medical services. In Medical-Legal Partnerships, legal aid attorneys work side-by-side with care teams, doctors, and social workers to take care of the whole health of a veteran in need. The Bob Woodruff Foundation is investing in this innovative model to tackle the issues that can lead to veteran homelessness, helping veterans avoid crisis.

- [Opinion](#): Mental health and suicide crisis among US veterans getting new approach

