

# RAO

# BULLETIN

## 1 August 2017

PDF Edition



**All Hands:** Move was delayed 1 week. I anticipate moving 7 AUG and it is likely I will not have time to publish the 15 AUG Bulletin or at best a delayed one.  
**Lt. James "EMO" Tichacek, USN (Ret)**  
**Editor/Publisher RAO Bulletin**

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1. The page number on which an article can be found is provided to the left of each article's title
2. Numbers contained within brackets [ ] indicate the number of articles written on the subject. To obtain previous articles send a request to [raoemo@sbcglobal.net](mailto:raoemo@sbcglobal.net).

**\* ATTACHMENTS \***

- Attachment - Maryland Vet State Benefits & Discounts JUL 2017
- Attachment - Military History Anniversaries 01 thru 15 AUG
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**\* DoD \***



**Military Disability ► How to Better Understand It**

Military Disability is compensation and benefits given to all veterans who have service-connected conditions. Military Disability is broken into two kinds: DoD Disability and VA Disability.

-- **The DoD's Military Disability:** The DoD gives Military Disability to service members who develop service-connected conditions that make them Unfit for Duty. Purple Hearts are given for veterans who received a military disability in combat. To receive Military Disability from the DoD, a service member must go through the Integrated Disability Evaluation System, which combines the DoD Disability Process with the VA Disability Process to make it easier and faster for the service member to get Military Disability from both organizations. During the DoD Disability Process, the Medical Evaluation Board (MEB) reviews all the service member's conditions and sends a report to the Physical Evaluation Board (PEB) on which of the conditions are medically unacceptable. The PEB then reviews the case and officially determines which of the service-connected conditions make the service member Unfit for Duty and thus qualify for Military Disability. A Military Disability Rating is then assigned by the VA to each

condition. These ratings determine the exact amount of Military Disability Benefits the service member will receive from the DoD. If the service member does not agree with the PEB's decision, he can try to increase his Military Disability from the DoD by submitting appeals.

-- **The VA's Military Disability:** While the DoD gives Military Disability only for conditions that make a service-member Unfit for Duty, the VA gives Military Disability for every service-connected condition a veteran has. The VA Disability Process for Military Disability begins with the veteran undergoing Compensation and Pension Exams (C&P Exams). The VA will then assign a VA Disability Rating to every condition that qualifies. Again, to qualify for Military Disability from the VA, a condition must be service-connected. The ratings are then used to determine the exact amount of Military Disability the veteran will receive from the VA. Our VA Disability Chart contains all the current monetary rates for the VA's Military Disability.

[Military Disability](http://www.militarydisabilitymadeeasy.com/militarydisability.html) can seem extremely complicated and overwhelming. To better understand it refer to <http://www.militarydisabilitymadeeasy.com/militarydisability.html>. This site makes it as simple and straightforward as possible. Here are a few pointers on using the site.

- The very first thing you need to understand is how the [DoD Disability Process](#) and the [VA Disability Process](#) work. Their systems are different, and they both look at different things when rating disabilities, so it's important that you understand each system.
- A word used a lot on this site is "rating." A [Military Disability Rating](#) is given by [Rating Authorities](#) to every condition that qualifies for [Military Disability Benefits](#). It's important that you understand how ratings work and why they are essential.
- Next, read up on the VASRD at <http://www.militarydisabilitymadeeasy.com/vasrd.html>. The VASRD is the law that Congress passed that defines exactly how conditions should be rated. It's important to be familiar with how the VASRD works and the various [VASRD Principles](#) and [Musculoskeletal Principles](#) that determine how the laws are to be applied in various circumstances. There is a lot of information here, but just go through it slowly and make notes of the principles that apply to you. Then you can just ignore the rest.
- At the bottom of every condition page, there is a short-list version of the VASRD Principles that are most pertinent to the conditions on that page. That doesn't mean that those are the only principles that apply; they are just the most common ones.
- Once you've got the VASRD under control, you are ready to [Find Your Conditions](#) to see how they should be rated. You can search for your conditions by name or by the [VASRD Code](#). There is a full menu of the various body systems and conditions at the bottom of every page. If you are unable to find your condition, visit the [Analogous and Equivalent Codes](#) page. The VASRD simply can't list every condition on the planet, so it allows conditions to be rated under a similar condition. There are rules governing how this is to be done, so make sure you read up on it first. Conditions might also just be called something different, so we've provided a list of the most common alternate names.
- Once you've found your condition, read our discussion carefully to figure out how it is rated. The discussion of each condition will begin with a code, followed by the name of the condition in bold and the discussion about the condition. Here is an example:

***Code 7010: Supraventricular arrhythmias are abnormal heart rhythms, most commonly too fast, that are located in the heart's two upper chambers. If episodes of abnormal heart rhythms occur 5 or more times a year, then it is rated 30%. A 10% rating is given if episodes of abnormal rhythm occur 1 to 4 times a year or if there is permanent arterial fibrillation with no evidence of other heart diseases or conditions. All episodes must be properly documented by an ECG test.***

- Each of the codes is linked to the original current VASRD text, so if you want to know exactly what the VASRD says about that condition, you can just click on the numbers. We've cross-referenced the original VASRD text with our discussions of the various conditions as well, so if you're in the original VASRD text, you can just click on the code to get to our discussion of that condition.
- Once you've found the ratings for all your conditions, you have to combine them to get a single [Total Combined Military Disability Rating](#) using [VA Math](#) (20 + 30 does not equal 50). The total combined rating is then used to determine the exact type and amount of [Military Disability Benefits](#) you should receive.

That's it. If you follow these steps, you should have a working knowledge of the very complicated [Military Disability](#) system. If you are unable to find answers to your questions feel free to send an email to <http://www.militarydisabilitymadeeasy.com/contactus.html>. If you are submitting a question about your disability, allow 2-3 weeks for them to get back to you. They always want to make sure you are given the best answers possible, and they respond to every inquiry in the order received. [Source: U.S. Veteran Compensation Programs | July 19, 2017 ++]

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## War Myths ► American Public Needs to Stop Fooling Itself

Army Chief of Staff Gen. Mark Milley wants the American public to stop fooling itself when it comes to war, so he's drawn up five "myths" he says we need to let go of, pronto. Milley shared his thesis with an audience at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C., on 27 JUL, and his take on it has evolved since he first started speaking about four slightly different myths of warfare back in 2015. The myths:

**1. Wars will be short** -- "There are wars that have been short in the past, but they're pretty rare," he said. Most of the time, wars take longer than people think they will at the beginning of those wars." Leaders tend to gloss over conflicts, he said, describing them as a "little dust-up," assuring everyone that victory will be quick. "Beware of that one," he said. "Wars have a logic of their own sometimes, and they move in directions that are highly unexpected."

**2. You can win wars from afar** -- Dropping bombs has become an increasingly popular way for the U.S. military to fight enemies overseas, but in Milley's view, few wars are decisively ended until troops come face-to-face. "Look, wars are about politics. That's what they're about," he said. "They're about imposing your political will, and they're about people. And I can tell you with a high degree of certainty that human beings can survive horrific things from afar." He used his father's experience as a Marine during World War II, storming Iwo Jima after 66 days of relentless bombing from the U.S. Army and naval air forces. His father, he said, was told that all of the Japanese soldiers on that island would have surely been killed.

"There's no eight square miles of Earth that has ever received as much ordnance as the island of Iwo Jima. Almost all the Japanese survived," he said. "Life wasn't good, they were drinking their own urine, they never saw the sunlight, they were deep buried under ground, and they weren't happy campers – I got it. But they survived. They were ideologically committed to their cause, and they survived enough to kill 7,000 Marines when they hit the beach."

It's a similar situation in the fight against ISIS now. U.S. and coalition forces were able to take back Mosul, but years of air campaigns couldn't put a dent in the extremist group's progress until boots got on the ground. "It took the infantry and the armor and the special operations commanders to go into that city, house by house, block by block, room by room, to clear that city," he said. "What I'm telling you is there's a myth out there that you can win from afar. To impose your political will on the enemy typically requires you, at the end of the day, to close with and destroy that enemy up close with ground forces."

**3. Special Forces can do it all** -- Special Operations Command has grown exponentially in both reach and prestige during the Global War on Terror, but it is not a magic bullet, Milley said. "I'm a proud Green Beret, love Special Forces," he said. "Special Forces are designated Special Forces, with that name, for a reason. They are special. They do certain special activities, typically of a strategic nature." They have the best warriors in the world with the best training, he said, but they are not designed to be plugged into a conflict to pull out a decisive victory. "The one thing they are not designed to do is win a war," he said. "They can do raids, they can train other countries – there's lots of other things they can do. Winning a war by themselves is not one of their tasks." Winning wars will take conventional troops to finish what Special Forces might have started. "There's a myth that you can just throw Special Forces at it and it works – it's magic dust," he said. "It's great, but winning wars is not in their job jar, by themselves."



**4. Armies are easy to create** -- Following years of drawing down troop numbers, the Army this year received the go-ahead from Congress to grow its total force back to over one million. Reaching that number is doable, Milley said, but you can't just dial up an effective force at the drop of a hat. "There's a myth that you can just bring kids into the military, march them around a field a little bit, six to eight weeks of training and – boom – you've got an army," he said. "Wrong answer. It takes a considerable amount of time to build armies, navies, air forces and marine corps, especially in today's environment with complex weapons systems." For that reason, to fulfill current needs and anticipate future conflicts, Milley and his officials are continuing to ask Congress for funds to grow the Army. "Based on the tasks that are required, I believe we need a larger Army," he said. "My teammates on the choice staff also think the same thing of the Navy, Air Force and Marines."

**5. Armies fight wars** -- "We don't. Armies don't fight wars," he said. "Navies, air forces – they don't fight wars. Nations fight wars." In other words, Milley explained, to fight and win wars on behalf of the U.S. takes a buy-in at every level, from service member, civilian and government official alike. "It takes the full commitment of the entire nation to fight wars," he said. "We can do a raid real quick – that's one thing. But war is a different thing, and it takes a nation to fight and win a war."

[Source: ArmyTimes | Meghann Myers | July 27, 2017 ++]

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## **Pentagon Weapon Sales** ► **GAO Sting Operation Reveals Vulnerabilities**

When you realize you've somehow sold \$1.2 million worth of controlled military equipment to a law enforcement agency that doesn't exist, you're likely to jumpstart efforts to reform that program. That's what happened when the Defense Logistics Agency learned that a sting operation run by the Government Accountability Office had exploited vulnerabilities in the Pentagon's 1033 program, which sells local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies excess military equipment. "Through creating a fictitious federal agency, we gained access to the program and obtained over 100 controlled items with an estimated value of \$1.2 million, including night vision goggles, simulated rifles and simulated pipe bombs which could be potentially lethal if modified with commercially available items," Zina Merritt, director of the GAO's defense capabilities and management team, told lawmakers 27 JUL.

The 1033 program, created in the Clinton era and administered by DLA, has transferred more than \$6 billion of equipment to some 8,600 agencies — including \$1.1 billion in controlled items from 2013 to 2015. It gained notoriety in 2014 when the nation's television sets filled with images of Ferguson, Missouri police responding to the Michael Brown protests with armored trucks and other military-grade equipment. Over the last few years, said DLA deputy director of logistics Mike Scott, the agency has added various controls on bequests to the local and state agencies, like the Ferguson force, that constitute 96 percent of the 1033 program participants. Each request by a police department, for example, must be approved by the force's local government and a statewide 1033 program coordinator.

But GAO found that federal agencies have it much easier. Investigators simply enrolled in the program online and, once approved, purchased equipment over the Web. "They never did any verification, like visit our 'location,' and most of it was by email," Merritt told The Marshall Project. "It was like getting stuff off of eBay." In late 2015, DLA realized that the process was less stringent for federal agencies than for state and local outfits, and started drafting a memorandum of understanding that laid out federal participants responsibilities in the program, Scott said. But it was only after the GAO brought its sting operation to the DLA's attention this spring that they froze transfers to any agency who hadn't signed the agreement. "The first meetings we had with [the GAO] were in March of 2017, when we learned what they were able to do in their investigation. By April 3, we had implemented" additional controls, Scott said.

Most of those controls are common-sense reforms, ones that make it less likely that bad actors can order potentially lethal equipment for a fake federal agency whose address is an empty lot — as the GAO did. “We now require, very similar to the types of controls we implemented in the state and local process, a federal executive appointment of a [point of contact], a face-to-face visit to ensure they’re compliant, and then as a backup, the [FBI] database check to verify they’re a valid agency,” said Mike Cannon, the director of the DLA division that runs the 1033 program. “With those controls in place, I’m confident this won’t happen again.” DLA has taken “positive steps in the right direction” Merritt said, but emphasized that GAO will be closely monitoring continued implementation. [Source: Defense One | Caroline Houck | July 27, 2017 ++]

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## Transgender Troops Update 07 ► Trump Bans Their Serving

President Trump has announced that transgender Americans will not be allowed to serve “in any capacity” in the U.S. military. On Wednesday morning, he tweeted that the U.S. military “must be focused on decisive and overwhelming victory and cannot be burdened with the tremendous medical costs and disruption that transgender in the military would entail.”

Former Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter had announced last June that transgender individuals would be able to serve openly in the military. He issued guidance for medical care for these soldiers—including those who transitioned during their service—as well as training military leaders. Since then, it has been the military’s policy not to discharge or deny reenlistment to service members based solely on their gender identity. The full policy was set to be implemented by July 1, 2017. But at the end of June, Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis announced a six-month delay to review the plan, assessing whether it would hurt the “readiness or lethality” of American troops.

Trump’s announcement is the latest in a set of steps his administration has taken to walk back Obama-era policies on transgender Americans. The biggest shift is the reasoning: Rather than framing his decision in the language of rights or morality, as Obama-era officials did, Trump spoke about the new transgender policy in terms of military efficiency. The decision is likely to trigger major pushback from Democratic legislators and LGBT activists who long pushed for full acceptance of transgender service members. It will also bring gender identity back into the spotlight, reigniting a culture-war debate surrounding a president who has tried to sell himself as a friend of LGBT rights.

Rand, a research think tank, estimated that there are between 1,320 and 6,630 transgender Americans currently serving in the military out of 1.3 million active-service members. While it’s impossible to know how many members would need gender-transition-related services, it’s likely that only a fraction would want to transition while in service—Rand suggested that somewhere between 29 and 129 people per year would make those requests. The “upper bound” of estimated requests was “0.1 percent of the total force,” Rand wrote. The expected costs related to these services were between \$2.4 million and \$8.4 million each year.

When Mattis announced the delay in implementing the Obama-era guidelines, he cited questions about the policy’s effect on service members’ ability to perform their duties. “Since becoming the Secretary of Defense, I have emphasized that the Department of Defense must measure each policy decision against one critical standard: will the decision affect the readiness and lethality of the force?” Mattis said, according to The Washington Post. “Put another way, how will the decision affect the ability of America’s military to defend the nation? It is against this standard that I provide the following guidance on the way forward in accessing transgender individuals into the military services.” While there has not been much research done on this question, according to Rand, policies welcoming lesbian, gay, and bisexual Americans to serve openly in the military did not have an effect. The researchers expected “little or no impact on unit cohesion, operational effectiveness, or readiness” resulting from Obama’s policy.



Legislators have also been working on potential ways to reverse or gut funding for the Obama administration's policy. Foreign Policy reported on 25 JUL that Vice President Mike Pence had been working with Republican Congressmen on amendments to the 2018 defense-spending bill that would have prohibited money from being used for medical services related to gender transition. This was a policy that many Republicans hated, although a small group of conservative legislators supported it. There's some evidence that the Trump administration's motivation is not just about military efficiency—it's also political. Jonathan Swan of Axios quoted an unnamed senior Trump administration official talking about the political consequences for Democrats who push back against the decision in 2018.

In the past, Trump has spoken supportively of LGBT rights, and on the campaign trail, he surprised some conservative backers with his cavalier attitude toward the now-infamous bathroom-bill controversy in North Carolina. At an event last April, he observed that the state's legislators were "paying a big price" for their attempt to ban transgender people from using public restrooms that match their gender identity. He said that if Caitlyn Jenner came to Trump Tower, she could use any bathroom she wanted.

His administration's policies, however, have signaled a different stance on transgender rights. Earlier this year, the Trump administration announced another transgender-related policy reversal. Under Obama, the Departments of Justice and Education had issued guidance to public schools requiring them fully accommodate transgender students, including allowing them to use bathroom and locker-room facilities that matched their gender identity. Attorney General Jeff Sessions and Education Secretary Betsy DeVos joined together to roll back that policy, citing a desire to "further and more completely consider the legal issues involved."

Trump's decision to ban transgender people from serving in the military is part of an on-going effort to undo policies Obama developed late in his presidency. While the decisions have been framed as efforts to protect the rights of states and performance of troops, they inevitably hold a culture-war valence. In that sense, Trump has just made his entry into a new kind of battle—one that tends to animate his allies and enemies, but doesn't seem to be a fight of his own. [Source: The Atlantic | Emma Green | July 26, 2017 ++]

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## **NDAA 2018 Update 06 ► More on TRICRAE Fee Increases**

In a tale between two legislative marks, the gulf widens The Senate's mark for the 2018 defense authorization bill was revealed this week. The Senate aligned itself with DoD's budget request to increase pharmacy copayments and to repeal a grandfathered TRICARE fee structure, under the guise that it is too confusing and costly. This legislative proposal goes even further and aims to raise pharmacy cost shares even higher. By contrast, the House voted to maintain the current grandfathered TRICARE fee structure and pharmacy cost shares and maintain fee increases tied to COLAs. MOAA strongly supports the House proposal to stick with the current TRICARE fee structure, which prevents disproportional fee increases foisted onto military beneficiaries.

The fee increases proposed by the Senate are nothing short of an assault on beneficiaries' hard-earned benefits. Beneficiaries are being asked, *again*, to fund readiness accounts and other DoD projects with money out of their own pockets, rather than asking the broader base of American taxpayers for their support. Sadly, this regrettable practice has become almost routine. The chart below compares TRICARE proposals from the administration, the House, and the Senate.

	Administration Budget	House bill (H.R. 2810)	Senate bill (S. 1519)
Enrollment	Repeals Grandfathered Fees	Existing (Grandfathered) Fee Structure	Repeals Grandfathered Fees
New TFL fees	No	No	No
Pharmacy fees	Tripled fees over 10-year period	Fee increases remain indexed to COLA	Fee increases more than tripled over 10 years
Fee Indexing	Health index†	COLA	Health index

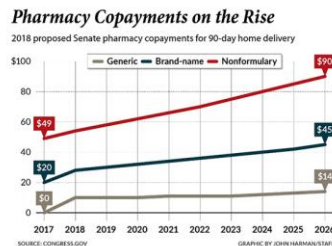
† The National Health Expenditure index far exceeds COLA increases. It is currently projected to be 5.9 percent in FY 2018.

Other provisions included in the legislation and supported by MOAA include:

- A five-year demonstration project to examine the feasibility of offering Medicare Advantage customized for TRICARE For Life (TFL) beneficiaries. Medicare Advantage plans are offered by private companies that contract with Medicare to provide Part A and Part B benefits. Medicare Advantage plan options include health maintenance organizations (HMOs), preferred provider organizations (PPOs), and others. DoD will select certain markets and contractors for the demo. TFL beneficiaries will be either enrolled or may choose to opt out of participation.
- An expedited process for evaluation and treatment of TRICARE beneficiaries requiring prenatal surgery.
- Establishing specific TRICARE policy which states hospice care can be provided to beneficiaries under age 21. This is a provision MOAA has advocated for strongly.
- Allows for the lower-cost TRICARE Reserve Select (TRS) health insurance for drilling Reserve and Guard members who are full-time federal employees.
- Proposes DoD, the VA, and the Department of Health and Human Services create a pilot program to establish an integrated health care delivery system between the military health system and other federal and private-sector health systems.

### Steep Pharmacy Cost Share Increases

Regarding pharmacy cost shares, the Senate proposal goes much further than even DoD's proposed fee hikes. The intent is to raise fees to encourage beneficiaries to fill their prescriptions for free on base. This logic presumes most retirees -- who are, incidentally, the ones who use mail order the most -- live near a base; the large majority do not. These proposed fee hikes will hit TRICARE For Life beneficiaries and members of the reserve components the hardest. A common example would be a retired beneficiary using TRICARE home delivery who is on three generic medications and uses one brand-name medication. Their current out-of-pocket cost share for a 90-day supply is \$0 for the generic medications and \$20 for the brand-name. Under the new proposal, their annual costs would increase, starting next year, from \$80 annually to \$232. Annual COLA increases would not even come close to covering these new costs. The chart below demonstrates the rise in beneficiary costs over time that would result from this proposal:



Another rationale of their proposal is to bring mail-order generic medications to parity with retail generics by adding a \$10 copayment for mail-order generics, which will rise to \$14 by 2026. The current cost is \$0. The end

result: a military beneficiary's TRICARE pharmacy benefit becomes no better than going to Wal-Mart, as the display below illustrates.

### Senate Rx Fees in Context

Retail (30 day supply)				What Wal-Mart Charges	
	Current	2018	2026	Retail (30 day supply)	
Generic	\$10	\$10	\$14	Generic	\$4
Brand name	\$24	\$28	\$45	Brand name	\$10
Non-formulary	\$50	\$49	\$90	Mail-Order (90 day supply)	
				Generic	\$10
Mail-Order (90 day supply)				Brand name	\$24
Generic	\$0	\$10	\$14		
Brand name	\$20	\$28	\$45		
Non-formulary	\$49	\$54	\$90		
MTF	Remains \$0				

Source: Congress.gov, Walmart.com

MOAA believes increasing these fees to pay for readiness improvements, fund other military personnel benefits, and fix the Widow's Tax (the Survivor Benefit Plan-Dependency and Indemnity Compensation offset) is a breach of Congress' inherent obligation to preserve and care for those who serve and have served. [Source: MOAA Leg Up | July 17, 2017 ++]

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### NDA 2018 Update 07 ► Taiwan

China reiterated it is firmly against any military contacts between the United States and Taiwan, after the passage of a new U.S. defense bill that could lead to American warships visiting Taiwan. "China firmly opposes any forms of official exchange and military contact between the U.S. and Taiwan," foreign ministry spokesman Lu Kang said 17 JUL. Kang said Beijing had made "stern representations" to Washington over the section on Taiwan in the U.S. National Defense Authorization Act for fiscal year 2018, which was passed Friday by Congress. The bill directs the Pentagon to submit a report to Congress on the possibility of reestablishing port calls between the U.S. and Taiwanese navies. It also calls for increased training for Taiwan's military and encourages it to increase defense spending. Beijing has claimed sovereignty over self-ruled Taiwan since the 1940s and tries to limit the island's international profile. [Source: VOA News | July 17, 2017 ++]

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### NDA 2018 Update 08 ► TREA 19 JUL SITREP

The House and Senate have been working on their own versions of the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), which they must pass each year. While they are behind schedule, the House of Representatives finally passed its version of the NDAA on 14 JUL and the Senate Armed Services Committee released its version a few days later.

The House NDAA authorizes increases in the size of Army, Navy, Air Force, Army Guard and Reserve, Naval and Air Reserve, and Air Guard and it fully funds the 2.4% pay raise for active duty personnel while blocking the President's ability to reduce troop pay. It also extends special pay and bonuses for servicemembers. The bill prohibits the attempt to close military medical facilities which are outside of the United States and which deployed troops and their families rely on. It also permits the services to reimburse a service member up to \$500 for a spouse's expenses related to obtaining licensing or certification in another state because of a military move. Perhaps the best

news is that the House NDAA makes no changes to TRICARE For Life, TRICARE Prime, or last year's new TRICARE Select. It also keeps the current grandfathered fee structure which means those now serving and retired servicemembers and families will not face the large fee hikes included in last year's defense authorization bill. Only those who enter the service after Jan. 1, 2018 will come under the increased fee structure.

The Senate Armed Services Committee's version of the FY2017 NDAA is a different story, however. The Senate's version of the NDAA increases TRICARE pharmacy co-payments and repeals the grandfathered TRICARE fee structure that we just received when Congress was changing the complete structure of TRICARE. The House's version on the other hand, proposes to maintain the current grandfathered TRICARE fee structure and drug co-pays with any future fee increases only tied to COLAs. The Senate uses part of the money that saves to fund permanent survivor allowances and to extend TRICARE Reserve Select along with paying for funding readiness.

If the Senate gets its way, co-pays will rise from 2018 through 2026 for prescriptions filled at TRICARE retail outlets or through its mail order program. Your cost for a 30-day supply of a brand drug at retail would climb to \$28 in 2018 and \$45 in 2026 and for a 90-day supply by mail order or 30 days of a brand drug on the DoD formulary you would pay \$28 in 2018 and \$45 by 2026. Costs for a generic drug at retail would climb from \$10 to \$14 by 2026. And while generic drugs ordered through the mail currently are free, the Senate wants to add a \$10 co-pay for mail order generic, which would increase to \$14 by 2026.

Obviously, this continues the trend of Congress wanting military personnel to pay more for their health care. Now Congress, or at least the Senate Armed Services Committee, wants to start charging co-pays for generic drugs ordered through the mail and also take away the grandfathering in of working-age retirees they voted for just last year and now force them to start paying several higher TRICARE fees. Below is a chart created by MOAA that shows the different pending proposals:

	Administration Budget	House bill (H.R. 2810)	Senate bill (S. 1519)
Enrollment	Repeals Grandfathered Fees	Existing (Grandfathered) Fee Structure	Repeals Grandfathered Fees
New TFL fees	No	No	No
Pharmacy fees	Tripled fees over 10-year period	Fee increases remain indexed to COLA	Fee increases more than tripled over 10 years
Fee Indexing	Health index <sup>†</sup>	COLA	Health index

<sup>†</sup> The National Health Expenditure index far exceeds COLA increases. It is currently projected to be 5.9 percent in FY 2018.

[Source: TREA Washington Update | July 19, 2017 ++]

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## NDAA 2018 Update 09 ► VA Medical Tests Using Dogs

The House voted 26 JUL to ban all Department of Veterans Affairs medical testing that causes pain to dogs, language that is now part of a multi-agency funding bill. By voice vote, lawmakers approved an amendment that would prevent the VA from spending any money on those tests. The bipartisan proposal was offered by Reps. Dave Brat (R-VA) and Rep. Dina Titus (D-NV). "My amendment combines three bipartisan issues — puppies, veterans, and government accountability," Brat said on the House floor. Lawmakers will now vote on the dog testing ban as part of the chamber's "minibus," a bundle of four national security appropriations bills they are angling to pass before the August recess.

Brat and Titus began working on legislation this year after reports of experimentation on dogs at the McGuire VA Medical Center in Richmond, Va., where he said the animals were given amphetamines and experienced induced heart attacks. "From what I read, the type of work that they were doing was on the level of torture," Brat said. Titus said the VA should not be using taxpayer money to fund the painful and unnecessary experimental procedures when technological advances offer other options to live animal testing. "In our culture, [dogs] are considered cherished pets, and they are a member of the family; they are not to be used for experiments," Titus said. "I firmly believe we should not be using taxpayer dollars to perform painful and unnecessary experimental procedures when we have technological advances that can move us toward alternative methods." [Source: Washington Examiner | Travis J. Tritten | July 26, 2017 ++] ++]

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## **DoD Fraud, Waste, & Abuse ► Reported 16 thru 31 JUL 2017**

**Red River Army Depot, TX** -- An ex-inspector at the Red River Army Depot in Texas must serve more than two years in prison and repay the government \$762,000 for stealing parts and selling them for scrap. **Jason Allen Autrey** of Maud in February pleaded guilty to theft of government property, in a plea agreement involving stolen military items. Prosecutors say the 37-year-old Autrey was sentenced Friday in Texarkana to 30 months in federal prison, plus must make restitution. Investigators say Autrey, from July 2015 to May 2016, stole batteries and armor kits while working as a heavy equipment mechanic inspector at the depot in Northeast Texas. [Source: The Associated Press, July 18, 2017 ++]

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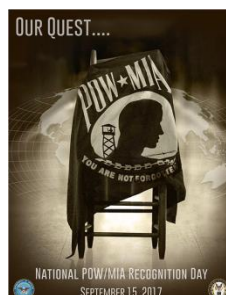
## **POW/MIA Recoveries ► Reported 16 thru 31 JUL 2017 | Sixteen**

“Keeping the Promise“, “Fulfill their Trust“ and “No one left behind“ are several of many mottos that refer to the efforts of the Department of Defense to recover those who became missing while serving our nation. The number of Americans who remain missing from conflicts in this century are: World War II more than 73,000, Korean War more than 7800, Vietnam War more than 1600, Cold War (126), Iraq and other conflicts (5). Over 600 Defense Department men and women -- both military and civilian -- work in organizations around the world as part of DoD's personnel recovery and personnel accounting communities. They are all dedicated to the single mission of finding and bringing our missing personnel home. For a listing of all personnel accounted for since 2007 refer to <http://www.dpaa.mil/> and click on ‘Our Missing’. If you wish to provide information about an American missing in action from any conflict or have an inquiry about MIAs, contact:

== Mail: Public Affairs Office, 2300 Defense Pentagon, Washington, D.C. 20301-2300, Attn: External Affairs

== Call: Phone: (703) 699-1420

== Message: Fill out form on <http://www.dpaa.mil/Contact/ContactUs.aspx>



Family members seeking more information about missing loved ones may also call the following Service Casualty Offices: U.S. Air Force (800) 531-5501, U.S. Army (800) 892-2490, U.S. Marine Corps (800) 847-1597, U.S. Navy (800) 443-9298, or U.S. Department of State (202) 647-5470. The remains of the following MIA/POW's have been recovered, identified, and scheduled for burial since the publication of the last RAO Bulletin:

### **Vietnam**

***The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency announced the identification of remains and burial update of 3 U.S. servicemen who had been previously listed as missing in action from Vietnam. Returning home for burial with full military honors are:***

-- **Air Force Reserve Capt. Joseph S. Smith**, 25, of Assumption, Ill., will be buried July 17 in his hometown. Smith was an F-100D pilot. During a combat mission over Cambodia, Smith's wingman noticed a stream of white vapor coming from the left wing of Smith's aircraft. Smith crashed a half-mile from the target. An aerial search was conducted the following day, but a recovery operation was ruled out due to intense enemy activity in the area. Smith was listed as missing in action as of April 4, 1971. Go to <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/Article/1246478/us-airman-missing-from-the-vietnam-war-accounted-for-smith-j> to read more about Capt. Smith.



-- **Air Force Capt. Robert E. Holton**, 27, of Butte, Mont., will be buried July 22 in his hometown. Holton was an F-4D pilot assigned to the 497th Tactical Fighter Squadron. On Jan. 29, 1969, Holton flew an armed reconnaissance mission over southern Laos. The flight lead cleared Holton to engage a target, and ordnance was seen impacting the ground. Aircrews reported seeing a large fireball on the ground in the vicinity of the target immediately thereafter. No radio transmissions were received, and no parachutes were seen. Efforts to make contact with the crew continued until the remaining planes were forced to leave the area due to low fuel. Holton was subsequently declared missing in action. To read about Capt. Holton refer to <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/Article/1247786/airman-missing-from-vietnam-war-accounted-for-holton>.



-- **Air Force Maj. James B. White** was assigned to the 357th Tactical Fighter Squadron. On Nov. 24, 1969, contact with White's F-105D was lost after a single pass attacking enemy troops in Laos. On November 28, wreckage thought to be from White's aircraft was spotted by an Air America helicopter. A Laotian ground team searched the area and found only small pieces of wreckage. White was subsequently declared missing in action. Interment services are pending. Refer to <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/1247773/airman-missing-from-the-vietnam-war-accounted-for-white> to read more about Maj. White.





## Korea

**The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency announced the identification of remains and burial update of 5 U.S. servicemen who had been previously listed as missing in action from the Korean War. Returning home for burial with full military honors are:**

-- **Army Cpl. John Lane, Jr.**, 18, of El Monte, Calif., will be buried July 17 in Mountain Home, Tenn. Lane was assigned to Headquarters Company, 2nd Battalion, 19th Infantry Regiment, 24th Infantry Division. In late July 1950, Lane's unit set up in defensive positions in Chinju, South Korea, after Chinese forces attacked the city. After his unit was forced to withdraw east to regroup, Lane could not be accounted for and was reported missing in action as of July 31, 1950. To read more about Cpl. Lane refer to <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/Article/1242960/soldier-killed-in-korean-war-accounted-for-lane>

-- **Army Sgt. William A. Larkins** was a member of Battery A, 503rd Field Artillery Battalion, 2nd Infantry Division. In late November 1950, his unit fought persistent attacks by Chinese forces in the Ch'ongch'on River region of North Korea. On Dec. 1, 1950, the unit came under continuous enemy mortar, small arms, and machine gun fire while moving down the main supply route toward the town of Sunchon. Larkins could not be accounted for afterwards. Interment services are pending. To read more about Sgt. Larkins refer to <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/1244586/soldier-captured-during-the-korean-war-accounted-for-larkins>.

-- **Army Pfc. Charles C. Follese**, 20, of Minn., will be buried July 25 in his hometown. Follese was a member of Company K, 3rd Battalion, 187th Airborne Infantry Regiment. On Nov. 29, 1950, Follese was part of a patrol sent to recover casualties near Hajoyang-ni, North Korea, when his patrol was ambushed. Follese could not be accounted for after the ambush and was declared killed in action on Nov. 30, 1950. Refer to <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/Article/1247812/soldier-killed-during-the-korean-war-accounted-for-follese> to read more about Pfc. Follese.



-- **Army Cpl. Edward L. Borders**, 20, of Harrisburg, Ill., will be buried July 29 in his hometown. Borders was a member of D Battery, 82nd Anti-Aircraft Artillery Battalion (Automatic Weapons), 2nd Infantry Division. Borders' unit, part of Support Force 21, provided artillery fire support for South Korean forces from Changbong-ni. On Feb. 11, 1951, Chinese forces launched a massive counter offensive, forcing the support force to withdraw. Borders could not be accounted for after the unit reassembled in Wonju on Feb. 13. A list later provided by the Chinese reported that Borders died while being held as a POW. Refer to <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/Article/1253923/soldier-captured-during-the-korean-war-accounted-for-borders> to read more about Cpl. Borders



-- **Army Cpl. Glen E. Kritzwiser**, 19, of Piketon, Ohio, will be buried August 3 in the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific in Honolulu. Kritzwiser was a member of Battery C, 15th Field Artillery Battalion, 2nd Infantry Division. Kritzwiser's unit, part of Support Force 21, provided artillery fire support for South Korean forces from Changbong-ni. On Feb. 11, 1951, Chinese forces launched a massive counter offensive, forcing the support

force to withdraw. Kritzwiser could not be accounted for after the unit reassembled in Wonju on Feb. 13. He was later reported to have been captured by the Chinese and died while being held at Camp #3, a prisoner of war camp near Changsong, North Korea. To read more about Cpl. Kritzwiser refer to <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/Article/1259469/soldier-captured-during-the-korean-war-accounted-for-kritzwiser>.

## World War II

**The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency announced the identification of remains and burial update of 8 U.S. servicemen who had been previously listed as missing in action from World War II. Returning home for burial with full military honors are:**

-- **Navy Fire Controlman 3rd Class Robert L. Pribble**, 19, of St. Petersburg, Fla., will be buried July 18 in the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific in Honolulu. Pribble was assigned to the USS Oklahoma, which was moored off Ford Island in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, when Japanese aircraft attacked his ship on Dec. 7, 1941. Pribble was one of 429 crewmen killed in the attack. To read more about FT3 Pribble refer to <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/Article/1242963/uss-oklahoma-sailor-killed-during-world-war-ii-accounted-for-pribble>.



-- **Army Air Forces 2nd Lt. Richard M. Horwitz** was a member of the 716th Bomber Squadron, 449th Bombardment Group. On Feb. 28, 1945, Horwitz and 10 other airmen departed Grottaglie Army Air Base, Italy, in a B-24J Liberator aircraft for a combat mission targeting Isarc-Albes railroad bridge in northern Italy, which was used by Germans to move personnel and equipment out of Italy. After the bombing run, Horwitz's aircraft was reported to have damaged at least two engines after skimming the mountain tops near Lake Wiezen, Austria, on the way to the rally point. No parachutes were reported and Horwitz was reported as missing in action. Interment services are pending. To read more about 2nd Lt Horwitz refer to <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/1246142/airman-missing-from-world-war-ii-accounted-for-horwitz>.

-- **Marine Reserve Cpl. Raymond C. Snapp** was assigned to Company F, 2nd Battalion, 8th Marines, 2nd Marine Division. Snapp's unit landed on the small island of Betio in the Tarawa Atoll on Nov. 20, 1943, against stiff Japanese resistance. Snapp was killed on the first day of the battle. Interment services are pending. Refer to <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/1247467/marine-killed-during-world-war-ii-accounted-for-snapp> to read about Cpl. Snapp.



-- **Marine Cpl. Anthony G. Guerriero** was assigned to Company B, 1st Battalion, 2nd Marines, 2nd Marine Division. Guerriero's unit landed on the small island of Betio in the Tarawa Atoll on Nov. 20, 1943, against stiff Japanese resistance. Guerriero was killed Nov. 21, 1943. Interment services are pending. Refer to <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/1247465/marine-killed-during-world-war-ii-accounted-for-guerriero> to read about Cpl. Guerriero.



-- **Marine Pvt. Joseph Carbon** from New York City who was killed in a Pacific island battle during World War II remains have been identified according to Military officials. The Pentagon's Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency says Pvt. Joseph Carbone, of Brooklyn, was killed on on the small island of Betio on the first day of the Battle of Tarawa on Nov. 20, 1943. Carbone was serving in the 2nd Marine Division as it assaulted the atoll that's part of the Gilbert Islands. The Marines suffered heavy casualties before securing the island after a three-day battle. Some of the Americans killed were buried in temporary cemeteries whose locations couldn't be found after the war. In 2015, the Florida-based nonprofit group History Flight found a mass grave containing the remains of 35 Marines and one sailor. Pentagon officials say interment services for Carbone's remains are pending. Refer to <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/1254413/marine-killed-during-world-war-ii-accounted-for-carbone> to read more about Pvt. Carbone

-- **Navy Fireman 1st Class Elmer T. Kerestes**, 22, of Holding Township, Minn., will be buried July 29 in Holdingford, Minn. Kerestes was assigned to the USS Oklahoma, which was moored off Ford Island in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, when Japanese aircraft attacked his ship on Dec. 7, 1941. Kerestes was one of 429 crewmen killed in the attack. To read more about 1st Class Kerestes refer to <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/Article/1253927/uss-oklahoma-sailor-killed-during-world-war-ii-accounted-for-kerestes>



-- **Navy Yeoman 3rd Class Edmund T. Ryan**, 21, of Wilbraham, Mass., will be buried August 2 in Arlington National Cemetery, near Washington, D.C. Ryan was assigned to the USS Oklahoma, which was moored off Ford Island in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, when Japanese aircraft attacked his ship on Dec. 7, 1941. Ryan was one of 429 crewmen killed in the attack. Refer to <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/Article/1258327/uss-oklahoma-sailor-killed-during-world-war-ii-accounted-for-ryan-e> to read more about Yeoman Ryan

-- **Marine Reserve Pvt. Alberic M. Blanchette** was assigned to Company K, 3rd Battalion, 2nd Marines, 2nd Marine Division. Blanchette's unit landed on the small island of Betio in the Tarawa Atoll on Nov. 20, 1943, against stiff Japanese resistance. Blanchette was killed on the first day of the battle. Interment services are pending. Refer to <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/1254415/marine-killed-during-world-war-ii-accounted-for-blanchette> to read more about Pvt. Blanchette.



[Source: <http://www.dpaa.mil> & <http://www.thepatriotspage.com/Recovered.htm> | July 15, 2017 ++]

\* VA \*



## **VA Reimbursements ► Private-Sector Doctors | Slowness Impact**

Forty House lawmakers signed onto a letter 10 JUL criticizing the Department of Veterans Affairs for slow reimbursements to private-sector doctors that they say harm their veteran constituents' credit reports. Thousands of veterans who use the Veterans Choice Program, which allows VA patients to use outside health care that is paid for by the VA, have complained their medical bills are sent to debt collectors when a timely payment is not made, according to the letter.

The situation "has negative consequences for veterans' financial standing, through no fault of their own," the letter reads. "[T]he long-term damage to credit scores could be severe. At a minimum, this increases the costs of credit and could make it more difficult, if not impossible, for veterans to secure credit for life essentials such as a car or housing." Issues with the payments to non-VA health care providers have plagued the VA since the Veterans Choice Program was created in 2014. Between then and 18 MAY of this year, the VA received 57,228 calls from veterans seeking help after the VA's delayed payments affected their credit reports, the letter states.

VA officials have said part of the problem is a result of the rush to establish the program. Congress gave the department only 90 days to do so. In an attempt to streamline reimbursements to private doctors, Congress worked with VA Secretary David Shulkin and passed legislation earlier this year that made the VA the primary payer under the Veterans Choice Program, rather than having third-party contractors pay the debts. Even with the change, the lawmakers wrote 10 JUL that they "remain concerned" that the negative credit reporting is continuing. The letter, sent to Shulkin, was led by Rep. John Delaney (D-MD), Rep. Randy Hultgren (R-IL), Rep. Julia Brownley D-CA), and Rep. Jodey Arrington (R-TX).

Delaney and Hultgren introduced legislation last year to provide a one-year grace period before debts for medical services through the Veterans Choice Program are sent to creditors. The bill was endorsed by major veterans organizations, including the Veterans of Foreign Wars, the American Legion and Paralyzed Veterans of America, but it stalled. The congressmen reintroduced the bill — the "Protecting Veterans Credit Act" — in May. [Source: Stars & Stripes | Nikki Wentling | July 10, 2017 ++]

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## **VA Caregiver Program Update 45 ► Resumption of Full Operations**

On 28 JUL the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced it is resuming full operations of the Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers. The resumption follows an 17 APR decision to temporarily suspend certain clinical revocations from the program to conduct a strategic review aimed at strengthening the program. "VA has taken immediate steps to improve the program's operations," said VA Secretary David J. Shulkin. M.D. "Our top focus during the review has been to listen, evaluate and act swiftly to make changes that will better meet the needs of our Veterans and caregivers. This does not mean our work is done. We will continue to refine and improve this important program."

VA's three-month review indicated a need for better communication about clinical revocations, improved internal processes and procedures, and additional staff training. bFollowing the review, VA issued a new directive outlining staff responsibilities, Veteran and caregiver eligibility requirements, available benefits and procedures for revocations from the program. VA also conducted mandatory staff training on the new directive and implemented standardized communications and outreach materials to educate Veterans and caregivers about the program. Additionally, the VA will be formalizing additional ways to ensure that the experience of Veterans' families,

caregivers and survivors are understood and that, where needed, new, or additional, assistance is explored. The VA is committed to listening to the voices of those who care for Veterans of all eras and to collaborating to improve services, outreach and awareness.

The caregiver program website has also been redesigned, and now includes a section linking caregivers and Veterans of all ages to resources and home- and community-based services available through VA's Geriatrics and Extended Care programs. More information on the program is available at [www.caregiver.va.gov](http://www.caregiver.va.gov). [Source: Veterans Health | July 28, 2017 ++]

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## **VA Secretary Update 59 ► Five Key Priorities**

On 24 JUL Secretary of Veterans Affairs Dr. David J. Shulkin addressed an audience of VFW and Auxiliary members at the Veterans of Foreign War (VFW) 118th National Convention in New Orleans. In his remarks, Shulkin spoke on the five key priorities he has identified to transform VA. The first of those five priorities is to give Veterans greater choice. "When I talk about greater choice, right now we have a system that I would call a rules-based system," Shulkin said, highlighting how administrative rules, such as how far a Veteran lives from a VA, dictates whether that person can get care in their local community. "I believe we need a system that's not based on rules, but is based on your clinical needs." "We want that clinical flexibility to be able to allow Veterans to be able to get the right care at the right place," Shulkin told the VFW convention attendees.

The secretary's comments echoed an editorial that appeared earlier that day in USA Today that community care, or private capacity, and VA's internal capacity are not mutually exclusive. "We are ramping up both simultaneously in order to meet the health care needs of the Veterans we are charged with serving," he wrote. VA is embarking on the largest transformation and modernization effort in recent history. Secretary Shulkin recently established the VA Office of Accountability and Whistleblower Protection and announced that the VA will dispose of 430 vacant buildings in 24 months. In June, the President signed into law the VA Accountability and Whistleblower Protection Act and Secretary Shulkin announced that the VA will adopt a joint electronic health record system integrated across all Department of Defense and VA components.

Go to <https://www.facebook.com/VFWFans/videos/10154517206152136> to watch Secretary Shulkin's remarks, including more on the top five VA priorities. [Source: Vantage Point | July 27, 2017 ++]

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## **VA Medical Marijuana Update 31 ► House Won't Allow Floor Debate**

House Republican leaders on 25 JUL ended marijuana supporters hopes for a floor debate on allowing veterans to talk about using cannabis to treat a variety of ailments with their Veterans Affairs doctors. The bipartisan proposal, submitted as an amendment to a broader appropriations bill set for a full chamber vote later this week, was rejected by the House Rules Committee. In a statement, sponsor Rep. Earl Blumenauer, (D-OR) criticized the decision. "All we want is equal treatment for our wounded warriors," he said. "This provision overwhelmingly passed on the House floor last year and bipartisan support has only grown. It's outrageous that the Rules Committee won't even allow a vote for our veterans. "They deserve better. They deserve compassion."

Under current law, VA medical providers are prohibited from discussing or recommending medical marijuana as a treatment option with veterans, even if they live in a state where the drug is legal. Earlier this month, Senate appropriators included language overturning that ban in their fiscal 2018 budget plans for VA. The House passed a similar plan last year by a 233-189 vote, and supporters were hopeful for a similar result this year. But leadership

instead tossed out the amendment, ending the debate. The issue comes at a complicated time for marijuana advocates. The drug is currently legal for medical use in 29 states and for recreational use in eight. But it's still classified as a dangerous addictive with "no accepted medical use" by the federal government, a distinction that has severely limited scientific research on the substance.

Advocates have pointed to a host of limited and international studies lauding cannabis for pain management. Last year, officials from the American Legion adopted a resolution supporting expanded research for its potential benefits to veterans suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, depression and other wounds of war. So far, the White House has given no indication it plans to change the federal stance on marijuana. Attorney General Jeff Sessions in public remarks has promised increase scrutiny on states that allow its legal sale, and repeated the belief that the drug has no medicinal value. VA Secretary David Shulkin has been softer in his approach, saying he would be open to reviewing whether the substance has benefits for veterans.

Blumenauer promised to continue his legislative fight. His proposal was co-sponsored by nine Republicans and eight Democrats, but faces a difficult legislative path as a stand-alone measure in the House. "Given that veterans are more likely to commit suicide or die from opiate overdoses than civilians, our fight to provide them safer alternatives won't stop here," Blumenauer said. "We have stronger support in the House and Senate than ever before, and we will keep advocating for a more rational approach." [Source: ArmyTimes | Leo Shane | July 26, 2017 ++]

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## **VA FMP ► Medical Claims | Effective 1 OCT in Philippines**

As anticipated, final notice has been received and effective October 1, 2017, VHA Foreign Medical Program (FMP) will assume medical claims processing responsibilities in the Philippines for all care in the community to include inpatient and outpatient care, diagnostic and laboratory tests, medications, refills, prosthetics and durable medical equipment reimbursement. VA Manila will no longer be issuing LOAs, pre-authorize treatment or reimburse Veterans for care received outside the VA Manila Outpatient Clinic after September 30, 2017.

Under FMP, Veterans will pay for treatment and submit official paid receipts with admission and treatment records to the address provided on the fact sheet. Local community providers also have the option of billing FMP directly for reimbursement. This program requires no pre-authorization or letter of authorization (LOA) before visiting a community provider as long as the medical care received is for a VA-rated service-connected condition. Treatment for non-service connected medical care is at the expense of the Veteran and cannot be reimbursed by the FMP.

Veterans living in the Philippines who choose to receive outpatient care at the VA Manila Outpatient Clinic can do so for their VA service-connected conditions. The clinic will continue to provide primary and specialty care, medications and refills ordered by a VA physician and performs laboratory and other ancillary tests in the clinic at no cost to the Veteran. When a service, procedure, test or specialist is not available in the clinic, the Veteran will be advised to seek treatment in the community, pay for treatment and submit official paid receipts with admission and treatment records to the FMP to be reimbursed. The Veteran's community provider may also choose to send a bill for reimbursement directly to FMP. A service connected Veteran may be treated for non-service connected disabilities within the limits of the outpatient clinic, as stated in 38 U.S.C. § 1724(e). Follow up services required for non-service connected conditions that are beyond the capabilities of the clinic, will be the Veteran's responsibility, including obtaining services and paying all related cost.

For questions about the FMP, Veterans can contact FMP customer service center Monday through Friday between the hours of 5:05 a.m. and 3:45 p.m. PST at (303) 331-7590 or visit the VHA Office of Community Care



website at <https://www.va.gov/purchasedcare/programs/veterans/fmp/index.asp> for more information. [Source: VA Manila | Bobby Reyes | July 26, 2017 ++]

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## **PTSD Update 232 ► Disability Claims Tripled in Last Decade**

More than one in five veterans receiving federal disability payouts suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder, a figure that has spiked in the last decade. Veterans Affairs officials told lawmakers 25 JUL that the number of disability cases related to PTSD has nearly tripled in that time, from around 345,000 cases in fiscal 2008 to more than 940,000 cases today. Service-connected PTSD payouts now make up 22 percent of all veterans receiving compensation benefits from the department. That includes all age groups, not just veterans from the recent wars.

But lawmakers still worry that current VA rules may still be excluding thousands more veterans eligible for the disability payouts, which are tied to injuries suffered during military service. “One-size fits all does not work when it comes to PTSD,” said Rep. Mike Bost (R-IL), and chairman of the House Veterans’ Affairs subcommittee on disability assistance. “When you’re dealing with a human mind damaged by some really bad circumstances, we have to do everything we can. I know we’re trying, but we hear concerns from constituents on a regular basis.”

The statistics came as part of a committee hearing looking at whether department health officials are handling PTSD claims effectively. Ronald Burke, assistant deputy undersecretary at the Veterans Benefits Administration, said much of the spike in these claims stems from decisions in 2010 to relax eligibility and evidentiary rules for PTSD diagnoses. That, coupled with more public attention on the topic and more awareness among veterans, led to more veterans from all eras to file claims. Burke said the department now has 16 training courses focused on handling the cases, in an effort to ensure any affected veteran is identified and helped.

But Gerardo Avila, deputy director at the American Legion’s rehabilitation division, said his group still sees multiple cases where veterans are rejected for a lack of proof or because of rushed evaluations. “We have seen cases where a veteran presents extreme systems, but is only given a 30 or 40 percent (disability) rating,” he said. “It can be overturned, but it’s not likely to happen. And that could mean years of waiting for an appeal.” Several lawmakers also expressed concerns about evaluators focusing too much on a symptoms checklist for PTSD, rather than fully assessing the problems before them.

Burke said officials do emphasize that broader view, and “remain committed to providing high-quality and timely decisions” on the issue. That includes possible changes in months and years to come. Both VA and Defense Department officials have worked in recent years to combat the stigma of seeking help for mental health issues such as PTSD. [Source: NavyTimes | Leo Shane | July 25, 2017 ++]

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## **VA Medical Marijuana Update 30 ► SAC Amendment Approved**

The amendment to force the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs to make cannabis available to veterans who need it was recently approved by the Senate’s Appropriations Committee on a 24-to-7 vote. The department would be prohibited from interfering with a veteran’s ability to obtain weed, and from blocking health care providers from giving pot to veterans where it’s legal, according to language attached to a military appropriations bill. “The amendment ensures that veterans have equal access to all of the medical options available in their local community, to include medical marijuana in states where it is legal,” according to a statement from the office of co-author Steve Daines, a Montana Republican.

Clearing the VA's blockade of medical marijuana has been attempted before. In 2015, military spending legislation supported by Southern California U.S. Rep. Dana Rohrabacher would have allowed Veterans Affairs–affiliated doctors to write medical marijuana recommendations in states like California. It was rejected in the House. And, last year, language very similar to the latest amendment made it through the House and Senate but was stripped in a last-minute move by Republican leaders in the House Appropriations Committee. This time around, there seems to be more hope for the legislation co-authored by Oregon Democrat Jeff Merkley.

"It has an excellent chance of passing the Senate, as it did last year," Tom Angell, chairman of the group Marijuana Majority, said via email. "Unfortunately last year, the conference committee stripped the language when reconciling both chambers' bills, something we will be working extra hard to prevent this year," Angell said. "I think the increase in support in the Senate committee, plus the new state laws coming on board, is an indication we are well-positioned." But support from key Republicans, including the administration of President Trump, who could veto the bill or exert pressure to strip the language again, is up in the air, Paul Armentano, deputy director of the pro-marijuana organization NORML, said via email. Attorney General Jeff Sessions, in particular, has expressed disdain for states' medical marijuana legalization.

"Given the rising level of both public and political support in favor of medical cannabis access, particularly for veterans — coupled with the increasing lobbying efforts from veterans' groups like the American Legion and AMVETS — I would not only anticipate members of the House and Senate to once again approve this reform legislation but also to do so in greater numbers than last year," Armentano said. "The question that remains, however, is whether high-ranking Republicans or the Trump administration will respect this vote, or will they turn their back on the needs of veterans and the will of the overwhelming majority of voters."

The Department of Veterans Affairs itself has long opposed medical cannabis for those who have fought for our country. It calls medical pot use among vets "a growing concern" and casts doubt on the science supporting weed's use for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). "There is no evidence at this time that marijuana is an effective treatment for PTSD," according to a VA fact sheet. Huntington Beach's Rohrabacher said last year, "Americans have found relief in regulated medical marijuana. These include stroke victims, epileptics, veterans afflicted with post-traumatic stress and those suffering from the effects of chemotherapy, among many other health-related issues." [Source: LA Weekly | Dennis Romero | July 17, 2017 ++]

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## **GDx App Project** ► **Enables Personalized Medicine To Be A Reality For Vets**

When a new system being field tested this summer goes live, VA will become the first U.S. health care organization ever to put genetic testing data into the hands of patients via a mobile application. The system, named **Genetic Diagnostic Testing App** — called GDx — will put individual genetic information in the hands of Veterans — providing them with access to their information anywhere, anytime, as well as the ability to share it with VA and non-VA providers alike. In short, medical professionals will be able to provide highly-individualized care and better treat their patients. To explain a bit more in detail, GDx project leads Dr. Michael Icardi, national director of VA Pathology and Laboratory Medicine Science, and Dr. Julie Lynch, nurse research scientist at VA Informatics and Computing Infrastructure answered the following questions about this initiative.

### **Question: What is the current landscape of clinical genetic testing at VA?**

**A:** VA is one of the country's largest consumers of clinical genetic testing, and it has been on the forefront of developing informatics systems to ensure appropriate use of precision medicine. Currently, if Veterans are sent for clinical genetic testing, in most cases their specimen is sent to a commercial laboratory outside of VA. Test results are then sent to the VA clinician through a 10-12 page faxed report. Sometimes these tests are single gene tests, other times these tests are gene panels that analyze anywhere from 100 to 300 genetic variants to determine whether the Veteran has clinically actionable mutations. This data is not currently standardized or stored within Veterans

Health Information Systems and Technology Architecture (VistA), so it's not easily searchable within the medical record. In addition, if Veterans go elsewhere for care, then they have to fill out forms for the facility to request hard copies of those reports. The same is true for Veterans tested on the outside coming into the VA system. They have to remember where the test was done and fill out a request for the information to be sent to VA. That takes time. If the facility can't get the reports soon enough, then the patient has to be retested.

**Q: How does GDx change this?**

**A:** The GDx backend is the system that captures the data, indexes it and makes it computable. Both VA and outside labs send their data to GDx. So, using the provider version of the app, a VA clinician can pull up the data, regardless of where it was done. But even better, the Veteran version of the app puts the information into the hands of Veterans. Now, they can walk in the door at a cancer facility, for example, and say "Here is my information. Let me Airdrop it to you." It becomes a patient-mediated data exchange – the patient is now in control of this specialized data.

**Q: Why is having this genetic data in your pocket so important?**

**A:** A patient's genetic data informs diagnosis, prevention and treatment of several diseases, so it is extremely important that both patients and their health care providers understand whether patients have a clinically actionable genetic variant. Delivering this directly to the patient via an app is something that no other health care organization has done. It's historic and will be life changing for the Veteran. This makes individualized care, that is, personalized medicine a reality for Veterans. It puts the power of diagnosis and treatment in their hands.

**Q: Can you explain further what you mean by that?**

**A:** I can offer three examples. First, let's say you've been diagnosed with cancer. They've done the molecular genetic tests to identify tumor mutations. This allows you to find the best treatment program for your cancer. Treatments, such as immunotherapy, can be ordered based on the genetic characteristics of your particular tumor. There is no more one size fits all.

But this isn't just for cancer. Here's a second example. GDx creates a database that pharmacists can access to make prescribing decisions. If you're a Veteran, they might order a drug metabolism profile for you. They can then look at whether you're a fast metabolizer of codeine versus a slower metabolizer, for example, and customize your dosage accordingly.

Finally, for those who have an infectious disease – hepatitis or HIV, for example -- the genetic information pinpoints what your treatment options should be. You can take a New York City workup with you to Iowa. It makes treatment uniform across the board.

**Q: Are there long-range benefits to collecting and storing this genetic information?**

**A:** Absolutely. Before, we only kept the information that was pertinent to the clinical issue at the time. Now, with GDx, in five or six years when genetic research reveals more to us, we'll be able to go back and look at a patient's data afresh and generate an updated report. This really is assembling a genetic testing database that will be available for future clinical analysis to directly benefit the patient.

The GDx team's goal is to wrap up the last leg of development by the end of August. Stay tuned for more information about GDx in the coming months. Both the provider and Veteran versions of the app, as well as extensive training materials, will be available on the VA App Store when the system goes live nationwide.



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## **VA Vet Choice Update 55** ► **Emergency Funding Opposed by Vet Groups**

Leading veterans groups are opposing House lawmakers plans to extend the Veterans Affairs Choice program with emergency funding, saying the plan unfairly shifts needed monies away from department programs. But supporters say the move simply keeps the much-needed health care program afloat while lawmakers sort-out long term fixes, and that blocking the move could harm thousands of veterans. In a letter sent out Saturday, leaders from a coalition of eight veterans groups said they opposed a House plan set for votes 24 JUL that would provide about \$2 billion for VA Choice services for the next six months. The funds would come from trims to other VA programs, an offset that the groups said are not in themselves a problem.

However, the groups said they oppose “legislation that includes funding only for the ‘Choice’ program which provides additional community care options, but makes no investment in VA and uses ‘savings’ from other veterans benefits or services to pay for the Choice program.” They see using savings from VA program changes to pay for additional outside VA care as a step toward privatization of the department, a charge that administration and congressional officials have repeatedly denied.

The coalition — which includes Veterans of Foreign Wars, AMVETS, Disabled American Veterans, Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, Military Officers Association of America, Military Order of the Purple Heart, Vietnam Veterans of America and Wounded Warrior Project — calls for lawmakers to vote down the “unacceptable choice funding legislation” and “instead work with the Senate to reach a bipartisan, bicameral agreement.” House lawmakers are scheduled to leave town 28 JUL for an extended summer recess, and VA officials have said they Choice program will run out of money by mid-August without new funding lines. Department officials have already begun shifting some veterans who use the program for health care into other VA systems.

The Choice program, created by Congress in 2014, had been controversial for Republicans and Democrats alike. Supporters of the program have expressed frustration with what they call extensive bureaucracy governing the program, which allows veterans who face significant wait times or travel times for VA care to see private physicians at the department's expense. Critics have labeled the program the first step towards privatization of VA responsibilities, since it have broadened the number of veterans seeking care outside department hospitals and clinics.

Last week, amid criticism from Democrats of plans that would link short-term funding fixes for the Choice program to more ambitious facility assessment plans, House Veterans' Affairs Committee Chairman Phil Roe (R-TN) announced he would push for a simpler, six-month fix to the impending deadline. Roe's spokeswoman, Tiffany Haverly, on 22 JUL said Roe is “committed to working in a bipartisan and bicameral way to ensure veterans have access to the health care they've earned and deserve. “With that said, Secretary Shulkin and other VA officials have made it clear that allowing the Choice Program to run out of money would be a disaster for veterans, which is why he's moving quickly to ensure the program has sound funding while Congress works on other reforms.”

Among the veterans groups absent from the opposition letter were the American Legion and Paralyzed Veterans of America. In a separate announcement, PVA leaders called for all parties involved to “continue with open minds” in the debate. “We are not prepared to simply oppose offsets because we believe VA is open to strengthening healthcare for our most catastrophically disabled veterans, which matters above all else,” group executive director Sherman Gillums Jr. said. Dan Caldwell, policy director of Concerned Veterans for America, offered full support for the House proposal and blasted the veterans coalition for “using this moment to advance their anti-choice agenda instead of doing what's best for veterans. “Chairman Roe and his committee have put forward a practical solution

that will address the problem quickly and in a fiscally responsible manner. This plan will ensure that the veterans who have been able to successfully use the choice program will not face any lapses in care due to the program running out of money in the coming weeks.”

But the opponents said they are “committed to building a future veterans health care system that modernizes VA and integrates community care whenever needed,” just not the way the current bill is structured. “If new funding is directed only or primarily to private sector ‘choice’ care without any adequate investment to modernize VA, the viability of the entire system will soon be in danger,” their letter stated.

Whether the plan could change again before the Monday vote remains unclear. House and Senate lawmakers have been working throughout the weekend on the issue, with numerous proposals rumored and denied for days. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane | July 23, 2017 ++]

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## **VA Vet Choice Update 56 ► Answers to 10 Questions About Choice**

### **1. Am I eligible for the Veterans Choice Program?**

To be eligible for the program, you must be enrolled in VA health care and must also meet at least one of the following criteria:

- You are told by your local VA medical facility that you will need to wait more than 30 days for an appointment.
- Your residence is more than a 40 mile driving distance from the closest VA medical facility with a full time primary care physician.
- You need to travel by air, boat, or ferry to the VA medical facility closest to your house.
- You face an unusual or excessive burden in traveling to the closest VA medical facility based on a geographic challenge, environmental factor, medical condition, or other specific clinical decisions. Staff at your local VA medical facility will work with you to determine if you are eligible for any of these reasons.
- You reside in a State or a United States Territory without a full-service VA medical facility that provides hospital care, emergency services and surgical care, and reside more than 20 miles from such a VA medical facility. Note: This criterion applies to Veterans residing in Alaska, Hawaii, New Hampshire, Guam, American Samoa, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Also note that some Veterans in New Hampshire reside within 20 miles of White River Junction VAMC and are therefore not eligible for the Veterans Choice Program.

### **2. What if I think I am eligible?**

- Call the VCP Call Center at 866-606-8198 or visit the Veterans Choice Program website to verify eligibility and set up an appointment here.

### **3. Can I call my non-VA doctor to make an appointment?**

- No, please call the VCP call center at 866-606-8198 to verify eligibility and set up an appointment.

### **4. How is the 40 mile calculation determined?**

- This calculation is based on the driving distance from your permanent residence (or active temporary address) to the closest VA facility, including Community-Based Outpatient Clinics and VA Medical Centers. You are eligible if you live more than 40 miles driving distance from the closest medical facility that has a full-time primary care physician.

### **5. If I am eligible for the Veterans Choice Program, can I receive Beneficiary Travel for travel to appointments with a VCP provider?**

- Yes, the Choice Act does provide funding to pay for travel to VCP providers for Veterans who are eligible for Beneficiary Travel. However, it did not provide any new Beneficiary Travel eligibility.

**6. If I didn't get my Choice Card or I lost my Choice Card, what do I do?**

- You do not need your Choice Card to access the VCP. If you didn't receive a Choice Card or lost your Choice Card, simply call 866-606-8198 to find out if you are eligible and to make an appointment.

**7. How do I get my prescription filled if I use the Veterans Choice Program?**

- The community provider you see through the VCP can issue a prescription for up to a 14 day supply of a national formulary drug. You may have the 14 day supply filled at any non-VA pharmacy of your choosing.
- Prescriptions can be reimbursed through the Business Office/Non-VA Care Coordination Office at VA facilities. This reimbursement may take 30-45 days to process, and requires a copy of the prescription and the original receipt. Veterans cannot be reimbursed at the VA Pharmacy.
- For prescriptions needed past 14 days, please follow standard procedures to fill a prescription at the VA pharmacy.

**8. If I use the Veterans Choice Program, does that affect my VA health care?**

- No, not at all. You do not have to choose between the two. The VCP is here to make it easier to access the care you need. VA is building a high-performing integrated health care network to deliver the best of VA and the community. This integrated network will give Veterans more choices to access care and ensure care is delivered where and when you need it.

**9. What is my responsibility for co-payments to my other insurance?**

- Nothing. VA is now the primary coordinator of benefits for VCP, so you are only responsible for your VA copayment.
- Your VA copayment will be determined by VA after the care is provided. VA copayments will be billed by VA after the appointment.

**10. How does the new VCP extension law affect me?**

- Public Law 115-26, enacted April 19, 2017, made three key changes to help improve the VCP. The law removed the expiration date for the program, made VA primary coordinator of benefits for services provided to you, and it removed barriers with sharing necessary health information with community providers.

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Refer to the Veterans Choice Program website <https://www.va.gov/opa/choiceact> for more information about the program, its benefits, and eligibility criteria. Providers interested in participating must establish a contract with one of the contractors, Health Net Federal, or TriWest Healthcare Alliance. For more information, about how to participate please visit Veterans Choice Program website for providers at [https://www.va.gov/opa/choiceact/for\\_providers.asp](https://www.va.gov/opa/choiceact/for_providers.asp). [Source: VHA Update | July 25, 2017 ++]

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**VA Vet Choice Update 57 ► Proposed Fix Fails 219-186**

House Republicans suffered a surprising setback during a full chamber vote on veterans funding 25 JUL which put in doubt the future of the controversial Veterans Affairs Choice Program, with just days left to find another solution. A proposed fix that would have provided \$2 billion to the health care program over the next six months failed to get enough votes to meet parliamentary requirements, failing despite a majority-backed tally of 219-186. Under rules, a two-thirds majority was needed to advance the measure.



The move left Republican leaders upset at what they saw as a reversal of an agreement with key chamber Democrats on the program fix. During floor debate, House Veterans' Affairs Committee Chairman Rep. Phil Roe (R-TN) called the measure a critical and direct solution to the problem. "We know that veteran demand for care through Choice has never been higher and consequently the remaining money in the Veterans Choice Program will run out in mid-August, a few short weeks from now," he said. "We cannot allow that to happen."

House members were scheduled to start their extended summer recess 28 JUL. VA officials have said without additional money for the Choice accounts in the next few weeks, thousands of veterans will be forced off the program, and thousands of third-party administrators will be cut off from the department's systems. But Democrats and a coalition of eight veterans groups protested using offsets from trims to existing programs and fee reauthorizations for the Choice program, one of several VA programs which reimburses private-sector physicians for veterans' healthcare services. The groups said that money should come from sources outside VA programming, since the money was not directly returning to the department. Roe and supporters of the plan called that confused logic.

- "First, providing money for Choice is providing money to support the VA health care system," he said. "Choice is a VA program and through it, veteran patients were able to access care that have otherwise been required to be long."
- "Second, the idea that Congress has been pouring money into VA community care programs to the detriment of addressing VA's in-house capacities is erroneous. VA's bottom line has increased substantially since the turn of the century while most other government agencies have seen theirs stagnant."

While opposing the plan, committee ranking member Rep. Tim Walz (D-MN) defended Roe for working towards compromise and rejected accusations the Republican funding plan amounted to "privatization" of VA services. But he also said he did not believe the fix would work. "It's apparent in the Senate that (this plan) will not pass," he said. "We will not have money for the Choice Program ... If we can't find compromise that gets something across the finish line, that actually does something for veterans, everything else is just message for politics." Last week, Republican leaders believed Democrats had signed off on the six-month fix, after committee officials pulled back an even broader plan that linked the extra Choice money to other facility assessment work and department reforms.

In a post-vote statement, Roe said he was disappointed "the concerns raised on the House floor today were not mentioned during what I thought was an open and honest conversation" in recent days. But Democratic officials said that was before the offsets were clear, and before significant opposition from veterans groups emerged. They had hoped Republicans would keep working for a different solution before bringing the disputed plan to a full chamber vote. Neither side presented an immediate plan for a new fix. Meetings between House and Senate committee members are set for later this week.

Meanwhile, VA officials have promised an overhauled Choice plan in coming months, to include less bureaucracy and clearer eligibility rules for the program based on medical need instead of geographical location. The program was flush with money as recently as last spring, when lawmakers passed legislation to remove deadlines for funding expiration. But in the last few months, usage has spiked significantly, with nearly \$2 billion spent in less than half a year. The Choice vote failure was a negative mark on an otherwise upbeat day for veterans' legislation in the chamber. Eight other measures related to VA, including an expansion of GI Bill benefits for reservists and wounded veterans, all received bipartisan backing in the House. They're expected to be passed later in the week. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane | July 24, 2017 ++]

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## **VA Vet Choice Update 58 ► \$3.9 Billion Emergency Spending Package**

Members of Congress reached agreement 28 JUL with a vote of 114-0 on a \$3.9 billion emergency spending package to fill a shortfall in the Department of Veterans Affairs' program of private-sector care, seeking to avert a

disruption to medical care for thousands of veterans. The deal includes additional money for core VA health programs, something insisted on by veterans' groups. But it also sets aside \$2.1 billion over six months to continue funding the Choice program, which provides federally paid medical care outside the VA and is a priority of President Donald Trump. VA Secretary David Shulkin has warned that without legislative action Choice would run out of money by mid-August, causing delays in health care for thousands of veterans.

The proposal also would devote \$1.8 billion to authorize 28 leases for new VA medical facilities and establish programs to make it easier to hire health specialists. That cost would be paid for by trimming pensions for some Medicaid-eligible veterans and collecting fees for housing loans. A House vote was planned 28 JUL, before members were to begin a five-week recess. The Senate is finishing up business for two more weeks and would also need to approve the measure. Leaders of the House and Senate Veterans' Affairs Committees all signed off on the deal Thursday night, after several weeks of fractured negotiations.

In a joint statement, Senate committee chairman Johnny Isakson (R-GA) and ranking member Jon Tester, (D-MT) praised the compromise. "We are glad that veterans will continue to have access to care without interruption," the statement said. "While this is only a short-term fix to the problem, we pledge to continue working together to find a long-term solution." Major veterans' groups had opposed the original House plan as an unacceptable step toward privatization, leading Democrats to block that bill on Monday. That plan would have trimmed VA benefits to pay for Choice without additional investments in VA infrastructure.

Put in place after a 2014 wait-time scandal at the Phoenix VA hospital, the Choice program allows veterans to receive care from outside doctors if they must wait 30 days or more for an appointment or drive more than 40 miles to a VA facility. House Veterans' Affairs Committee Chairman Phil Roe (R-TN) said 27 JUL that the six-month funding plan was urgently needed and would give Congress more time to debate broader issues over the future of the VA. He was joined by Rep. Tim Walz, the panel's top Democrat. In a statement released before the deal was finalized, Shulkin praised the agreement and urged the House to act swiftly. The legislation "will greatly benefit veterans," he said.

Still, while the agreement may avert a shutdown to Choice, the early disputes over funding may signal bigger political fights to come. During the 2016 campaign, Trump criticized the VA for long wait times and mismanagement, saying he would give veterans more options in seeing outside providers. At an event Tuesday night in Ohio, Trump said he would triple the number of veterans "seeing the doctor of their choice" as part of an upcoming VA overhaul. His comments followed a warning by the leader of the Veterans of Foreign Wars against any Trump administration effort to "privatize" the VA. Speaking 24 JUL at its national convention in New Orleans, outgoing VFW National Commander Brian Duffy criticized the initial House plan as violating Trump's campaign promise to VFW that it "would remain a public system, because it is a public trust."

Shulkin announced the budget shortfall last month, citing unexpected demand from veterans for private care and poor budget planning. To slow spending, the department last month instructed VA medical centers to limit the number of veterans it sent to private doctors. "This situation underscores exactly why Congress needs to pass broader and more permanent Choice reforms. Even after they finish scrambling to fund this flawed program, too many veterans will still be trapped in a failing system and will be unable to seek care outside the VA when they want to or need to," said Dan Caldwell, policy director of the conservative Concerned Veterans for America.

Currently, more than 30 percent of VA appointments are in the private sector, up from fewer than 20 percent in 2014, as the VA's more than 1,200 health facilities struggle to meet growing demands for medical care. VA's fiscal 2017 budget totaled nearly \$180 billion. [Source: MilitaryTimes | July 27, 2017 ++]

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## Gulf War Syndrome Update 42 ► Waco VA Office Claim Denial Rate 90%+

A federal report shows that a Veteran Affairs office in Texas has denied more than 90 percent of benefit claims related to Gulf War illnesses. The data from the U.S. Government Accountability Office shows that Waco's Department of Veterans Affairs denied almost 1,100 claims in 2015. A lack of a clear definition of Gulf War illness has led to issues in processing claims, the Austin American-Statesman reported. Gulf War illness has two main clinical categories: medically unexplained chronic multisymptom illness and undiagnosed illness.

Exposure to toxic elements - such as smoke from burning oil wells, depleted uranium and chemical warfare agents - are believed to have caused Gulf War illnesses. The VA estimates about 44 percent of the 700,000 Gulf War service members have developed symptoms that include joint pain, chronic fatigue syndrome and neurological problems. Only 26 percent of those veterans receive benefits. "(Gulf War illness) disability compensation claim laws and regulations need urgent overhaul," said Paul Sullivan, director of veteran outreach for the Bergmann and Moore law firm. He's a Gulf War veteran whose own illness claim remains unresolved after 25 years.

Government investigators found the VA doesn't properly educate medical examiners that are tasked with identifying the illness. As of February, 10 percent of medical examiners had completed a 90-minute web-based training course designed to help them better identify the illness. "Several VA staff noted the complexity of Gulf War illness claims and some medical examiners stated they would benefit from additional training on Gulf War illness and how to conduct these exams," office officials said in the report.

The VA has made the training course mandatory. A VA spokeswoman said Waco medical examiners are anticipated to complete the training by November. [Source: - Associated Press | July 21, 2017 ++]

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## VA Fraud, Waste & Abuse ► Reported 16 thru 31 JUL 2017



**Albuquerque, NM** — Federal prosecutors are accusing a New Mexico guardianship firm of embezzling millions of dollars from the trust accounts of their clients as part of a decade-long scheme to support what court documents describe as lavish lifestyles. The 28-count indictment against Ayudando Guardians, Inc. and co-founders **Susan Harris** and **Sharon Moore** was unsealed 19 JUL. It details charges of conspiracy, mail fraud, aggravated identity theft and money laundering. Moore and Harris were arrested and made an initial court appearance Wednesday. They were scheduled to return to court the next day to be arraigned. It wasn't immediately clear if the women had attorneys. Messages left at the company's office were not immediately returned.

Ayudando - which means "helping" in Spanish - specializes in guardianship, conservatorship and financial management services for hundreds of individuals with special needs, including disabled veterans. The company receives benefit payments from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and U.S. Social Security Administration on behalf of many clients. "The victims in this case relied upon Ayudando to manage their finances and meet their needs," said Acting U.S. Attorney James Tierney. "If the allegations in the indictment are true, the principals of Ayudando cruelly violated the trust of their clients and looted their benefits."

With a court order, federal authorities have assumed control of Ayudando’s business operations to ensure the clients’ interests are protected as the case moves forward. The case comes as a special commission created by the New Mexico Supreme Court studies the state’s overall guardianship system with the aim recommending ways it can be improved. The system was thrust into the spotlight following a series of investigative articles published by the Albuquerque Journal that raised questions about the lack of oversight and transparency.

According to the indictment made public Wednesday, Harris and Moore set up client trust and company bank accounts that only they controlled and transferred funds from client accounts to company accounts.

They are accused of using client funds to pay off more than \$4 million in charges on a company credit card that was used by the two women and their families for personal purposes. The indictment also accuses them of writing checks to themselves from company accounts, replenishing depleted client accounts with funds taken from other clients and mailing fraudulent statements to the VA. Between June 2011 and March 2014, Harris is accused of writing 12 checks that totaled nearly a half-million dollars. One check in the amount of \$50,950 was made out to Mercedes Benz of Albuquerque while another for \$26,444 was issued to an RV dealership. Other spending included more than \$140,000 on vacations, from cruises in the Caribbean to a college basketball Final Four junket. [Source: Associated Press | Susan Montoya Bryan | July 19, 2017 ++]

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**Nationwide** — It’s been reported by various sources that “**IG Squads**” from Veterans Affairs (VA) are scouring the country looking for veterans believed to be defrauding the U.S. Government. Almost daily, there are more and more reports from veterans everywhere that VA “IG Squads” are roaming the countryside spying on disabled veterans. The “IG Squads” are allegedly filming disabled veterans from drones, automobiles, and buildings close to a disabled veterans home and workplace, all in the hope of capturing enough data that might identify a veteran believed to be malingering. That is, faking an illness or physical condition for monetary gain.

Initially, one might think veterans are simply paranoid and confused. But, consider the evidence. Truth be told, there is a VA Office of Inspector General Rewards Program that the general public and veterans may participate in for the sole purpose of identifying fraud, waste, and abuse within the government. The rewards program provides cash to the individual for disclosing information concerning criminal or unlawful activities involving VA programs and personnel. Types of criminal or unlawful activity include, but are not limited to, false or fraudulent claims for benefits, medical care, services, or payment from VA to beneficiaries, survivors, fiduciaries, contractors, veterans and VA employees; theft of identity of veterans or fictitious or exaggerated military service claims against VA (including offenses known as “stolen valor”); fraud related to pharmaceutical firms’ illegal defective pricing or off-label marketing activities; acts of embezzlement, extortion and bribery committed by VA employees; theft and diversion of legal drugs by VA staff and others; sale of contraband drugs and pharmaceuticals by and to VA staff and patients; theft of VA resources and data; assaults involving VA employees and patients, including homicide, manslaughter and rape; threats against VA employees, patients, facilities, and computer systems; mortgage fraud; and workers’ compensation fraud.

There seems to no shortage of veterans and civilians eager to take on the role of watchdog for VA inspectors. Allegedly, some veterans have made it a fulltime job for themselves looking for veterans who may be defrauding the government. Veterans have identified many cases where unsuspecting disabled veterans have been spied on for weeks and convicted of fraud. Consider snippets of the following cases:

- A jury in Huntington, Kentucky, returned a guilty verdict in the trial of a Kentucky veteran for defrauding the Veterans Health Administration. Phillip M. Henderson, 50, of Olive Hill, Kentucky, was convicted following a five-day jury trial. The jury required only an hour of deliberations before finding Henderson guilty of fraud for pretending to be blind.
- In Tampa, Florida, a veteran faced a possible federal prison sentence after he admitted that he lied about being blind to collect government benefits. Although he claimed he couldn’t drive or even get around

without help, the veteran actually worked as a mailroom clerk and drove for years. The veteran, Gary W. Gray, 67, of Kenneth City, suffered a service-related eye injury while serving in the Army between 1968 and 1970. Over the years, he collected Veterans Administration benefits, claiming his disability — hypertensive retinopathy — worsened after a stroke to the point he was almost totally blind. He couldn't drive, he said, or read to handle his financial matters. He depended on his wife and other people to help him get around. But he was lying about the severity of his condition. Gray pleaded guilty to stealing government money, a charge that carries up to 10 years in federal prison. IG Squads used several methods of surveillance over several weeks showing that Mr. Gary not only was able to drive himself, but was extremely active at his place of employment.

- In Sacramento, California, a veteran was charged with fraud for faking the severity of a shoulder injury. While the veteran's shoulder injury was service-connected, the veteran was charged with fraud for pretending the injury left him permanently disabled. IG Squads filmed the veteran at a local park playing football, and using his "bad shoulder" to toss footballs more than 50 yards at a time.
- A veteran who was service-connected at 100% with PTSD, had his rating dropped to 0% after he was seen at a VA function playing tennis, and cooking BBQ for other veterans in attendance. A VA inspector used a spy-like camera-pen to record the veteran engaged in a VA social function.

At this point, you might be thinking to yourself, "The severity of my disability is real, and the VA has proof." Which, by the way, is the case for 99% of veterans with service-connected disabilities. However, all it takes is for one person to report you to the VA for fraud, and the next thing you know you're being investigated without your knowing of it. You don't want VA "IG Squads" snooping around your home or business looking for the first sign of what they believe to be fraud. This is not an attempt to frighten you or cause some degree of oversensitivity to the issue of fraud. It is only an attempt to make you aware that VA IG inspectors are watching you. Always! [Source: , USVCP Laura | Martinez | April 28, 2016

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**Rapid City, S.D.** — A Rapid City woman who pleaded guilty to stealing money from military veterans has been sentenced to five years of probation and ordered to repay at least \$45,000. The Rapid City Journal (<http://bit.ly/2vLqHwR> ) reports 41-year-old **Cassandra Koscak** worked as a representative of veterans who receive benefits from the Department of Veterans Affairs. Koscak pleaded guilty in federal court to misappropriation by fiduciary, which is punishable by up to five years in prison. Authorities say she transferred money from at least two veterans' accounts to her own. U.S. District Court Chief Judge Jeffrey Viken on 18 JUL gave prosecutors 90 days to determine the full amount Koscak must repay. Court records show she has repaid \$20,000 so far. [Source: Associated Press -| July 22, 2017 ++]

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**Jacksonville, FL** – Acting United States Attorney W. Stephen Muldrow announces the return of a two-count federal indictment charging **Jose Calderon-Fuentes** (62, Jacksonville) with stealing more than \$538,000 in government property, specifically veterans' disability benefits. The indictment notifies Calderon-Fuentes that the government intends to forfeit the alleged proceeds of the fraud. The indictment alleges that from October 1997 through April 2013, Calderon-Fuentes stole veterans' disability benefits by overstating the extent of his vision disability. Calderon-Fuentes claimed that he was unable to see any "better than hand motion or light perception," when, in reality, he knew that statement was false. The indictment further alleges that he lied when interviewed by an investigator with the Department of Veterans Affairs - Office of Inspector General. An indictment is merely a formal charge that a defendant has committed one or more violations of federal criminal law, and every defendant is presumed innocent unless, and until, proven guilty. [Source: DOJ US Attorney's Office | Middle District of FL | July 18, 2017 ++]

[flawlesshdgamer@gmail.com](mailto:flawlesshdgamer@gmail.com)

**Jacksonville, FL** — Acting United States Attorney W. Stephen Muldrow announced the return of an indictment charging **Dwayne Thomas** (21, Miami) with one count of credit card fraud and nine counts of identity theft. If convicted, he faces up to 10 years in federal prison for the credit card fraud count and up to 5 years' imprisonment on each of the identity theft counts. According to the indictment and information presented in court, Thomas was in possession of multiple credit card account numbers from Bank of America, Wells Fargo, and USAA. He also possessed the Social Security numbers of multiple former members of the military who were receiving healthcare through the Department of Veterans Affairs. Note that an indictment is merely a formal charge that a defendant has committed one or more violations of federal criminal law, and every defendant is presumed innocent unless, and until, proven guilty. [Source: DoJ Middle Dist of FL | U.S. Attorney's Office | July 20, 2017 ++]

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### **VAMC Manchester NH Update 02 ► Leaders Removed**

Top leaders at a New Hampshire Veterans Affairs Medical Center were swiftly removed from their posts 16 JUL after a scathing article portrayed the facility as unsanitary and disorganized, despite internal ratings labeling it as one of the agency's best facilities. On 15 JUL, the Boston Globe chronicled multiple problems at the VA-labeled four-star facility, including flies in surgical rooms, poorly-maintained medical equipment and an administration that ignores the best interests of patients. The newspaper quoted the center's chief of medicine — one of at least 11 whistleblowers filing complaints about conditions there — as saying he had "never seen a hospital run this poorly — every day it gets worse and worse."

In a statement 16 JUL, Shulkin called the allegations "serious" and said he was removing the director (Danielle Ocker) and chief of staff (James Schlosser) at the facility immediately. "We want our veterans and our staff to have confidence in the care we're providing," the statement said. "I have been clear about the importance of transparency, accountability and rapidly fixing any and all problems brought to our attention, and we will do so immediately with these allegations." Alfred Montoya, director of the VA Medical Center in White River Junction, Vermont, will serve as director pending a full review of the center's operations. No replacement has yet been named for Schlosser.

The moves come just weeks after the White House signed into law new accountability rules for VA workers, designed to speed up firing of employees found guilty of incompetence or negligence. However, those rules have not yet been put in place, and the moves at the New Hampshire facility appear to fall under the same workplace authorities as in the past. Shulkin has said promised to improve accountability within VA, saying that not properly punishing bad employees hurts morale across the workforce. But he has also said the new firing rules will not result in large waves of firings. His moves so far have generally drawn praise from lawmakers. On 16 JUL, Rep. Ann Kuster (D-NH) — who in the past has reported problems at the facility to the VA Inspector General — said in a statement that she appreciated the quick action. "The reports concerning the Manchester VA Medical Center are simply unacceptable," she said. "'Our veterans deserve much better.'" [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | July 17, 2017 ++]

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### **VAMC Manchester NH Update 03 ► Veterans Air Frustrations**

The interim director of the embattled Manchester VA Medical Center told nearly 100 veterans he's working to address allegations of substandard care at the facility but has acknowledged the culture can't be changed overnight. Alfred Montoya, who took over in Manchester a little more than a week ago, heard from veterans 26 JUL about shoddy care, being misdiagnosed and frustration over inadequate mental health services. "We got a lot of room for



improvement. We have to open our ears a little bit," he told The Associated Press after spending several hours with the veterans. "We have to listen to what our veterans are saying to make those improvements."

Secretary of Veterans Affairs David Shulkin recently removed the hospital's top two leaders and ordered a review by the VA's Office of the Medical Inspector after The Boston Globe reported on a whistleblower complaint filed by physicians. He also has ordered the VA's inspector general to launch its own investigation and plans to meet with the state's congressional delegation at the hospital on 4 AUG.

Montoya said he has launched an analysis of what services are missing from Manchester, recruited a part-time cardiologist and put in place a system to read echocardiograms remotely and on 28 JUL will open a center that helps veterans who have problems accessing Choice, which offers veterans federally paid medical care outside the VA. They also moved quickly to set up mobile medical facilities after a pipe failure last week caused flooding on a number of floors. "I am deeply committed to making sure we make improvements. This mission is personal," said Montoya, who spent 10 years in the Air Force.

At the town hall, the veterans said they would give Montoya a chance but doubted he would be able to change the system that many believe is responsible for the problems at the medical center. "I came with an open mind and I feel Mr. Montoya is very compassionate and very courageous for taking on this assignment," said Craig Meriwether, a Persian Gulf veteran who complained the lack of mental health services had exasperated his depression and bipolar condition. "He will do what is in his control," he said. "But unfortunately, the culture and the bureaucracy within the VA is above his head. He can make recommendations all day long. But if Washington doesn't support him by adding more funds or a full service VA hospital here in New Hampshire, his work will be at a turtle's pace."

On 25 JUL, Shulkin said that VA investigators "have been looking into the allegations in detail since early last week, and we are close to announcing a third-party panel of medical experts who will review their final report." A spokesman for Shulkin said 26 JUL the secretary also plans to meet with the 11 staffers who described a fly-infested operating room, surgical instruments that weren't always sterilized and patients whose conditions were ignored or weren't treated properly. One of those was staffers is Dr. Ed Kois, who said he's looking forward to the meeting. "I think this will be a historic first step for a VA chief to reach out to the whistleblowers and hopefully will be the start of dialogue not only toward solving issues at the Manchester VA but addressing the larger issue of VA reform nationally," he said.

He and several of the other doctors, however, said they have little confidence that the inspector general's investigation will be a "separate, wholly independent review" as Shulkin put it. They want a third-party investigation from the start, not just an outside panel to review the VA's conclusions. "I had sent a request for an investigation to the (inspector general) back in April, and they didn't even respond to my allegations at that time, so we have no faith in this," said Dr. Stewart Levenson, the hospital's chief of medicine. Kois said: "They're investigating themselves, and getting the final report rubber stamped by an independent panel who may be well-meaning but will not have enough information to form a real, valuable opinion."

Acting VA Undersecretary of Health Dr. Poonam Alaigh visited the hospital on 25 JUL and held two listening sessions with staff. Levenson said people were angry. "People got up to talk about more problems coming to light, and we seem to have gotten canned answers," Levenson said. In interviews with the Globe, former hospital director Danielle Ocker and former chief of staff James Schlosser acknowledged significant cuts in services but said the hospital was addressing the shortcomings and patient safety hadn't been compromised. The whistleblowers accuse administrators of essentially dismantling the hospital's cardiology and surgical programs. "Manchester's broken, it's as simple as that," Dr. Ed Chibaro said. [Source: Associated Press | Holly Ramer | July 27, 2017 ++]

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## Eastern Colorado HCS ► Wait Times Among Worst In Nation

Wait times for medical appointments at veterans facilities in eastern Colorado and the Denver area are among the worst in the nation, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs data show. Front Range veterans have seen little improvement in the three years since a national scandal erupted over the problem. The average wait for a primary care appointment at just the Denver VA Medical Center has grown to more than 18 days as of July 1 — three times higher than those at the main VA facility in Phoenix, where the problem was first exposed in 2014, and nearly four times the national average. The waiting period in Denver had been half of what it was in Phoenix, according to VA data released earlier this month.

Throughout the 13 hospitals and clinics that make up the Eastern Colorado Health Care System, the average wait for a primary care appointment as of 1 JUL was more than 12 days. Only Amarillo, Texas, and Palo Alto, Calif. — both smaller than ECHCS — were worse. In all, though, nearly 13.5 percent of all the appointments at the ECHCS had longer than a 30-day wait, federal data show — worst in the nation — even though the VA in 2011 said its goal was for each veteran to be seen by a doctor within 14 days.

Navy veteran Al Montoya of Denver said he has become accustomed to waiting up to three months to see a primary care doctor at the Denver facility. “It’s not always like that for everything, but primary care takes longest,” he said. “It does no good to complain, and I know they’re doing the best that they can. They’re very good people here.” The national wait-time average is 4.9 days, and about 5.8 percent of all appointments across the country had longer than a 30-day wait, according to VA data.

In May, the VA reported that more than 92 percent of all completed appointments in eastern Colorado were handled within 30 days, but that was the lowest in the nation. The average was nearly 97 percent, data show. “Not much has really changed here since what happened in Phoenix,” said Randy Proctor, an Army veteran who said he has been visiting the VA center in Denver for 30 years. “Some appointments aren’t so bad, but if it’s dental, that’s the worst. It takes a long time.”

Colorado congressmen assailed the agency for its continued — and worsening — issues over veteran care, especially after the VA battled other controversies such as the massive delays and cost overruns in constructing a new \$1.7 billion facility in Aurora, which is expected to open in the spring. “I find this deeply troubling and I will be discussing it with (VA) Secretary David Shulkin,” said U.S. Rep. Mike Coffman, R-Aurora, who is a member of the House Committee on Veterans’ Affairs and the Armed Services Committee. “Additionally, I will be spending time ... at the VA to find out why our veterans in the Rocky Mountain region are not receiving the timely care that they need and have earned through their military service.”

Congressman Ed Perlmutter (D-Arveda) said he was surprised wait times were still an issue here. “Clearly, we need to be continuously focused on how to reduce veteran wait times, and I plan to take another look at the issue,” he said. “Denver’s wait times shouldn’t be above the national average.” Sen. Cory Gardner (R-CO) said via Twitter that “this is unacceptable. Colorado veterans deserve better.”

In January 2015, not long after the wait-time scandal came to light in Arizona, the average wait time at the Denver facility for a primary care appointment was just 7.5 days, records show. Phoenix was 14 days. The current backlog for ECHCS is worst in La Junta, which showed average waiting periods of more than 24 days, up from about three days in 2015. ECHCS officials on 27 JUL said critical shortages in medical personnel — doctors, physician assistants and licensed practical nurses — make it difficult to keep up with the growing demand Colorado has seen from an increasing veteran population. And sometimes it’s simply because veterans would rather wait for a familiar face. “Veterans want to come to us,” ECHSC Chief of Staff Dr. Ellen Mangione said. “They can go elsewhere, but they choose us.”

The system currently has a 16 percent vacancy rate — there are 336 physicians — even though it offers some primary care doctors as much as \$200,000 a year in salary and additional training. “It’s a challenge to keep up with the demand,” assistant director Josh Pridgen said. “The marketplace has become very competitive.” The Denver facility has improved in one key area: the average wait for a mental health appointment has dropped from nearly 20 days in 2015 to fewer than nine days today, data show. But that is still more than double the national average.

The number of scheduled appointments in the ECHCS has grown by 41 percent in 2½ years to 91,278, data show, while those in Phoenix have risen by 48 percent to 102,363. “I know the Golden clinic has been a bright spot in providing another option for veterans, and I believe the new medical facility will be too, but we need to shorten these wait times for our veterans moving forward,” Perlmutter said. The average wait at the Golden clinic was more than seven days in 2015. Today, it is about five days, data show.

Denver insiders challenged the accuracy of VA’s national numbers, saying patients are better off today than three years ago. However, they concede that hiring medical professionals remains a problem at facilities in Colorado Springs and Pueblo, where the number of patients on waiting lists is larger than Denver. “That’s to do with not enough available people wanting to work for the VA,” said Bernie Rogoff, a volunteer veterans advocate who serves on a patient-care team at the Denver center and is a board member of United Veterans Committee of Colorado. “They are distorted (wait-time) numbers. Primary care waiting times are likely five, at most seven days, and there ain’t nothing wrong with that.”

Since the scandal broke in 2014, average wait times at the Carl T. Hayden Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Phoenix have improved dramatically, to six days for a primary care appointment. Regionally, about 7 percent of all appointments in Phoenix were outside the 30-day window. Medical staff makes their way through the Surgical Intensive Care Unit on Tuesday, June 30, 2015 at the Denver Veterans Affairs Medical Center. “VA facilities learn from each other by sharing information and best practices,” Schabert said. “But ultimately, every VA health care system is unique in a number of ways, including the demographics of its veteran population, the geography it covers, the number and size of clinics and the number and certifications of its health care professionals.”

The wait-time scandal broke in 2014 with allegations that VA hospitals intentionally falsified records to make it appear patients were being seen promptly when, in fact, they were placed on long waiting lists. Some veterans in Phoenix died waiting to see a doctor. Findings from ensuing investigations caused the creation of the Choice program, which offers veterans federally paid medical care outside the VA when waiting times exceed 30 days or the drive to a VA medical facility is more than 40 miles. Congress on 24 JUL 4 approved a \$2 billion funding shift to cover Choice expenses despite objections it took money away from other VA programs.

Through May and since its inception in 2014, the VA has issued more than 108,000 Choice program authorizations to more than 49,000 veterans in Colorado, a VA spokesman said. Mangione said she knows it’s a challenge to improve, but she won’t give up. “Am I worried about improving?” she asked before taking a long pause to respond. “Other than every morning realizing there’s a veteran behind every one of those numbers, I’m absolutely focused on doing a better job.” [Source: The Denver Post | David Migoya | July 27, 2017 ++]

**\* Vets \***



## Home Depot ► Shoplifting Policy Results in Vet's Firing

A 70-year-old Army veteran was fired from a Home Depot in Pearland, Texas, after he tried to stop a trio of shoplifters. **Jim Tinney** was working at the Houston-area Home Depot last month when he saw three men trying to steal tool sets, reports Houston ABC affiliate KTRK. In an attempt to stop the shoplifters, Tinney threw a paint roller extender toward one of their legs. The shoplifters escaped and were not hurt in the incident, according to the TV station. Two weeks after the incident, Tinney was fired for violating the company's policy not to confront shoplifters, according to KTRK.

Although he admitted that he was aware of the company's policy, Tinney said his Army training kicked in when he saw the trio attempting to flee the store. "In the Army, they train you to do things like that," Tinney said. "I just automatically went like this and threw the stick at their feet." While Tinney understands clearly that he violated the company's policy, he believes that being terminated from Home Depot was excessive, according to KTRK. "I think they could have written me up, reprimanded me, but terminate me? That's pretty strong," Tinney told the TV station. "I'm 70 years old. I need to work. I needed that job. I enjoyed working with customers figuring out what they wanted to do. It's fun."

Home Depot has not indicated any plans to reinstate Tinney, instead releasing a statement explain why the policy is in place, KTRK reports. "What I can tell you now is that we have a strict policy that only our trained security personnel can pursue and engage shoplifters," wrote Stephen Holmes, director of corporate communications at The Home Depot. "We've had deaths and serious injury over the years, and no amount of merchandise is more important than the safety of our associates and customers." The Pearland Police Department had no information on the shoplifting case, according to CBS News. [Source: ArmyTimes | Christopher Diamond | July 18, 2017 ++]

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## War on Terrorism Memorial Update 01 ► Why Wait!

Military veterans of the war on terrorism deserve a memorial. Let's hope they don't have to wait as long for it as World War II veterans did theirs. Pittsburgher Andrew Brennan, an Army veteran who flew helicopters in Afghanistan, has been promoting the idea of a national memorial in Washington, D.C., for about three years. Significant obstacles remain. Funding is one of them, but that's a worry for another day. First, Congress would have to waive a law that permits memorials to be built only 10 years or more after a war is concluded. The war on terror, however, is more nebulous than most. It's a fight against a concept, a tactic used by non-state actors, not a foreign power. It's waged on many fronts, not two or three. Unlike other wars, such as World War II, it might never end. But that's no reason to hold off giving veterans their due.

The National WWII Memorial did not open until 2004, 59 years after the war's end. Now, WWII veterans are dying at a rate of hundreds per day, and there's a rush to get as many as possible to Washington to see the memorial while they're still able to travel. The nonprofit Honor Flight Network has cobbled together money and planes to fly tens of thousands of them to Washington. Veterans of the war on terrorism shouldn't have to wait until they are 80 or 90 to visit their memorial. They reported when called, putting duty before families, careers and convenience. Recognition of their sacrifices should be prompt, too.

Rep. Tom McClintock (R-CA) is correct to point out that the 10-year-rule is intended to provide "historical context" to a war. The waiting period theoretically leads to a more fitting tribute. But 10 years is completely arbitrary; historians could provide even better context 20, 30 or 40 years afterward. While much about the war on terrorism remains unknown, the broad outlines are clear. That's enough to get started. An unconventional war

deserves an unconventional memorial, and this one should be built in a way that allows later chapters of the story to be added. Architects will find a way.

For inspiration, Congress might look at the example set 75 years ago by the people of Monongahela, Pa., who wasted no time erecting an honor roll to friends and relatives serving during WWII. Their memorial went up in June 1942, the work done by local craftsmen and the space donated by a town businessman. Planning, according to the old Daily Republican newspaper, began soon after the attack on Pearl Harbor. Two girls with brothers in the military pulled aside a red, white and blue curtain unveiling the honor roll, to which names were to be added each month. For America, the war was just getting started. But folks in Monongahela needed no more context than the empty seats at their dinner tables. Moving on a memorial now would be just thanks to veterans of the war on terrorism. It also might help to steel those of us on the home front. [Source: <http://www.freedomsback.com> | Editors | July 30, 2017 ++]

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## **WWII VETS 140 ► Andy Ramotnik | Owed \$13 Captivity Pay**

Andy Ramotnik who survived a plane crash and capture by the Germans during World War II has an axe to grind with the Department of Defense, and it centers around \$13. Andy Ramotnik flew 42 successful combat missions as a 20-year-old radio operator in the Army Air Corps during World War II, until he was shot down on his 43rd mission and captured. After nearly two years in captivity, he escaped and rejoined American troops in Austria, not far from where he was held. Following his captivity, Ramotnik received a check for \$554 — \$1 for every day in captivity — but in his eyes, the military came up short, according to WLTV, a Jacksonville, Florida ABC news affiliate, which first broke the story of Ramotnik’s miraculous survival, capture, and escape.



With the check was a letter from the Department of War that said Ramotnik was being docked \$1 for each day he was on the run — or \$13 total. According to letter, under the War Claims Act, the government “does not provide for the payment of benefits during a period of escapement.” “That’s the reason I’m unhappy!” Ramotnik exclaimed in an interview with WLTV. More than 70 years later, that still doesn’t sit well with the 94-year-old veteran — who lives in Jacksonville, Florida. Now, Ramotnik wants that money back and an explanation from the Department of Defense “I’m paying a penalty?” Ramotnik asked. “Why? I did good.”

The mission that set it all in motion launched on Oct. 4, 1943. Ramotnik’s B-25 was on a bombing run to take out a German military target in Italy, when the aircraft’s right engine was hit. As the B-25 plummeted toward the earth, Ramotnik parachuted to safety, but he was floating down toward German lines and was captured moments after he hit the ground.



After he was interrogated in Frankfurt, Germany, Ramotnik was transferred to Stalag 17-B a prison camp in Krems, Austria, where he was held for the next 19 months, but he wasn't idle. The first time Ramotnik escaped was during a forced march, when he and a fellow prisoner made a break for it, but their freedom was short-lived, and they were captured a few days later. They tried again, and in April 1945, pulled off the same stunt, ducking their captors on an unguarded forced march. This time, Ramotnik and his brother-in-arms got away. Not long after their escape, the two heard the news: The Allies had won.

They met up with American troops and were granted a 90-day rest period before Ramotnik received his discharge, and then, the letter and the check. His goal now? He just wants to close the books on the whole ordeal, and not feel like he's been penalized for doing his duty. [Source: Task & Purpose | James Clark | July 26, 2017 ++]

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## **GI Bill Update 236 ► Forever Bill Changes if Senate Passes**

Student veterans could keep their housing allowance for up to four months if their college or university closes unexpectedly, under an update to the GI Bill approved this week by the U.S. House of Representatives. Other changes would allow veterans to use their benefits - which cover tuition, housing and other education expenses - over their entire lifetime as opposed to the current 15-year time frame. In addition, benefits would be restored for veterans impacted by school closures, while funding would be increased for those studying science, technology, engineering and math. The measure must now pass the Senate and be signed by President Donald Trump to become law.

The update pertaining to housing allowances was pushed for by U.S. Rep. Dan Kildee, D-Flint Township. He said he decided to pursue the change after ITT Technical Institute, a for-profit college with campuses around the nation, suddenly closed in 2016, impacting student veterans across the nation. "When ITT Technical Institute abruptly closed its doors and left veterans in fear of losing their housing, I knew Congress needed to act," Kildee said in a statement. "Veterans should not lose their G.I. benefits or housing allowance because a for-profit school closed through no fault of their own. Veterans have earned their G.I. benefits by sacrificing for our country. We should do everything we can to support them- not make it harder for them to advance their education or keep a roof over their head."

ITT had at least five campuses in Michigan when the school announced it would close its doors. Under current law, veterans using the GI Bill must be enrolled in school to receive housing benefits, according to a news release from Kildee's office. In a statement issued after the update passed the House, U.S. Rep. Luke Messer (R-IN) said the changes would be a "big win for our veterans." "Among many improvements, the bill helps thousands of veterans who lost their GI Bill benefits when ITT Tech closed," he said. "Our military men and women count on their GI Bill benefits to build a career and life after serving our country. This bill makes sure they get that chance." [Source: Michigan Live News | Brian McVicar | July 27, 2017 ++]

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## **Cold War Recognition Certificate Update 01 ► How To Obtain**

If you served honorably on active duty, the Guard, Reserve, or as a DOD federal employee from Sept 2, 1945 to Dec 26, 1991, you are authorized the Cold War Recognition Certificate [as per section 1084 of the Fiscal Year 1998 National Defense Authorization Act]. There is the only official site on which to request Cold War Recognition Certificates, which is operated by the United States Army (the executive agency for the Cold War Recognition Program). Here's how to obtain your copy free:



1. You will need proof of your service, such as a DD Form 214 (Record of Military Service), WD AGO Form 53-55 (War Department Separation Document); or Oath of Office -- Military Personnel or Letter of Appointment.
2. Qualifying civilian service also can be proved with a Standard Form 50 (Notification of Personnel Action); Standard Form 2809 (Health Benefit Registration Form); an award certificate with employee's name, name of service or agency, and dates; or retirement forms with the employee's name, service or agency and dates.
3. Prepare, date, and sign a letter, requesting the award of the Cold War Recognition Certificate. Send the letter or request form, and a copy of your service proof to:

Commander, USAHRC  
 ATTN: AHRC-PDP-A, Dept 480  
 1600 Spearhead Division Avenue  
 Fort Knox, KY 40122-5408



**Tips:**

- Your letter must contain the phrase "I certify that my service was honorable and faithful" whether as a member of the U.S. armed forces or as a federal civilian employee during the Cold War era, or it will be rejected.
- Do not send the original of your proof of service. Send a copy. Original documentation will not be returned.
- There is a large demand for this program. Individuals normally will receive a response within 60 days; however, the turnaround time will depend upon the amount of requests received.
- A telephone help line is available at (502)613-9126.

[Source: <https://www.thebalance.com/how-to-obtain-a-cold-war-certificate-3332660> | Rod Powers | September 08, 2016 ++]

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**Vet ID Update 01 ► Florida New Veteran Designation Format**

Starting in August 2017, the Florida Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles will begin issuing a new, more secure Florida driver license and ID card. By the end of December 2017, the new credential will be available at all service centers throughout Florida and online. Previous driver license and ID cards will still be in use alongside the new credential until replaced or phased out.



The new design incorporates designations for lifetime sportsman's, boater, freshwater, saltwater and hunting licenses, as well as designations for veteran, organ donor, deaf/hard of hearing and developmentally disabled. Please note the existing "V" for Veteran designation will be replaced with the entire word "Veteran". Go to <https://www.flhsmv.gov/driver-licenses-id-cards/newdl> for complete info and pictures of the new Florida drivers/ID cards. [Source: FDVA | R. Steven Murray | July 27, 2017 ++]

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**Space-A-Travel Update 01 ► CONUS Terminals Telephone Numbers Update**

Reminder to all Space-A Travers: Per DoD 4515.13-R, "C6.1.9. Conditions of Travel. There is no guaranteed space for any traveler. The Department of Defense is not obligated to continue an individual's travel or return him or her to point of origin, or any other point. Travelers shall have sufficient personal funds to pay for commercial transportation to return to their residence or duty station if space-available transportation is not available." If you plan to travel Space-A, contact the following Air Mobility Command (AMC) passenger terminal(s) where you plan to depart from. The terminal staff will have the most-current information available



**4**  
**CONUS - Stateside**

- AMC Terminal Telephone Baltimore-Washington IAP, Maryland 410-918-6900
- Dover AFB, Delaware 302-677-4088
- Fairchild AFB, Washington 509-247-3406
- Jacksonville NAS, Florida 904-542-8159
- JB Andrews, Maryland 301-961-3604
- JB Charleston, South Carolina 843-963-3048
- JB Lewis-McChord, Washington 253-982-7259
- JB McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, New Jersey 609-754-5023
- Little Rock AFB, Arkansas 501-987-3342
- MacDill AFB, Florida 813-828-2440
- McConnell AFB, Kansas 316-759-5404
- NS Norfolk, Virginia 757-444-4118
- Pope Field, North Carolina 910-394-6527
- Scott AFB, Illinois 618-256-3017
- Seattle-Tacoma IAP, Washington 253-982-3504
- Travis AFB, California 707-424-1854

Visit the AMC website for OCONUS - Overseas terminals and contact information: [www.amc.af.mil/amctravel](http://www.amc.af.mil/amctravel). [Source: Honors Newsletter | July 2017 ++]

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## **AFL Q & A ► SMC Rating Award**

**Q:** Being a SMC (Special Monthly compensation) 100% disabled veteran, I had a heart attack which was related to agent orange and was awarded 100% for the first three months, then rated 30%. I thought I would get more money, yet I didn't get any monetary increase. Am I entitled to an increase?

**-o-o-O-o-o-**

**A1:** Correct you do receive 100% for 3 months after a heart attack. Then you are rated accordingly with the measurement of metabolic rates or ejection fraction of your heart. (JRD) 11/30/16

**A2:** I had the same thing (IHD) and 30% which is the flat rate, no increase. (RS) 12/1/16

**A3:** You are entitled to a temporary rating of 100% for three months while convalescing. This can be extended up to another three months while under doctor care. At the end of convalescence, you are evaluated per the CFR for residuals. (AP) 12/3/16

**A4:** All answers above are correct, but, the VA will downgrade you to what the Ejection Fraction is after recovery. The VA will not even look at the METs because they have found a loophole that is called co-morbid conditions of nonservice connected disabilities. The regulations say that a doctor can state that the ejection fraction is a better measurement of the heart function if there are comorbid conditions. But, those conditions have to be nonservice connected and I am fighting a number of these claims now. I have one veteran who the VA said was not overweight but because of the Body Mass Index which exceeded 30% the veteran was Stage I Obese so that was a co-morbid condition and the veteran's METs of 1 to 3 was not considered. It's tough. (CP) 12/19/16

**-o-o-O-o-o-**

Armed Forces Locator is an offline computer-based search system. It was developed to help veterans, active duty, servicemembers, Reservists, National Guard members and ROTC members locate old friends, current colleagues, and family members who serve or have served in the armed forces. Their mission is to provide an opportunity for those who served to reconnect again with war buddies. Also, locate many topics that are of interest to veterans, active duty servicemembers, and veterans organizations. [Source: <http://www.armedforceslocator.com> | July 1, 2017 ++]

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## **Retiree Appreciation Days ► As of 31 JUL 2017**

Retiree Appreciation Days (RADs) are designed with all veterans in mind. They're a great source of the latest information for retirees and Family members in your area. RADs vary from installation to installation, but, in general, they provide an opportunity to renew acquaintances, listen to guest speakers, renew ID Cards, get medical checkups, and various other services. Some RADs include special events such as dinners or golf tournaments. Due to budget constraints, some RADs may be cancelled or rescheduled. Also, scheduled appearances of DFAS representatives may not be possible. If you plan to travel long distances to attend a RAD, before traveling, you should call the sponsoring RSO to ensure the RAD will held as scheduled and, if applicable, whether or not DFAS reps will be available. The current updated schedule for 2017 is available at:

== HTML: [http://www.hostmtb.org/RADs\\_and\\_Other\\_Retiree-Veterans\\_Events.html](http://www.hostmtb.org/RADs_and_Other_Retiree-Veterans_Events.html)

== PDF: [http://www.hostmtb.org/RADs\\_and\\_Other\\_Retiree-Veterans\\_Events.pdf](http://www.hostmtb.org/RADs_and_Other_Retiree-Veterans_Events.pdf)

== Word: [http://www.hostmtb.org/RADs\\_and\\_Other\\_Retiree-Veterans\\_Events.doc](http://www.hostmtb.org/RADs_and_Other_Retiree-Veterans_Events.doc)

This schedule has been expanded to include dates for retiree\ veterans activity related events such as Seminars, Veterans Town Hall Meetings, Stand Downs, Resource\Career Fairs and Other Military Retiree & Veterans Related Events for all military services. To get more info about a particular event, mouseover or click on the event under Event Location. Please report comments, changes, corrections, new RADs and other military retiree\ veterans related events to the Events Schedule Manager at [milton.bell126@gmail.com](mailto:milton.bell126@gmail.com).

(NOTE: Attendance at some events may require military ID, VA enrollment or DD214.”@“ indicates event requires registration\RSVP.)For more information call the phone numbers indicated on the schedule of the Retirement Services Officer (RSO) sponsoring the RAD.

To quickly locate events in your geographic area just click on the appropriate State\Territory\Country listed at the top of the schedule. They will look like this:

**AK AL AR AS AZ CA CO CT DC DE FL GA GU HI IA ID IL IN KS KY LA MA MD ME MI MN MO MS MT NC ND NE NH NJ NM NV NY OH OK OR PA PR RI SC SD TN TX UT VA VI VT WA WI WV WY Belgium Germany Italy Japan Korea Netherlands Thailand**

[Source: RAD List Manager | Milton Bell | July 31, 2017 ++]

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## **Vet Hiring Fairs ► 01 thru 30 AUG 2017**

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce’s (USCC) Hiring Our Heroes program employment workshops are available in conjunction with hundreds of their hiring fairs. These workshops are designed to help veterans and military spouses and include resume writing, interview skills, and one-on-one mentoring. For details of each you should click on the city next to the date in the below list. To participate, sign up for the workshop in addition to registering (if indicated) for the hiring fairs which are shown below for the next month. For more information about the USCC Hiring Our Heroes Program, Military Spouse Program, Transition Assistance, GE Employment Workshops, Resume Engine, etc. visit the U.S. Chamber of Commerce’s website at <http://www.hiringourheroes.org/hiringourheroes/events> . Vet Job Fairs being conducted in the next 30 days in state order include:



**Recruit Military Listings** *Note: Click on site for details*

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[San Diego CA Veterans Job Fair](#)

August 3, 2017

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[New Orleans LA Veterans Job Fair](#)

August 3, 2017

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<a href="#">Fort Stewart GA Job Fair</a>	August 9, 2017
<a href="#">Philadelphia PA Veterans Job Fair</a>	August 10, 2017
<a href="#">Fort Stewart GA Job Fair</a>	August 10, 2017
<a href="#">Birmingham AL Veterans Job Fair</a>	August 17, 2017
<a href="#">Foxbough MA Greater Boston Veterans Job Fair</a>	August 17, 2017
<a href="#">Fort Lee VA Job Fair</a>	August 22, 2017
<a href="#">Denver CO Veterans Job Fair</a>	August 24, 2017
<a href="#">Greater Dallas TX Veterans Job Fair</a>	August 24, 2017
<a href="#">Cleveland OH Veterans Job Fair</a>	August 31, 2017
<a href="#">San Antonio TX Veterans Job Fair</a>	August 31, 2017

### **U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation Listings**

[Atlanta Hiring Expo with the Atlanta Braves](#) August 2 -9:00 am to 2:00 pm  
Atlanta, GA [Details](#) [Register](#)

[Gulfport/Biloxi Hiring Fair](#) August 17 -8:30 am to 1:30 pm  
Biloxi, MS [Details](#) [Register](#)

[San Francisco Hiring Expo with San Francisco Giants](#) August 17 -9:30 am to 2:00 pm  
San Francisco, CA [Details](#) [Register](#)

[Joint Base Charleston Transition Summit](#) August 22 - 9:00 am to August 23 - 4:00 pm  
Joint Base Charleston, SC [Details](#) [Register](#)

[The American Legion 99th National Convention Employment Forum](#) August 22 - 9:00 am to 4:00 pm  
Reno, NV [Details](#) [Register](#)

[Camp Pendleton Transition Summit](#) August 29 to August 30  
Camp Pendleton, CA [Details](#)

[New Orleans Hiring Fair](#) August 30 - 4:30 am to 1:30 pm  
Belle Chasse, LA [Details](#) [Register](#)

### **Veteran Career/Job Fairs**

[Atlanta, GA](#) August 2, 2017, 9:30am - 2pm [More information](#)  
SunTrust Park, 755 Battery Avenue, Atlanta, GA 30339

#### **ATLANTA HIRING EXPO WITH THE ATLANTA BRAVES**

- 9:30-10:15 a.m. | Financial readiness workshop
- 10:15-11 a.m. | Personal branding workshop
- 11 a.m.-2 p.m. | Hiring fair

All registered veterans and military spouses are eligible to receive up to two free tickets to attend that evening's game between the Braves and the Dodgers.

[Herndon, VA](#) August 2, 2017, 3pm - 7pm [More information](#)

Security University, 510 Spring Street, Herndon, VA 20170

**QUALIFIED CYBERSECURITY HIRING EVENT**

Rescheduled from July 19.

**Lexington Park, MD** August 15, 2017, 3pm - 7pm **More information**

Patuxent River MD Bay District Vol Fire Dept Social Hall

46900 S. Shangri-La Drive, Lexington Park, MD 20653

**PATUXENT RIVER JOB FAIR**

[Source: Recruit Military <https://events.recruitmilitary.com> & <https://www.uschamberfoundation.org/events/hiringfairs>  
& <https://www.legion.org/careers/jobfairs> | July 31, 2017 ++]

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**Vet State Benefits & Discounts ► Maryland 2017**

The state of Maryland provides several benefits to veterans as indicated below. To obtain information on these plus discounts listed on the Military and Veterans Discount Center (MCVDC) website, refer to the attachment to this Bulletin titled, “**Vet State Benefits & Discounts – MD** for an overview of the below benefits. Benefits are available to veterans who are residents of the state. For a more detailed explanation of each of the following refer to <http://www.military.com/benefits/veteran-state-benefits/maryland-state-veterans-benefits.html> and <http://veterans.maryland.gov>.

- Housing Benefits
- Financial Assistance Benefits
- Employment Assistance
- Recreation Benefits
- Education Benefits
- Other State Veteran Benefits
- Discounts

[Source: <http://www.military.com/benefits/veteran-state-benefits> | July 2017 ++]

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**\* Vet Legislation \***



**Note:** To check status on any veteran related legislation go to <https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress> for any House or Senate bill introduced in the 115th Congress. Bills are listed in reverse numerical order for House and then Senate. Bills are normally initially assigned to a congressional committee to consider and amend before sending them on to the House or Senate as a whole.



## Vet Funeral Benefits ► H.R.1212 | Brave Act

U.S. Senators Gary Peters (D-MI) and Marco Rubio (R-FL) announced that are introducing bipartisan legislation to improve burial services for our nation's veterans by increasing funeral benefits for eligible veterans. The **Burial Rights for America's Veterans' Efforts** (BRAVE) Act would update the current funeral and burial benefit system to ensure that all non-service connected deaths are treated equally, regardless of where the veteran passes away. Veterans with no next of kin that pass away in a U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) facility are currently afforded greater funds to cover the costs of their funerals and burials than veterans who pass away in a private home or other facility. Those commenting on the legislation included:

- “Our brave men and women in uniform have sacrificed so much in defense of our nation, and we owe it to them to ensure they receive the benefits they earned through their service, including a dignified burial,” said **Senator Peters**, a former Lieutenant Commander in the U.S. Navy Reserve and member of the Senate Armed Services Committee. “I’m proud to introduce this bipartisan legislation to honor our nation’s heroes by making commonsense updates to veterans’ funeral benefits to help ensure every veteran has a proper funeral and burial, no matter the circumstances at the end of their lives.”
- “Our veterans have sacrificed so much defending our country, and we owe them a debt of gratitude that we can never fully repay,” said **Senator Rubio**. “They are entitled to a proper funeral and burial no matter where they pass away. This bipartisan legislation will ensure we honor all of America’s heroes properly, with the highest honors and respect.”
- “On behalf of the 20,000 members of the **National Funeral Directors Association**, I commend Senators Peters and Rubio for introducing this bill in the Senate,” said National Funeral Directors Association (NFDA) CEO Christine Pepper, CAE. “Every day, in cities and towns across America, our members are helping families honor the lives of our nation’s veterans. Passing this bill will help ensure that veterans can be buried or interred with the honor and dignity befitting their sacrifice. NFDA and its members fully support this bipartisan legislation and thank Senator Peters and Senator Rubio for their support of veterans.”
- “Nothing is more devastating for a family than the inability to properly lay to rest a veteran,” said John Rowan, President of **Vietnam Veterans of America**. “We are thankful that Senator Peters and Senator Rubio for introducing the BRAVE Act to help alleviate this pain.”
- “The **Veterans of Foreign Wars** supports the BRAVE Act of 2017, which would increase funeral and burial benefits for eligible veterans. Currently, the cost of funeral expenses in the private sector have increased nearly seven times over since 2001 and the current VA benefit is \$2,000 for a service connected death, and \$300 burial and \$749 plot allowance for a qualifying non-service connected death. These allowances are well below the cost in the private sector. The VFW thanks Senator Peters and Senator Rubio for their leadership on this issue and continued dedication to veterans,” said VFW Adjutant General Robert E. Wallace.
- “On behalf of the two million members of **The American Legion**, we are pleased to support the Burial Rights for America’s Veterans’ Efforts (BRAVE) Act, as currently written, that would increase the funeral and burial benefits for non-service-connected deaths of veterans with no next of kin,” said Charles E. Schmidt, National Commander of The American Legion. “We believe that all veterans who have honorably served our nation should be provided adequate funeral benefits and that those benefits should be indexed for inflation. It is our nation’s responsibility to ensure that the families and loved ones of our veterans are financially supported in their time of mourning. We thank Senator Peters and Senator Rubio for their leadership on this important legislation.”

Currently, the VA burial benefit provides:

- \$300 for non-service-connected deaths and for veterans who have passed without a next-of-kin;
- \$749 if a veteran passes away in a VA facility, and;

- \$2,000 if a veteran passes away from a service-connected disability.

The BRAVE Act will increase the \$300 for non-service connected deaths to \$749 to equal the benefit received if a veteran passes away in a VA facility. The legislation additionally indexes for inflation both the non-service and service-related passing funeral benefits, thereby eliminating the need for Congress to make further readjustments. According to the National Funeral Directors Association, national median cost of a funeral in 2015 was \$7,181 - not including a vault, which is typically required by most cemeteries. Over the past decade, the median cost of an adult funeral in the United States has increased 28.6 percent and has not kept up with the pace of inflation. For instance, in 1973, the benefit for a veteran with no next-of-kin and a non-service connected death would have been 22 percent of the national average, versus the 2 percent it covers today. [Source: FedSmith.com | Ian Smith | June 29, 2017 ++]

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### **VA Bonuses Update 33 ► H.R.1690 | Bonus Transparency Act**

H.R. 1690 would require the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to submit annual reports to the Congress detailing information on performance awards and bonuses paid to certain high-level executives of the agency, including Regional Office Directors, Directors of Medical Centers, Directors of Veterans Integrated Service Networks, and all other senior executive positions (that is, the Senior Executive Service and other administrators or executive positions). VA would be required to provide the amount of each award as well as the job title and work location of the person receiving such an award. [Source: Congressional Budget Office | July 21, 2017 ++]

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### **GI Bill Update 235 ► H.R. 3218 | Forever GI Bill Passes House**

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. The Harry W. Colmery Veterans Education Assistance Act of 2017 — colloquially known as the “Forever GI Bill” — would make significant changes to the Post-9/11 GI Bill. These 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 Rep. Phil Roe (R-TN) said before the vote. Committee Ranking Member Rep. Tim Walz (D-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,” Walz said.

The vote was 405-0 in a rare display of bipartisanship in Congress on behalf of veterans seeking higher education after active duty service. On 26 JUL, the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs will hold a hearing for its own identical plan for GI Bill reform, which has also garnered support from Republican and Democratic lawmakers and more than 40 veteran, military and higher education groups, according to a spokeswoman for Committee Chairman Sen. Johnny Isakson, R-Ga. The committee is also aiming to move this legislation along quickly, she said. Both the House and Senate versions call for slight reductions in the monthly housing allowances for new GI Bill enrollees to

pay for the estimated \$3 billion cost of the benefits expansion. [Source: MilitaryTimes| Natalie Gross | July 24, 2017 ++]

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## **VA Health Care Access Update 54 ► H.R. 1848 | Medical Scribe Pilot Act of 2017**

The U.S. House of Representatives passed H.R.1848 on 24 JUL which would provide medical scribes to 10 Department of Veterans Affairs medical centers for the next two years. The pilot program, proposed by Reps. Phil Roe, MD (R-TN) and Greg Walden (R-OR) is designed to help unburden VA doctors to increase the number of patients seen. The VA has been working on modernizing its medical program, after the massive wait time scandal in 2014. The pilot seeks to reduce wait times for patients. The VA released an online wait time tool in April to work toward the same goal. “This legislation sets up a pilot program to try something that has worked successfully in the private sector -- having scribes work side-by-side with doctors, so that doctors can focus on the patient and scribes can focus on the paperwork,” said Walden in a statement.

Under the bill, the VA is required to provide the medical scribes to at least four rural medical centers, at least four to urban areas and two for medical centers with a need for increased access or efficiency. These will be determined by VA Secretary David Shulkin, MD. Shulkin will hire 20 new VA-term employees as medical scribes, while looking for vendor contracts to employ 20 additional scribes. The bill requires 30 percent of the scribes to be assigned to emergency care, while 70 percent will be assigned to specialty care in areas with the greatest patient wait times or lowest efficiency ratings. The VA will need to provide Congress with a separate analysis on the results of the pilot program, including provider efficiency, patient satisfaction, wait times, how many patients were seen daily and how long it takes to hire and train medical scribes. The bill passed the House with a bipartisan vote and now heads to the Senate. [Source: VFW Action Corps Healthcare IT News | Jessica Davis | July 25, 2017 ++]

**\* Military \***



## **Military Restricted Airspace ► Unmanned Aircraft Problem**

After two incidents where small civil drones invaded U.S. Air Force airspace — and in one event almost collided with an F-22 Raptor — the head of Air Combat Command is clamoring for congressional authorities that would allow him to deal with future incursions of unmanned aircraft. Speaking at an Air Force Association event Tuesday on Capitol Hill, Gen. Mike Holmes implored congressional staff for more help on countering unmanned aerial systems that are flown near a military airfield.



“One day last week I had two small UASs that were interfering with operations,” he said. “At one base, the gate guard watched one fly over the top of the gate check, tracked it while it flew over the flight line for a little while, and then flew back out and left, and I have no authority given to me by the government to deal with that.” In a second incident that same day, an F-22 had a “near collision” with a small UAS, Holmes said. The Air Force declined to comment on whether either incident led to damage of government property. Once again, the ACC commander was left with few options.

“The rules basically are the same as if it was a civil aircraft,” he said. However, UAS operations pose unique challenges that make it difficult to enforce those laws. Under the U.S. Federal Aviation Administration’s current rules, drone operators are not permitted to fly within five miles of a base without getting permission from that installation, but there are no clear regulations governing what the military is allowed to do once a drone violates that policy. When a civil aircraft enters a restricted airspace, the military can easily track the aircraft and ensure that the pilot faces consequences from the FAA, such as a fine or losing his or her license. But that’s more difficult with small unmanned systems, said Holmes, who acknowledged that the possibility exists for nefarious actors to use commercial drones like off-the-shelf rotorcraft to launch an attack. “Imagine a world where somebody flies a couple hundred of those and flies one down the intake of all my F-22s with just a small weapon on it? I need the authorities to deal with that,” he said.

While the military retains the inherent right of self-defense, even in encounters with small UAS, the Air Force is seeking an expansion of that jurisdiction that would give the service more options to deal with drones while allowing citizens to operate them safely, Air Force spokeswoman Capt. Trisha Guillebeau said in a statement. Recent legislation gave the Air Force the authority to protect bases and assets connected with the nuclear mission from UAS threats — a problem that Air Force Global Strike Command head Gen. Robin Rand said in September had grown.

Exactly what is included in those authorities remains murky. In April, Gen. John Hyten, head of U.S. Strategic Command, told Congress that he had issued guidance to service members on the rules of engagement with a drone that has flown near a nuclear site such as a missile launch facility or a base with ballistic missile submarines. However, the details of the guidance — including when the services are permitted to shoot down or electronically disable a drone — are classified. Air Combat Command plans on making a request to Air Force headquarters to extend those authorities beyond nuclear bases and is also working with other stakeholders such as the FAA, Holmes said 11 JUL. [Source: DefenseNews| Valerie Insinna | July 14, 2017 ++]

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## **Afghanistan War ► What Would Happen If U.S. Pulled Out**

The United States' longest war doesn't look like it will end anytime soon. Sixteen years have passed. Nearly 2,400 U.S. troops have died. More than \$700 billion has been spent. But talk of “winning” is scarce. The goal now seems more akin to “not losing.”

The Taliban is present in nearly half the country's districts, and the group regularly attacks Kabul and provincial capitals. A fledgling Islamic State affiliate is proving hard to eliminate in the mountainous east. The popularity of the American mission here has eroded into cynicism as the war grinds on. Afghan civilians and security forces are dying in record numbers — and more than 600 civilians were killed by NATO or government-aligned forces last year. Casualties among Afghan security forces soared by 35 percent in 2016, with 6,800 soldiers and police killed, according to U.S. government watchdog SIGAR.

Perpetual conflict and lack of opportunity are driving thousands of Afghan youths to either flee the country or join militant groups. Discontent with the government and the revival of ethnic rivalries are threatening to plunge the country into political chaos, or worse. Regional powers such as Iran, Pakistan and Russia advance their own strategic interests in Afghanistan, often at the cost of American objectives.

Defense Secretary Jim Mattis and President Trump's national security adviser, Lt. Gen. H.R. McMaster, are leading a White House review of Afghanistan policy. The United States currently has around 8,800 troops here, down from a high of more than 100,000 in 2011. The debate has been intensely fractious within the administration, with Trump particularly skeptical of his advisers' plan for a modest troop increase and a multiyear commitment to the war — essentially par for the course. Given the way the war is going, many Americans may be wondering why their government is still in Afghanistan at all.

With that in mind, The Washington Post's Kabul bureau asked a variety of people here — from the Taliban's spokesman to provincial politicians to taxi drivers to the press officer for the U.S. military — this question: **What would happen if the United States totally disengaged from Afghanistan?**

**Navy Capt. William Salvin, spokesman for the U.S. military in Afghanistan**

If the U.S. and NATO were to leave Afghanistan, it will leave a void that would be exploited by the 20 terrorist and violent extremist organizations that are based in the Afghanistan/Pakistan region. That is a higher concentration of terror groups than anywhere in the world. Those groups would seek to both destabilize Afghanistan and organize and launch attacks against the U.S. and the West. Those terror groups would also work to destabilize the legitimate government of Afghanistan that is fighting to bring peace and stability to the country.

**Zabiullah Mujahid, spokesman for the Taliban**

It will be cause of salvage for both Afghans and America, if Americans withdraw and put an end to the occupation. It will prevent further loss of its manpower and economy and lead in ending America's longest war in history and decline of America's prestige globally. From the other side, this will be a means of salvage for us Afghans, too; the war will possibly end here, Afghans will unite and will create a sound Islamic establishment. Therefore, if America's occupation comes to an end, it means that the problem between the two nations will end, too.

**Davood Moradian, director of the Afghan Institute for Strategic Studies**

Disengagement would result in the partition of the country into regions akin to “Somalia” and “Somaliland.” The Pashtun heartland will resemble the former and the central, northern and western regions the latter. In this scenario, Pakistan revives its strategic depth by creating a “Grand Waziristan,” comprising of Pashtun-dominated border regions of Pakistan and Afghanistan. Russia will consolidate its reign over Central Asian states. Should Afghan and regional players fail to manage this scenario, then the Pashtun heartland will revert to an Islamist, Sunni, Pashtun caliphate where attacks on the West could be launched.

**Hashemi Nezhad, political analyst, researcher and writer**

Afghanistan relies on foreign aid entirely. If the United States pulls out of the country, the government will collapse and inter-factional political and military conflicts will ruin all the achievements the country attained since 2001.

**Hameedullah Tokhi, lawmaker from restive, southern Zabul province**

The U.S. military presence in Afghanistan has earned the government here enmity of the entire region such as Russia, Iran, Pakistan and Central Asia, who all support the Taliban now. We do not want the U.S. to remain forever in Afghanistan and defend us, but to leave in a responsible manner, without any fallout. Premature disengagement or departure will mean 100 percent failure of the United States not only in Afghanistan, but globally. It will be forced to end its military missions across the world and will mean a defeat similar to the one the former Soviet Union faced not only in Afghanistan, but in the world stage. The Soviet Union disintegrated after the withdrawal from Afghanistan.

**Ahmad Shah, 57, taxi driver**

If Trump chooses to pull the troops out of Afghanistan, the likely scenario will be another big war involving factional leaders, backed by our neighbors. It will be a disaster for us and also for the United States. Leaving without winning the war certainly means defeat. It will damage America's prestige in the world.

[Source: Washington Post | Max Bearak | July 26, 2017 ++]

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**USS Fitzgerald (DDG-62) Update 02 ► Preliminary Findings**

Preliminary findings in the investigation into the collision between the USS Fitzgerald and a Philippine cargo ship off the coast of Japan in June suggest the accident was caused by multiple errors by the Fitzgerald's crew and a failure to take action in the minutes leading to the collision, according to two defense officials. "They did nothing until the last second," one official said. "A slew of things went wrong." A second official said the crash "will wind up being our (the US Navy's) fault."

The collision between the Fitzgerald, a guided-missile destroyer, and the ACX Crystal on 17 JUN claimed the lives of seven US sailors. It took place 56 nautical miles off the coast of Honshu, Japan, in an area heavily traveled by commercial shipping. The initial findings are just the first stage in what is expected to be a lengthy inquiry. Both officials said the initial investigation found that the Fitzgerald crew failed to understand and acknowledge the cargo ship was approaching and failed to take any action necessary to avoid the collision. It's also not clear if the crew ever called the commanding officer to come to the bridge.

The officials say investigators are also looking at the possibility that the ship was traveling at a higher speed than expected to reach a location it was due to arrive at the next day.

The preliminary findings will now be reviewed by the 7th Fleet commander, Vice Adm. Joseph Aucoin, even as the investigation continues and they are likely to lead to recommendations about potential punishment. The ongoing investigation is known inside the Navy as a "dual purpose" review, meaning it is both fact finding and will address the accountability of various service members. In addition to the US Navy, the US Coast Guard and Japanese naval and maritime authorities are all conducting investigations.

The Navy issued a statement from Rear Admiral Dawn Cutler, US Navy chief of information, responding to CNN's reporting on Friday: "We are in the early stages of the investigation process to develop a comprehensive picture of what caused the collision and do not have any definitive information to release at this time. It is premature to speculate on causation or any other issues. Once we have a detailed understanding of the facts and circumstances, we will share those findings with the Fitzgerald families, our congressional oversight committees and the general public."

The two ships collided on the Fitzgerald's starboard side directly next to the berthing area, where sailors sleep. The impact ripped the Fitzgerald open and caused water to pour in. Top Navy officials have said since the beginning that the catastrophe could have been even worse, with the possibility the ship potentially could have sunk with the



crew on board. "Heroic efforts prevented the flooding from catastrophically spreading which could have caused the ship to founder or sink," Aucoin said at a press conference the day after the collision.



**Remembering the seven USS Fitzgerald sailors**

Photos released by the Navy show extensive damage below the water line on the starboard side where the ship was hit. "The ship suffered severe damage rapidly flooding three large compartments that included one machine room and two berthing areas for 116 crew," Aucoin said. "The commanding officer's cabin was also directly hit, trapping the CO inside." The ship's commander, Bryce Benson, was so badly injured that once freed he had to be medevaced off the ship by the Japanese Coast Guard. [Source: CNN Pentagon Correspondent | Barbara Starr | July 21, 2017 ++]

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### **USS John Finn (DDG-113) ► Commissioned 15 JUL 2017**

Just over 75 years ago, John Finn manned a machine gun for two hours firing at Japanese planes strafing him and attacking Naval Air Station Kaneohe Bay on Oahu. On the other side of the island a fleet of aircraft laid waste to Battleship Row in Pearl Harbor during the Dec. 7, 1941, attack. On the windward side the island, planes ravaged Finn's body with almost two dozen wounds. A Marine Corps chief aviation ordnanceman, Finn was awarded the first Medal of Honor of World War II. He survived the attack and his wounds, living to the ripe age of 100 when he died in 2010.



**The crew of the Navy's newest Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer, the USS John Finn, brings the ship to life during its commissioning ceremony in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, Saturday, July 15, 2017.**

On 15 JUL the Navy commissioned the USS John Finn, its latest Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer. "USS John Finn is about to join the Pacific Fleet and the PACOM joint team," said Adm. Harry Harris, commander of U.S. Pacific Command, during a ceremony beside the ship, which arrived at Pearl Harbor a week ago. "This ship and her crew are ready to sail into harm's way and assume the critical mission of safeguarding our nation's interests in the Indo-Asia-Pacific. "In my opinion," he said, "we can't get our most advanced assets here fast enough." The ship's sponsor was Laura Stavridis, the wife of retired Adm. James Stavridis, a former Supreme Allied Commander, Europe.

The John Finn is the first new ship built from the keel up with the Aegis Baseline 9 weapon system, which enables the ship to simultaneously conduct air warfare and ballistic missile defense, Harris said. "That means the John Finn brings both the saber and the shield to the fight," Harris said. "American know-how to get her done – anytime and anywhere." Weighing just over 9,100 tons, the John Finn was built by Huntington Ingalls Industries in Pascagoula, Miss. Carrying a crew of roughly 300, it is just over 500 feet long and driven by four turbines and two propellers for a top speed of about 35 mph. "Handles like a dream," John Finn Cmdr. Micheal Wagner told reporters 13 JUL.

The ship will be homeported in San Diego, but given Finn's immortal connection with Hawaii, officials decided it was fitting to commission it there. One wall in the enlisted dining area of the USS John Finn is devoted to a mural depicting Finn's wife, Alice, inspecting the Medal of Honor adorning the then-young sailor's chest. Behind them are the mountains that stand in the center of Oahu. Mrs. Finn, who died in 1998, holds another place of honor on the ship's bow. The 5-inch cannon there is called the Alice Gun, and her oversized signature is scrawled across the turret. [Source: Stars & Stripes | Wyatt Olson | July 16, 2017 ++]

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## Funeral Honors Update 02 ► Procession Protocol

The soldier seen in a viral image standing outside his Jeep at a stoplight in the rain to salute a funeral procession has been identified as a colonel based in Nashville. Colonel Jack L. Usrey was driving from Ft. Knox, Kentucky last week, according to a release from the Tennessee Department of Military, when a funeral procession passed while he was at a stoplight. "I didn't really think," Usrey said. "I just did what my parents taught me to do growing up." "I stopped, got out, saluted the police escort and held my salute as the hearse and family passed by, then went on my way and didn't give it a second thought."



Usrey is a senior army advisor to the adjutant general at Tennessee National Guard Headquarters in Nashville. He has more than 29 years of military service and is a native of Martin, Tennessee. Erin Hester of Vine Grove, Kentucky snapped a photo of the act and posted it online where it has been seen more than a million times. "I always get frustrated when I see cars that don't pull to the side and stop for a procession, but this gentleman went above and beyond," she wrote in her post. A mutual friend at Ft. Knox contacted Hester to put her in touch with the soldier, according to the release. She talked to Usrey on the phone 13 JUL to thank him for his act and let him know how much it meant to her. [Source: Stars & Stripes | Mark Pace | July 13, 2017 ++]

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## **U.S. Coast Guard Recruiting ► 4,000 Recruits Needed**

"In order to recruit 4,000 enlisted personnel, the recruiting offices have to interview 40,000 applicants," said Chief Petty Officer Benjamin Harris, recruiter in charge, recruiting office Los Angeles. "Only 80 percent of those applicants processed by the recruiting offices will complete boot camp at Cape May." The Los Angeles and Riverside recruiting offices are staffed with more than 15 recruiters combined and represent a diverse background of Coast Guard military specialties. Recruiters are primarily responsible for outreach to schools and colleges and for screening applicants over the phone. The recruiters use the basic requirements for entry into the service, such as age, health, education, tattoos, drug use, criminal record and credit history during the screening process. Applicants who meet these minimum standards are scheduled for in-person interviews at the recruiting office.

Those passing the in-person interview are scheduled for an appointment at the Military Entrance Processing Service (MEPS), where the applicants take the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB) test, receive a physical, choose a specialty, and if successful, are sworn in as members of the Coast Guard. Once the recruiting office is notified by MEPS that a candidate is qualified, the candidate is called by the recruiting office staff and asked to choose a date to begin basic training. From the time a date is picked to the actual reporting date, the candidate undergoes an extensive background check by the Coast Guard's Security Center.

In 2018, Harris expects that the target number of enlisted personnel will be reduced to 3,900. However, the Los Angeles recruiting office will still need to recruit seven reserves, 20 officers, and 120 enlisted personnel as part of that quota. Most of the reserve applicants are interested in maritime law enforcement, so it's the recruiter's job to expose them to other opportunities for service and provide them options for their final decision. "It is not an easy job to meet these goals. Every recruiting office is making an extra effort to meet the personnel needs of the Coast Guard by using outreach, social media and personal referrals," said Harris. "However, the biggest challenge facing this office is the size of its service area and the highly concentrated population within that geographical area. Los Angeles County has hundreds of public and private high schools and over 20 community colleges, in addition to 4-year colleges and universities."

Chief Petty Officer Mario Gordillo, recruiter in charge, Riverside recruiting office, echoed the geographical challenge, but added that the area of responsibility for the Riverside recruiting office is Riverside and San Bernardino counties. San Bernardino county is the largest county in the continental United States. Further, this office is responsible for recruiting in extreme climate zones ranging up to 120 degrees in heat and even snow in the San Bernardino Mountains during winter. The Riverside office also seeks partnerships with high schools, community colleges, and 4-year colleges and universities in the area. There are 108 high schools and 59 colleges and universities between the two counties.

"One hurdle we have to overcome is that the leadership of the JROTC programs at these schools as well as the administrators of these schools and colleges are associated with veterans of one of the four service branches within the Department of Defense and have little knowledge about the Coast Guard. We are working very hard to change that, but progress is slow. Once they have knowledge about the Coast Guard, they send us referrals," said Gordillo. Finding 4,000 recruits is an unenviable task, but the personnel of the recruiting offices are and will continue to meet

their goals. You can help by referring qualified candidates to the recruiting offices or to the Coast Guard’s website <https://www.gocoastguard.com/chat-now>. [Source: U.S. Coast Guard News | Maritime Executive | July 19, 2017 ++]

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## **U.S. Coast Guard Funding ► Not Included in NDAA Spending Bill**

While the House recently passed its \$696 billion version of the 2018 defense spending bill, one branch of the armed services — the U.S. Coast Guard — won’t receive a windfall in defense spending. Instead, the Coast Guard is lucky to have avoided a \$1.3 billion, or 14 percent, cut in its fiscal 2018 budget that President Donald Trump’s proposed in his “skinny” budget in March. Since then, the Trump administration has proposed a Coast Guard budget that “sustains current funding levels.”

The Coast Guard operates under the Homeland Security Department, and carries out law enforcement and intelligence-gathering missions, but Coast Guard Commandant Adm. Paul Zukunft said the service is still a branch of the armed services, and should be funded as such. “It’s often forgotten that we are a military service ... but we are not funded as a military [service],” Zukunft told the Federal Drive with Tom Temin. “Ninety-six percent of my budget is funded through nondefense discretionary funding. Only 4 percent of that is funded as a military service, and most of that is for the work that we’re doing in the Mideast, where I’ve got a squadron of ships deployed over there.”

While the Trump administration proposed \$54 billion in extra defense in its March budget proposal, the Coast Guard faces its fifth year of funding at levels below the Budget Control Act’s caps. “The area where we are starting incurring some degree of risk is on the maintenance side, and once you go down that slippery slope, you may have to delay or take a ship out of service, so it’s a very delicate balance. But as a military service, we need to be funded like a military service,” Zukunft said.

Meanwhile, the Coast Guard enjoys the highest retention rate of all the armed forces. Forty percent of enlisted recruits coming out its training center in Cape May, New Jersey will remain on active duty 20 years later, as will 60 percent of commissioned officers graduating from the Coast Guard Academy in New London, Connecticut. However, Zukunft said he cannot expect that trend to continue without new incentives. “I cannot assume that we are going to enjoy these unprecedented retention rates. If the economy changes, do people decide, ‘Hey, it’s time for me to leave. Coast Guard, thank you for these great job skills, I’m now going to make more money somewhere else,’” he said.

Taking a page from the Navy and Air Force, which are working to keep pilots from leaving for the private sector, the Coast Guard recently put out a human capital strategy to address things like incentive packages, dual careers, childcare, and the number of times Coast Guard personnel move to new assignments. “We make tremendous investments in training these individuals, but if they then leave and walk out the door, we never get to that next level, where they truly become professionals at what they do, and we continue to operate with journeymen,” Zukunft said. “If you don’t look out for your people, you can build all these great new ships and new planes, but if you’re not keeping an eye on your people, they will be tied to the pier, and will not be able to put to sea.”

For all its budget constraints, Zukunft said the Coast Guard benefits from information sharing with other DHS components in carrying out its drug interdiction mission. “It’s our ships that have the authority to apprehend and interdict the vessels, but it really is a collective effort among everybody. But certainly great synergy within the Department of Homeland Security,” Zukunft said. [Source: Federal News Radio | Jory Heckma | July 20, 2017 ++]

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## USS Gerald A. Ford Update 07 ► Commissioned

The Navy commissioned its newest aircraft carrier, the future USS Gerald R. Ford (CVN 78) 22 JUL at Naval Station Norfolk. USS Gerald R. Ford (CVN 78) is the lead ship of the new Gerald R. Ford class of aircraft carrier, the first new class in more than 40 years, and will begin the phased replacement of Nimitz-class carriers when the ship is commissioned. President Donald J. Trump delivered the commissioning ceremony's principal address. Susan Ford Bales, President Ford's daughter, served as the ship's sponsor.



“The nation's going to be very proud of USS Gerald R. Ford,” said Chief of Naval Operations Adm. John Richardson. “I am incredibly thankful for the shipyard workers and sailors who worked amazingly hard to bring this mighty ship to life. This Saturday will be a huge day for our Navy and our nation. The new technology and warfighting capabilities that Ford brings will transform naval warfare, making us a more lethal Navy. The increased combat power will enable new ways to combine information, ships, aircraft and undersea forces, changing how we operate and fight.”

The Navy plans to spend \$43 billion developing and building the three new Ford-class ships—Ford, the future USS John F. Kennedy (CVN 79), and the future USS Enterprise (CVN 80). Built by Huntington Ingalls Industries, the Gerald R. Ford class is designed with significant quality-of-life improvements and reduced maintenance. These innovations are expected to improve operational availability and capability compared with Nimitz-class carriers. The Gerald R. Ford class incorporates advances in technology such as a new reactor plant, propulsion system, electric plant, Electromagnetic Aircraft Launch System (EMALS), Advanced Arresting Gear (AAG), machinery control, Dual Band Radar and integrated warfare systems. Compared to Nimitz-class carriers, the Gerald R. Ford-class carriers have more than 23 new or modified systems. The ceremony can be viewed on the Navy Live blog at <http://navylive.dodlive.mil>. [Source: PEM NR-274-17 | July 20, 2017 ++]

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## USS Gerald A. Ford Update 08 ► Urinaless | Gender Neutral

The new aircraft carrier Gerald R. Ford has all sorts of high-tech gear equipped for 21st century naval warfare. But there is one thing that male sailors will notice is no longer available: Urinals. For the first time, every bathroom on the Ford — known throughout military circles as a head — is designed to be “gender-neutral,” meaning all of the urinals have been replaced with flush toilets and stalls, Navy officials say. The vast majority of the 5,000-plus



sailors who will deploy aboard the carrier Ford are men, as women account for only about 18 percent of sailors in the Navy.

Bathroom design experts say water closets with seated toilets are less sanitary and take up far more space than wall-mounted urinals. Nevertheless, the Navy says there are advantages to eliminating urinals. It will allow the Navy to quickly and efficiently change a head's assigned gender, so depending on the ship's demographics at the time, berthing areas can be switched between male and female to accommodate the crew's needs. "This is designed to give the ship flexibility because there aren't any berthing areas that are dedicated to one sex or the other," Operations Specialist 1st Class Kaylea Motsenbocker told Navy Times recently. Every head on the Ford is being integrated into a berthing, she said.

As such, the Navy claims that gender-neutral heads will make living aboard the Ford more convenient for sailors. Every berthing area on the ship has a head attached to it, and some heads service multiple berthing areas, giving sailors more privacy. "So if this space was needed for males, we could shift the females to other berthing areas and make this all male without any modification being necessary," Motsenbocker said. It's a decision that comes as a surprise to many professionals who design restrooms. "[A toilet is] by far a less clean environment than a urinal. By far," said Chuck Kaufman, president of the Public Restroom Company, an organization that specializes in designing bathrooms.



**Ford Unisex Head**

For men, traditional seated toilets are farther away, making them harder targets to accurately focus on. Thus, men who use a water closet are more likely to miss the bowl and hit the floor, says Kaufman. He says that when men are obligated to pee in water closets, urine tends to build up on the floor, leaving an abysmal stench. "A urinal is a target," said Kaufman. "What is a problem is [with a water closet] you have a very big target and we can't aim very quickly." The only way to ensure men accurately aim into a toilet bowl is to force men to sit down, which is unlikely to happen, said Kaufman. Moreover, sitting down to pee makes trips to the bathroom take longer.

Kaufman estimates that the average trip to the urinal takes a little under a minute. Meanwhile, peeing at a sit-down toilet takes twice as long, he said. Whatever convenience that is gained by being able to morph men's rooms into women's rooms would also be lost in the amount of space that water closets, and the stalls around them, take up, he said. When he is designing a bathroom, Kaufman says he is required to allot around 1,500 square inches of space for a urinal. A toilet needs more than 3,300 square inches. For a ship like the Ford, which cost upwards of \$13 billion, every inch of space matters tremendously. "Why would you want the ship to be bigger just for fixtures?" said Kaufman. "You can get twice as many urinals as water closets."

For now, the Ford will be the only Navy ship in the fleet that is entirely outfitted with gender-neutral bathrooms, said Bill Couch, a Naval Sea Systems Command spokesperson. Regardless, urinals on aircraft carriers may be a thing of the past. [Source: NavyTimes | Peter Rathmell | July 21, 2017 ++]

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## Navy Fleet Size Update 05 ► Submarine Construction

The U.S. Navy’s submarine shortage may not be as bad as once thought, reports USNI News. A recent Navy report found that the service can continue adding a pair of Virginia-class attack submarines to its fleet each year while still incorporating the future Columbia-class ballistic missile attack subs. The Navy has been under fire recently as many of its current ballistic missile attack subs — Ohio-class — are nearing retirement, creating a potential lack of deployment-ready submarines. The Columbia-class subs will eventually replace the Ohio-class, but they will not be ready for construction until 2021.

Originally, the Navy said it would have to build either two Virginia-class subs per year or one Virginia-class and one Columbia-class each, according to USNI News. The report, however, found that building two Virginia-class subs per year, on top of one Columbia-class — once they are ready — is a “viable” option and would be highly beneficial for both the Navy and the industrial base. Rep. Joe Courtney told USNI News, “For the Navy to come back with a very strong report saying, yep, we don’t have to reduce Virginia-class in the Columbia-class years, to me that needle really moved in terms of the Navy’s confidence, public confidence, in having all these concurrent efforts stay on track and perform,” [Source: NavyTimes | Peter Rathmell | July 6, 2017++]

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## Navy Fleet Size Update 06 ► Projected Cost of 355 Ship Navy

In December 2016, the Navy released a new force structure assessment (FSA) that called for a fleet of 355 ships—substantially larger than the current fleet of 275 ships and also larger than the Navy’s previously stated goal of 308 ships. In response to a request from the Subcommittee on Seapower and Projection Forces of the House Committee on Armed Services the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) has estimated the costs of achieving the Navy’s objective within 15, 20, 25, or 30 years. As part of its analysis of those alternatives, the agency assessed the implications of building and operating a 355-ship fleet, including the number of ship purchases that would be necessary, prospective inventory levels, personnel requirements, and effects on the shipbuilding industry.

To enlarge the Navy to 355 ships would require a substantial investment of both money and time. CBO estimates that the earliest the Navy could achieve its goal of a 355-ship fleet would be in 2035, or in about 18 years, provided that it received sufficient funding. However, the cost to build and operate a 355-ship fleet would average \$102 billion per year (in 2017 dollars) through 2047, CBO estimates, or more than one-third greater than the amount appropriated for fiscal year 2016 for today’s 275-ship fleet. On average under CBO’s alternatives, shipbuilding costs would be at their highest point over the next 10 years, while operating costs would be highest between 2037 and 2047, once the fleet numbered 355 ships.

### Shipbuilding Costs

CBO estimates that, over the next 30 years, meeting the 355-ship objective would cost the Navy an average of about \$26.6 billion (in 2017 dollars) annually for ship construction, which is more than 60 percent above the average amount the Congress has appropriated for that purpose over the past 30 years and 40 percent more than the amount appropriated for 2016. By comparison, CBO estimates that the Navy’s 2017 shipbuilding plan—which is based in part on the 308-ship goal outlined in the service’s 2014 FSA—would cost an average of \$21.2 billion per year to implement over the next 30 years. However, the Navy’s 2017 shipbuilding plan would fall short of the 308-ship force goal in 22 of the next 30 years.

To establish a 355-ship fleet, the Navy would need to purchase around 329 new ships over 30 years, compared with the 254 ships that would be purchased under the Navy’s 2017 shipbuilding plan. In particular, over the next five years, the Navy would purchase about 12 ships per year under CBO’s alternatives compared with about 8 per year under the Navy’s 2017 plan. Over the next 30 years, buying additional fixed-wing aircraft and helicopters to

outfit the additional 63 ships would require \$15 billion more than the Navy would spend on aircraft under its existing plan. Those costs do not reflect the additional weapons or unmanned systems that the Navy would need to purchase to arm the new ships or the cost of improvements to the shipyards that would be needed to build ships at higher rates.

### **Operating Costs**

In addition to the costs of building 329 new ships, a larger fleet would cost more to operate: More ships would require more sailors; recruiting and training those sailors would require more civilian and military positions onshore; additional ships would lead to larger maintenance budgets; and those extra ships and crews would consume more fuel and supplies, during both training exercises and deployments. According to CBO's analysis, by 2047, the annual cost in 2017 dollars of operating the Navy's 355-ship fleet—regardless of whether the buildup took 15 or 30 years—would be about \$38 billion (or 67 percent) more than the \$56 billion the fleet of 275 ships costs annually to operate today. CBO's projection of the steep increase in operating costs by 2047 results both from having a larger fleet and from the expectation that operation and support costs would grow faster than general inflation in the economy. Under the smaller buildup proposed in the Navy's 2017 shipbuilding plan, annual costs would also rise by 2047, by about \$23 billion.

### **Total Costs**

CBO estimates that the cost to build, crew, and operate a 355-ship fleet would average \$102 billion per year through 2047. That amount would be 13 percent more than the \$90 billion needed to build and operate the fleet envisioned in the Navy's 2017 shipbuilding plan.

### **Effects of Reaching 355 Ships More Quickly**

CBO analyzed four alternatives that would expand the fleet to 355 ships over different time frames: 15, 20, 25, and 30 years. Under each alternative, construction of the additional ships would begin in 2018. The major difference among those alternatives is the timing of when the fleet would reach 355 ships and, thus, when the money to build, crew, and operate those fleets would need to be appropriated. Exactly when the fleet reached the 355-ship goal would not have a significant effect on total 30-year costs in real (inflation-adjusted) terms.

For example, buying more ships earlier in the 15-year time frame would mean that those ships would be slightly less expensive to build (because ships would be constructed at more efficient rates and the real cost growth in the shipbuilding industry would be lower than in later years); but establishing a larger fleet earlier would lead to higher operating costs. In addition, in comparison with the 30-year buildup, shipbuilding budgets would need to be significantly higher in the 2020s for the 15-year alternative. Finally, building the fleet more quickly would pose much greater, but not insurmountable, challenges for the shipbuilding industry. [Source: Congressional Budget Office | July 25, 2017 ++]

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## **GunnAR ► New Wearable Headset for Navy Gunners**

In just a year, a wearable headset designed to help U.S. Navy gunnery sailors cut through the fog of combat has evolved from a lieutenant's brainstorm to a prototype being tested in various exercises. Conceived by a junior officer aboard the destroyer Gridley, the idea for GunnAR was presented at last year's ONR Innovation Jam, where it received first prize — and \$100,000 to make it real. After rapid progressions through various development milestones, the blue-tinted visor was put to the test in the Trident Warrior 2017 experiment aboard USS Bunker Hill, where sailors used it to put live fire on targets.



But what does GunnAR do, exactly? It is meant to facilitate communication between the ship's gunnery liaison officer and the sailors manning the ship's smaller guns. The headset is wirelessly connected to a tablet, which the officer uses to direct the gunner's attention toward targets, and to start or stop firing. Cues and other information — infrared imagery, distances to targets — appear in a heads-up display projected on the visor. The system thus helps the sailor to see exactly what his or her officer wants him or her to do, all without having to rely on shouted orders, radio transmitters, or sound-powered telephones

GunnAR is part of the military's growing fascination with augmented and virtual reality. VR allows soldiers to train for battle without wasting expensive ammunition, while AR may eventually be used by commanders on the battlefield to pinpoint objectives and highlight threats to their troops. The Space and Naval Warfare Systems Center Pacific's Battlespace Exploitation of Mixed Reality (BEMR) Lab, the outfit that made Lt. Robert McClenning's idea a reality, frequently tests such technology. In September, GunnAR will be part of in the CITADEL PROJECT waterside security experiment at Naval Base San Diego. In the year or so after, it is expected that DoD's Physical Security Enterprise & Analysis Group will provide funding to produce and distribute the technology on a wider scale. [Source: Defense One | William Morris | July 24, 2017 ++]

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## **USS Harry S. Truman (CVN-75) ► Underway for Sea Trials**

Nearly 14 months after returning from her last record-setting deployment, the aircraft carrier Harry S. Truman left Norfolk Naval Shipyard this morning and headed straight for open water in the Atlantic for sea trials — a day ahead of schedule . Truman has been in Norfolk Naval Shipyard for the past 10 months following a planned incremental availability — a yard period she finished one day ahead of schedule — Navy officials told Navy Times. Ushered by tugboats and security craft, Truman made the long transit through downtown Norfolk along the Elizabeth River, through Hampton Roads and the Chesapeake, a rare transit for a carrier.



"The number one goal for this ship over the last year was making it better than when it arrived here," Capt. Ryan B. Scholl, Truman's commanding officer, said in a Navy press release 21 JUL. "This excitement, enthusiasm and teamwork is what propelled us out of the shipyard. Truman is ready to tackle the next stage of doing what carriers do." The work, which began last September, upgraded all of the ship's communications and information technology networks, including an install of more than 3,000 consolidated afloat networks and Enterprise Services work stations as part of the Navy's next generation tactical afloat network. It's hoped that the upgraded networks and work stations will not only enhance operational missions, but will also provide sailors with better online access.

Navy sources tell Navy Times that Truman will start to work up next year for her next deployment as part of the Enhanced Fleet Response Plan. Truman was the last ship to deploy under the original FRP. Nearly a quarter of the work done during the 10-month period was to fix nearly 4,500 reactor material items. Also, maintenance was performed on shipboard systems in preparation for future operations, including refurbishing 90,000 square feet of Truman's hangar bay, 7,000 square feet of its flight deck combing and scuppers and 10,000 square feet of catwalk. Upgrades to the ship also reworked 12 berthing spaces and 10 heads, as well as over 950 decks, which took nearly 309,000 man hours to complete.

When not helping with the refurbishment of their ship, sailors were sent to training and qualification opportunities at Navy schools and aboard other ships. "During this shipyard period, the ship sent 1,200 sailors to more than 77 different locations covering 395 different types of training," said Damage Controlman 1st Class Mykel Cruz in the release. "We also indoctrinated more than 600 new members to the crew," including 300 who never served on a ship, he said. Departing NNSY is the first step in a long road ahead for Truman. The ship is now preparing for an upcoming schedule consisting of various training exercises, placing emphasis on damage control, flight deck operations and simulated at-sea combat.

Officials say even with four carriers currently in port Norfolk — a rare occasion on the water front — she'll have a parking space when she returns from trials. In August, meanwhile, Truman's sister ship, the Dwight D. Eisenhower, is scheduled for a planned shipyard visit. Also in August, the George Washington is slated to head to Newport News Shipyard and dry dock to kick off her mid-life overhaul, which is expected to last about four years. [Source: NavyTimes | Mark Faram | July 21, 2017 ++]

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## **MCAS Futenma Okinawa Update 09 ► New Lawsuit Filed**

The Okinawa Prefectural Government filed a fresh lawsuit against the central government 25 JUL, seeking a halt in work at the relocation site for the U.S. Futenma air base. It was the latest shot in Okinawa's long-running fight against the plan to relocate the functions currently handled by U.S. Marine Corps Air Station Futenma in Ginowan to the less populated Henoko coastal area of Nago, partly by reclaiming land off the coastal area. The move follows a Supreme Court ruling in December that Gov. Takeshi Onaga's attempt to revoke his predecessor's 2013 decision to approve the land reclamation work was illegal.

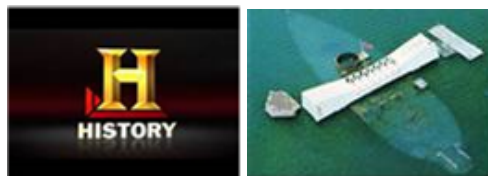
In the fresh lawsuit filed with the Naha District Court, the prefectural government argues that the central government is acting illegally by not securing permission from the governor for work that involves damaging rock on the seabed where fishing rights have been granted. Okinawa also filed an injunction to block the construction work before the court hands down a ruling. The central government, meanwhile, plans to argue that legal precedent shows that the prefecture's complaint is unlawful and it does not need the permission. Onaga told a news conference the prefectural government cannot accept the central government acting without permission. "The state will be questioned again for its stance to push through the construction of the new base while leaving behind the feelings of the people of Okinawa," he said.

In Tokyo, Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga declined comment, other than to say the central government won't change its stance. According to Okinawa Prefecture's rules on fisheries adjustment, permission from the governor is needed if certain work involves destroying rock in the area where fishing rights are granted. Okinawa wants the central government to apply for a renewal of permission for damaging rock, which expired in March. But the central government argues that a local fisheries cooperative had given up the fishing rights. The central government has so far not carried out work that involves crushing rock, but the prefectural government took legal action, saying, "It is certain to be conducted in the future and the work is illegal." The central government argues the new lawsuit won't be subject to a trial after the Supreme Court ruled in 2002 that the central or a prefectural or local government cannot bring a suit seeking others to comply with ordinances or rules.

The first stage of the land reclamation process saw the central government begin building seawalls for the facility in Nago adjacent to Camp Schwab, in late April, following its victory in legal wrangling at the top court over the base relocation plan. To complete construction of the new base, the central government is scheduled to fill in around 157 hectares of land in the water off the Henoko area and construct runways in a V-shaped configuration. Many people in Okinawa, which hosts the bulk of U.S. military facilities in Japan, want the Futenma base to be moved outside the prefecture altogether. Japan and the United States agreed in 1996 on the return of the land used for the Futenma base and announced in 2006 a road map for realigning the U.S. military presence in Japan, which included transferring Futenma's functions to the Henoko coastal area.

The central government has maintained that the relocation plan is "the only solution" for removing the dangers posed by the Futenma base without undermining the deterrence provided by the Japan-U.S. alliance. Futenma sits in a densely populated district in the city of Ginowan. [Source: The Japan Times | Kyodo | July 24, 2017 ++]

**\* Military History \***



**Military History** ► **Moe Harris | Now You Know The Rest of the Story**

In 1934 when baseball greats Babe Ruth and Lou Gehrig went on tour in baseball-crazy Japan some fans wondered why a third-string catcher named Moe Berg was included. Although he played with five major-league teams, from 1923 to 1939, he was a very mediocre ball player. But Moe was regarded as the brainiest ballplayer of all time. In fact, Casey Stengel once said: "That is the strangest man ever to play baseball".





**Presidential Medal of Freedom: the highest award  
given to civilians during wartime.**

The answer was simple: Moe Berg was a United States spy, working undercover with the Office of Strategic Services (predecessor of today's CIA). Moe spoke 15 languages - including Japanese. And he had two loves: baseball and spying. In Tokyo, garbed in a kimono, Berg took flowers to the daughter of an American diplomat being treated in St. Luke's Hospital - the tallest building in the Japanese capital. He never delivered the flowers. The ball-player ascended to the hospital roof and filmed key features: the harbor, military installations, railway yards, etc. Eight years later, General Jimmy Doolittle studied Berg's films in planning his spectacular raid on Tokyo.

His father disapproved and never once watched his son play. In Barringer High School, Moe learned Latin, Greek and French. Moe read at least 10 newspapers everyday. He graduated magna cum laude from Princeton - having added Spanish, Italian, German and Sanskrit to his linguistic quiver. During further studies at the Sorbonne, in Paris, and Columbia Law School, he picked up Japanese, Chinese, Korean, Indian, Arabic, Portuguese and Hungarian - 15 languages in all, plus some regional dialects. While playing baseball for Princeton University, Moe Berg would describe plays in Latin or Sanskrit.

During World War II, Moe was parachuted into Yugoslavia to assess the value to the war effort of the two groups of partisans there. He reported back that Marshall Tito's forces were widely supported by the people and Winston Churchill ordered all-out support for the Yugoslav underground fighter, rather than Mihajlovic's Serbians. The parachute jump at age 41 undoubtedly was a challenge. But there was more to come in that same year. Berg penetrated German-held Norway, met with members of the underground, and located a secret heavy-water plant - part of the Nazis' effort to build an atomic bomb. His information guided the Royal Air Force in a bombing raid to destroy that plant.

There still remained the question of how far had the Nazis progressed in the race to build the first Atomic bomb. If the Nazis were successful, they would win the war. Berg (under the code name "Remus") was sent to Switzerland to hear leading German physicist Werner Heisenberg, a Nobel Laureate, lecture and determine if the Nazis were close to building an A-bomb. Moe managed to slip past the SS guards at the auditorium, posing as a Swiss graduate student. The spy carried in his pocket a pistol and a cyanide pill.

If the German physicist indicated the Nazis were close to building a weapon, Berg was to shoot him - and then swallow the cyanide pill. Moe, sitting in the front row, determined that the Germans were nowhere near their goal, so he complimented Heisenberg on his speech and walked him back to his hotel. Moe Berg's report was distributed to Britain's Prime Minister Winston Churchill, President Franklin D. Roosevelt, and key figures in the team developing the Atomic Bomb. Roosevelt responded: "Give my regards to the catcher."

Most of Germany's leading physicists had been Jewish and had fled the Nazis mainly to Britain and the United States. After the war, Moe Berg was awarded the Medal of Freedom - America's highest honor for a civilian in wartime. But Berg refused to accept it because he couldn't tell people about his exploits. After his death, his sister accepted the Medal. It now hangs in the Baseball Hall of Fame, in Cooperstown. Moe Berg's baseball card is the only card on display at the CIA Headquarters in Washington, DC. [Source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moe\\_Berg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moe_Berg) | Don Niemeyer | July 2017 ++]

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## **Korean War Explosive Legacy ► Dealing With It in the North**

In the 10 years he has been digging up ordnance from the Korean War, Maj. Jong Il Hyon has lost five colleagues to explosions. He carries a lighter one gave him before he died. He also bears a scar on his left cheek from a bomb disposal mission gone wrong. Sixty-four years after it ended, the war is still giving up thousands of bombs, mortars



and pieces of live ammunition. Virtually all of it is American, but Jong noted that more than a dozen other countries fought on the U.S. side, and every now and then their bombs will turn up as well. “The experts say it will take 100 years to clean up all of the unexploded ordnance, but I think it will take much longer,” Jong said in an interview with The Associated Press at a construction site on the outskirts of Hamhung, North Korea’s second-largest city, where workers unearthed a rusted but still potentially deadly mortar round in February. Last October, 370 more were found in a nearby elementary school playground.

According to Jong, his bomb squad is one of nine in North Korea, one for each province. His unit alone handled 2,900 leftover explosives — including bombs, mortars and live artillery shells — last year. He said this year they have already disposed of about 1,200. Fortunately, there have been only a few injuries in the past few years. But Jong said an 11-year-old boy who found a bomb in May lost several fingers when it went off while he was playing with it. North Korea is just one of many countries still dealing with the explosive legacy of major wars. In Asia alone, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos and even Japan have huge amounts of unexploded ordnance left to clean up.



**Yom Hak Chol, 44, manager of the 4th work team of the Pohang cooperative farm (left), and Paek Song Guk, 44, who found an unexploded bomb near the railway that runs through Hamhung from Pyongyang to the northeastern port of Chongjin speaking to the AP (left) and holding up a photograph of the unexploded bomb found near the railway**

The three-year Korean War, which ended in what was supposed to be a temporary armistice on July 27, 1953, was one of the most brutal ever fought. Virtually all of the 22 major cities in North Korea were severely damaged and hundreds of thousands of civilians killed by U.S. saturation bombing. The tonnage of bombs dropped on the North was about the same as the total dropped by the U.S. against Japan during World War II. North Korea is probably second only to Cambodia as the most heavily bombed country in history. By 1952, the bombing was so complete that the U.S. Air Force had effectively run out of worthwhile targets.

North Koreans claim 400,000 bombs were dropped on Pyongyang alone, roughly one bomb for every resident at the time, and that only two modern buildings in the capital were left standing. All told, the U.S. dropped 635,000 tons of bombs on Korea during the war, most of it in the North, including with 32,500 tons of napalm. Twelve to 15 percent of the North’s population was killed in the war. Charles Armstrong, a historian at Columbia University, said the expansion of saturation bombing in North Korea marked something of a turning point for the United States and was followed by the use of an even heavier version during the Vietnam War.

“To this day, the North Korean government and media point to the American bombing as a war crime and a major justification for the continued mobilization of the North Korean people — as well as the development of nuclear weapons — in defense against future attacks,” he said. Armstrong noted that the Hamhung area and the nearby port of Hungnam were hit particularly hard by U.S. bombers because they were an industrial center and home to the largest nitrogen fertilizer plant in Asia. Nitrogen fertilizer can be used to make explosives, so the U.S. Air Force obliterated the area in late December 1950. Later rebuilt, the fertilizer plant is still functioning today and remains one of Hamhung’s most famous landmarks.

The bomb squads respond to calls when ordnance is discovered, check construction sites before excavation work begins and educate people, especially schoolchildren, about the dangers. Jong’s squad, which covers South

Hamgyong province, has nine members. The largest, in Kangwon along the South Korean border, has 15. One bomb was uncovered in March by farmers digging an irrigation canal near a railway that runs through Hamhung from Pyongyang to the northeastern port of Chongjin. “This railway was here during the war, so it was a target,” said Yom Hak Chol, manager of the 4th work team of the Pohang cooperative farm. He was working in the field when the bomb was found and watched the bomb squad remove it. “We had to evacuate the area. The bomb squad blew it up over there,” he said, pointing to a narrow canal area where cows stood grazing between sprawling corn fields. “It left a hole 3 meters (10 feet) deep.”

Some bombs are not easily recognizable to the untrained eye. Jong said he has come across a surprising variety of bombs and explained in detail one in particular — a “butterfly bomb” that used wing-like attachments to disperse small “bomblets” over a wider area. The bomb was originally devised by the Nazis during World War II. The U.S. revised its design and used them in North Korea. Jong said many aging bombs have become even more dangerous as rust erodes their detonators, and that some could go off with the slightest movement. “I’m sure that my daughter’s generation will also suffer from this problem,” he said. “I want the world to know that.”

The rare access to Jong and the two sites on the outskirts of Hamhung was granted after repeated requests from AP. North Korea’s state media have also reported on the issue as part of a monthlong anti-U.S. propaganda campaign conducted in the run up to the anniversary of the end of the war. [Source: Associated Press | Eric Talmadge | July 25, 2017 ++]

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## **Military History: Dunkirk** ► **What You Need to Know Before Seeing Movie**

Christopher Nolan’s film *Dunkirk* inspired new attention to the famous evacuation by sea, in 1940, of four hundred thousand British troops under harrowing air attack. Had that evacuation failed, the United Kingdom would have been deprived of a land army to oppose Nazi Germany. But *before* Dunkirk, British and French troops fought desperate last stands in the channel ports of Calais and Boulogne that bought vital time for the evacuation in the Belgian Port. The situation grew so desperate at Boulogne that Allied destroyers were forced to blast their way into and back out of the harbor, using naval guns to duel with tanks, field guns and even snipers while evacuating panicky mobs of British soldiers. How did the British Expeditionary Force fall into such dire circumstances in the first place? To find out refer to the attachment to this Bulletin titled "**Dunkirk**". [Source: Task & Purpose | Sebastien Roblin | July 22, 2017 ++]

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## **Abandoned Military Bases [04]** ► **Saint Nazaire Submarine Base, France**



**The Saint Nazaire submarine base housed German U-boats during World War II in the occupied French city of Saint Nazaire. The Third Reich built five submarine bases in France, and this one still stands today.**

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## Insanely Daring Air Raids ► No.3 | Operation Opera

Air raids were one of the military strategies that were used to attack enemies using fighter planes which would drop bombs and blow buildings apart. This task was perhaps the most dangerous and terrifying mission during the times of war. However, many brave aviators risked their lives and conducted daring raids against insane odds. Following covers one often of the most daring raids to ever been conducted in history, the story behind the raids and the crews who flew the military planes.



Operation Opera was the code name of 7th June 1981 Israeli air strike on an Iraqi nuclear reactor. The operation followed the 1980 Iran-Iraq war where a pair of Iranian Phantom jets, part of a group of aircraft that were attacking a nearby conventional power plant, bombed the Iraqi reactor but only caused minor damages which were later repaired by French technicians.

The story began when Israeli intelligence confirmed the purchase of a nuclear reactor from the French by the Iraq government. Both the countries claimed that the reactor was purely for research purposes but soon after Israel confirmed Iraqis intention of developing a nuclear weapon, they were aware of the threat the Iraqi posed to them. Quickly, the Israel tried to seek a diplomatic solution that would halt the French from financing and supporting the Iraqi project, but if failed. At this point, Israel had no much time as Iraq was within a year of obtaining nuclear weapons. Israel planned their attack and on June 7, 1981, their forces took off.

The operation which was conducted carefully involved fourteen F-15 and F-16 fighters which flew off the runway of Etzion Air Force base in the Negev, and proceeded to pass over Jordanian, Saudi, and Iraqi airspace, to attack the French-built Iraqi nuclear reactor. The flight to Iraq was done low-level so as to minimize the possibility of being spotted by aircraft radar in any of the Arab nations the planes flew over.

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## Military History Anniversaries ► 01 thru 15 AUG

Significant events in U.S. Military History over the next 15 days are listed in the attachment to this Bulletin titled, “**Military History Anniversaries 01 thru 15 AUG.** [Source: This Day in History <http://www.history.com/this-day-in-history> | July 2017 ++]

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## Medal of Honor Citations ► Foss~Joseph Jacob | WWII



*The President of the United States in the name of The Congress  
takes pleasure in presenting the  
Medal of Honor  
to*

**Joseph Jacob Foss**

**Rank and organization:** Captain, U.S. Marine Corps Reserve, Marine Fighting Squadron 121, 1st Marine Aircraft Wing

**Place and date:** Over Guadalcanal, 9 October to 19 November 1942, 15 and 23 January 1943

**Entered service:** South Dakota 1937

**Born:** April 17, 1915, Sioux Falls, South Dakota

### *Citation*

For outstanding heroism and courage above and beyond the call of duty as executive officer of Marine Fighting Squadron 121, 1st Marine Aircraft Wing, at Guadalcanal. Engaging in almost daily combat with the enemy from 9 October to 19 November 1942, Capt. Foss personally shot down 23 Japanese planes and damaged others so severely that their destruction was extremely probable. In addition, during this period, he successfully led a large number of escort missions, skillfully covering reconnaissance, bombing, and photographic planes as well as surface craft. On 15 January 1943, he added 3 more enemy planes to his already brilliant successes for a record of aerial combat achievement unsurpassed in this war. Boldly searching out an approaching enemy force on 25 January, Capt. Foss led his 8 F-4F Marine planes and 4 Army P-38's into action and, undaunted by tremendously superior numbers, intercepted and struck with such force that 4 Japanese fighters were shot down and the bombers were turned back without releasing a single bomb. His remarkable flying skill, inspiring leadership, and indomitable fighting spirit were distinctive factors in the defense of strategic American positions on Guadalcanal.



During WWII



1990

Foss was born in an unelectrified farmhouse near Sioux Falls, South Dakota, the oldest son of Mary Esther (née Lacey) and Frank Ole Foss. He was of Norwegian and Scottish descent. At age 12, he visited an airfield in Renner to see Charles Lindbergh on tour with his aircraft, the Spirit of St. Louis. Four years later, he and his father paid \$1.50 apiece to take their first aircraft ride in a Ford Trimotor at Black Hills Airport with a famed South Dakota aviator, Clyde Ice.

In March 1933, while coming back from the fields during a storm, his father died when he drove over a downed electrical cable and was electrocuted as he stepped out of his automobile. Young Foss, not yet 18 years old, pitched in with his mother and brother Cliff to continue running the family farm. Farming was made difficult by dust storms, which over the next two years took its toll on crops and livestock.

After watching a Marine Corps aerial team, led by Capt. Clayton Jerome, perform aerobatics in open-cockpit biplanes, he was determined to become a Marine aviator. Foss worked at a service station to pay for books and college tuition, and to begin flight lessons from Roy Lanning, at the Sioux Skyway Airfield in 1938, scraping up \$65 to pay for the instruction. His younger brother took over the management of the farm and allowed Foss to go back to school and graduate from Washington High School in Sioux Falls. He graduated from the University of South Dakota in 1939 with a degree in business administration.

While at USD, Foss and other like-minded students convinced authorities to set up a CAA flying course at the university; he built up 100 flight hours by graduation. Foss paid his way through university by "bussing" tables. He joined the Sigma chapter of the Sigma Alpha Epsilon fraternity and excelled at sports in USD, fighting on the college boxing team, participating as a member of the track team and as a second-string guard on the football team.

Foss served as a Private in the 147th Field Artillery Regiment, Sioux Falls, South Dakota National Guard from 1937 to 1940. By 1940, armed with a pilot certificate and a college degree, Foss hitchhiked to Minneapolis to enlist in the Marine Corps Reserves, in order to join the Naval Aviation Cadet program to become a Naval Aviator. After being designated a Naval Aviator, Foss graduated at Pensacola, Florida and was commissioned as a second lieutenant, then served as a "plowback" instructor at Naval Air Station Pensacola. At 26 years of age, he was considered too old to be a fighter pilot, and was instead sent to the Navy School of Photography. Upon completion of his initial assignment, he was transferred to Marine Photographic Squadron 1 (VMO-1) stationed at Naval Air Station North Island in San Diego, California. Dissatisfied with his role in photographic reconnaissance, Foss made repeated requests to be transferred to a fighter qualification program. He checked out in Grumman F4F Wildcats while still assigned to VMO-1, logging over 150 flight hours in June and July, 1942, and was eventually transferred to Marine Fighting Squadron 121 VMF-121 as the executive officer. While stateside, Foss married his high school sweetheart, June Shakstad in 1942.

In October 1942, VMF-121 pilots and aircraft were sent to Guadalcanal as part of Operation Watchtower to relieve VMF-223, which had been fighting for control of the air over the island since mid-August. On October 9, Foss and his group were catapult launched off the USS Copahue escort carrier and flew 350 miles (560 km) north to reach Guadalcanal. The air group, code named "Cactus", based at Henderson Field became known as the Cactus Air Force, and their presence played a pivotal role in the Battle of Guadalcanal. Foss soon gained a reputation for aggressive close-in fighter tactics and uncanny gunnery skills. Foss shot down a Japanese Zero on his first combat mission on October 13, but his own F4F Wildcat was shot up as well, and with a dead engine and three more Zeros on his tail, he landed at full speed, with no flaps and minimal control on Henderson Field, barely missing a grove of palm trees. On 7 November his Wildcat was again hit, and he survived a ditching in the sea off the island of Malaita.

As lead pilot in his flight of eight Wildcats, the group soon became known as Foss's Flying Circus, with two sections Foss nicknamed "Farm Boys" and "City Slickers." In December 1942, Foss contracted malaria. He was sent to Sydney, Australia for rehabilitation, where he met Australian ace Clive "Killer" Caldwell and delivered some lectures on operational flying to RAF pilots, newly assigned to the theater. On January 1, 1943, Foss returned to



Guadalcanal, to continue combat operations which lasted until February 9, 1943, although the Japanese attacks had waned from the height of the November 1942 crisis. In three months of sustained combat, Foss's Flying Circus had shot down 72 Japanese aircraft, including 26 credited to him. Upon matching the record of 26 kills held by America's top World War I ace, Eddie Rickenbacker, Foss was accorded the honor of becoming America's first "ace-of-aces" in World War II.

Foss returned to the United States in March 1943. On May 18, 1943, Foss received the Medal of Honor from President Franklin Delano Roosevelt. The White House ceremony was featured in Life magazine, with the reluctant Captain Foss appearing on the magazine's cover. He then was asked to participate in a war bond tour that stretched into 1944.

In February 1944, Foss returned to the Pacific theater to lead VMF-115, flying the F4U Corsair. VMF-115 was based in the combat zone around Emirau, St. Mathias Group in 1944. It was during this second tour that Foss met and became friends with fellow Marine fighter ace Marion Carl. He also had an opportunity to meet and fly with his boyhood idol, Charles Lindbergh, who was on assignment touring the South Pacific as an aviation consultant. After eight months of operational flying but no opportunities to increase his wartime score, Foss finished his combat service as one of America's top scoring pilots. Foss again contracted malaria, and was sent home to the Klamath Falls, Oregon Rehabilitation Center. In February 1945, he became operations and training officer at the Marine Corps Air Station Santa Barbara, California.

In August 1945, Foss was released to inactive duty and opened Joe Foss Flying Service, charter flying service and flight instruction school in Sioux Falls, that eventually grew into a 35-aircraft operation. With a friend, Duane "Duke" Corning, he later owned a Packard car dealership in the town. In October 1945, Foss was ordered to Iowa to appear at Navy Day ceremonies in four cities there and was finally relieved from active duty in December 1945 but was retained in the Marine Corps Reserve on inactive duty until 1947. In 1946, Foss was appointed a lieutenant colonel in the South Dakota Air National Guard and instructed to form the South Dakota Air National Guard, becoming the commanding officer for the Guard's 175th Fighter-Interceptor Squadron. During the unit's formative years, Foss was actively involved in administration and flying with the squadron, even becoming a member of their F-51 Mustang air demonstration team.[24] During the Korean War, Foss, then a colonel, was called to active duty with the United States Air Force, relinquishing command of the 175th Squadron, and served as a Director of Operations and Training for the Central Air Defense Command; he eventually reached the rank of brigadier general

Campaigning from the cockpit of a light aircraft, Foss served two elected terms as a Republican representative in the South Dakota legislature and, beginning in 1955, at age 39, as the state's youngest governor. During his tenure as governor, he accompanied Tom Brokaw, then a high school student and Governor of South Dakota American Legion Boys State, to New York City for a joint appearance on "Two for the Money", a television game show, which featured Foss because of his wartime celebrity. In 1958, Foss unsuccessfully sought a seat in the U.S. House of Representatives, having been defeated by another wartime pilot hero, the Democrat George McGovern. Foss tried to re-enter politics in 1962 in a campaign to succeed Sen. Francis Case, who died in office. Foss and several other contenders lost to Joseph H. Bottum, who filled out Case's term.

Foss suffered a stroke in October 2002 when he bled from a cerebral aneurysm. He died three months later on New Year's Day, 2003, never having regained consciousness, in Scottsdale, Arizona, where he and his wife had made their home in later years. Vice President Dick Cheney, retired Colonel Oliver North and South Dakota native and NBC News anchor Tom Brokaw were among those who attended with North delivering the eulogy. Actor Charlton Heston gave a brief tribute to his old friend. Foss was buried at Arlington National Cemetery in Section 7A, Lot 162 on January 21, 2003. Family, friends, military personnel and dignitaries remembered him fondly at a service in Arlington and at an earlier "Memorial Service for an American Patriot" in the old chapel at nearby Fort Myer.

[Source: <http://www.history.army.mil/moh> | July 2017 ++]





## TRICARE Mental Health/SUB ► Treatment Options Expanded

TRICARE expanded mental health and substance use disorder (SUD) services, adding intensive outpatient programs and expanding options for opioid treatment. In addition to other improvements, this expansion improves access to care and increases opportunities for mental health and SUD treatment. It also makes it easier for beneficiaries to access the right level of care for their health and wellness needs. These new services round out existing TRICARE covered treatments, including:

- Emergency and non-emergency inpatient hospitalization
- Psychiatric residential treatment center care for children
- Inpatient/residential SUD care
- Partial hospitalization
- Outpatient and office-based mental health and SUD treatment

“If someone does well in inpatient psychiatric care and no longer requires 24-hour care, they could step down a level. Their options may be a partial hospital program, an intensive outpatient program at six hours a day, or outpatient treatment with a TRICARE-authorized provider. An authorized provider is any individual, institution/organization, or supplier that is licensed by a state, accredited by national organization, or meets other standards of the medical community, and is certified to provide benefits under TRICARE. There are two types of TRICARE-authorized providers: Network and Non-Network,” said Dr. Patricia Moseley, a senior policy analyst for military child and family behavioral health at the Defense Health Agency. “Now we have a continuum of care to meet our beneficiaries’ needs.” Other changes are:

**Increased Substance Use Disorder Treatment Options** -- Improvements to SUD options include opioid treatment programs and office-based opioid treatment. Office visits with qualified TRICARE-authorized providers may include coverage of medications for opioid addiction.

**Reduced Limitations on Number of Treatments** -- TRICARE reduced limitations for receiving mental health and SUD services. There are no limits for the number of times beneficiaries can get SUD treatment, smoking cessation counseling and outpatient treatment per week. In addition, TRICARE removed the requirement for authorization after the eighth outpatient mental health or SUD visit.

**Lower Copayments and Cost-Shares** -- Lower copayments and cost-shares continue from last year. Since October 2016, non-active duty dependent beneficiaries, retirees, family members and survivors began paying generally lower copayments and cost-shares for mental health and SUD care. One example is the cost per each mental health and SUD outpatient office-based visit, now reduced from \$25 to \$12. See the full list of updated mental health copayments and cost-shares on the TRICARE website. “Mental health and substance use disorder treatment is now cost equivalent to medical and surgical care, as it should be,” said Dr. Moseley.

### New TRICARE-Authorized Provider Options

For mental health and SUD treatment providers, becoming TRICARE-authorized is now a more streamlined process for providers and facilities. This means more options for TRICARE beneficiaries. The changes remove unique certification requirements to become consistent with industry standards. In the coming months, new mental health

and SUD institutional provider options (such as intensive outpatient programs) will be available. Your TRICARE regional contractors are developing networks now. Contact your regional support contractor at <https://tricare.mil/FindDoctor/AllProviderDirectories> for services in your area. For more information on the updated services and expanding treatment options for mental health and SUD, visit Mental Health Care on the TRICARE website <https://tricare.mil/CoveredServices/Mental>.

[Source: TRICARE Communications | July 19, 2017 +]

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## TRICARE Information Service Update 01 ► Ways to Get Smart

When you need information about your TRICARE health care benefits, turn to [www.TRICARE.mil](http://www.TRICARE.mil). In addition to this website, there are a number of resources to help you learn about your coverage and important health issues. Take a look at seven ways to get smart about TRICARE:

- **Handbooks, Guides and Booklets:** When you have questions about TRICARE benefits, coverage or costs, visit the TRICARE Publications page at <https://tricare.mil/publications>. You'll find handbooks, guides and booklets that cover eligibility, enrollment and health plans. For example, at [https://tricare.mil/CoveredServices/BenefitUpdates/Archives/07\\_28\\_17\\_7WaystoGetSmart](https://tricare.mil/CoveredServices/BenefitUpdates/Archives/07_28_17_7WaystoGetSmart) the TRICARE Dental Program Benefit Booklet gives details about dental benefits from preventive services to claim filing. There are also booklets if you use TRICARE [overseas](#) or [stateside](#).
- **Fact Sheets:** The search words "fact sheet" on the publications page will lead you to short fact sheets that describe specific programs and benefits. The [Cost and Fees fact sheet](#) lists your costs for TRICARE programs and services. The [Appeals fact sheet](#) describes how to file TRICARE medical appeals.
- **Newsletters:** Check out the [Health Matters newsletters](#). The overseas, stateside and dental newsletters feature seasonal articles, news and health information that impacts the TRICARE community.
- **News Articles:** Stay updated regarding your TRICARE coverage by reading the latest [TRICARE news articles](#). The articles cover health and seasonal issues, ranging from childhood obesity to summer safety and help you use TRICARE to stay healthy.
- **Videos:** Find videos about your medical and dental coverage on [TRICARE TV](#). TRICARE TV gives you short overviews of important topics, such as [well woman exams](#), [covered preventative services](#) or [avoiding mosquitoes this summer](#).
- **Podcasts:** Listen to the weekly podcast, [TRICARE Beneficiary Bulletin](#). The podcast highlights [recent news](#), military health care and issues that affect TRICARE beneficiaries. Transcripts are available for each episode.
- **Webinars:** The monthly webinars let you listen to briefs by TRICARE subject matter experts. You may submit questions for the experts to answer. [Sign up for upcoming TRICARE webinars](#) and [watch previous archived webinars](#) on the Military OneSource website.

Don't want to miss anything? You can [sign up to get email updates](#). Also, follow them on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [Google+](#). Plug in and stay informed—get smart with TRICARE. [Source: Tricare Communications | July 28, 2017 ++]

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## TRICARE Changes ► New Enrollment Rules/Fees | Who's Affected

Big changes are coming for TRICARE users, and the Military Officers Association of America (MOAA) wants to make sure you and your family are prepared to take a more proactive approach in selecting the best health care plan.

New enrollment rules and fees are hitting in 2018 for many TRICARE users. MOAA is working with the Defense Health Agency to help craft communication materials to inform TRICARE users about the changes — but with so many new rules on the horizon, we want to help our members understand who will be affected and when. “The overarching theme is that we have a new model, a new process,” says Capt. Kathy Beasley, USN (Ret), director of MOAA’s government relations health affairs. “Beneficiaries have to make an active annual choice of their program.”

Here’s a look at how the changes could affect you. Let’s start by breaking down what each cohort needs to know about the upcoming TRICARE changes:

**Q. What should active duty families expect?**

**Beasley:** For active duty servicemembers, there’s going to be virtually no change for them. They get all of their care predominantly in military treatment facilities, and that will not change. They won’t be charged any fees, and if they need care on the outside, it will continue to be authorized.

For active duty family members, however, there will be some changes. Changes will be minimal for those on TRICARE Prime. But during the new open enrollment season for 2018 — which is expected to run from the end of November through December [2017]— active duty family members need to know that they’ll be automatically enrolled in TRICARE Prime unless they opt out during that period.

**Q. What about the under-65 military retiree?**

**Beasley:** They will also be automatically enrolled during that same November-December [2017] period into the plan they’re already in. For example, if they’re on TRICARE Prime, they’ll automatically be enrolled in that same plan unless they opt out. If they’re on TRICARE Standard, they’ll automatically be enrolled in TRICARE Select, which is the new name for TRICARE Standard.

If someone wants to switch from TRICARE Standard into TRICARE Prime, or they want to drop their coverage because they’re picking up insurance elsewhere, they’ll have to make that change during the open enrollment period. This is a new change for folks.

**Q. And how about those over the age of 65 who use TRICARE for Life?**

**Beasley:** There are no changes for them.

**Q. Will anything change for dependents between the ages of 21 and 26 who use Tricare Young Adult?**

**Beasley:** TRICARE Young Adult is separate and will remain as is.

**Q. How will the TRICARE Overseas program be affected by these upcoming changes?**

**Beasley:** That will be changed to TRICARE Select, so anyone who wants that plan will need to be aware of the enrollment period to elect the coverage. Other than that, though, nothing should really change about the coverage.

**Q. What about TRICARE Reserve Select?**

**Beasley:** That will stay as TRICARE Reserve as it stands right now. But anyone who uses or wants that plan will need to make sure they enroll for it during open enrollment later this fall.

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Have a question about the new TRICARE rules? Send it to [ginah@moaa.org](mailto:ginah@moaa.org) and we’ll get our subject-matter experts to weigh in. [Source: MOAA Leg Up | July 30, 2017 ++]

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## Hearing Aids Update 03 ► Military Retiree Dependent's Eligibility

A provision in last year's National Defense Authorization Act gave DoD permission to provide hearing aids, at government cost, to dependents of military retirees. This is great news for retired beneficiaries, who are already eligible for hearing aids through the Retiree At-Cost Hearing Aid Program, popularly known as RACHAP. Now retiree dependents are eligible to use this program too. Key features of the program:

- Eligible beneficiaries directly purchase hearing aids, utilizing the government contract price through manufactures (at cost). Available at military treatment facilities (MTFs) only.
- Cost at the MTF is \$300-\$400 per hearing aid; the average savings to the beneficiary is \$1,600 to \$3,600 per hearing aid.
- This is a voluntary program for MTFs. This means individual MTFs are allowed to determine whether they will participate.
- Currently, there are 27 MTFs participating in the program, representing all three services and located only in the continental U.S. (CONUS).
- Capacity is limited at most MTFs. Active duty servicemembers and their family members have priority.
- The program is not a TRICARE benefit.

A hearing aid is considered a medical device, and getting one typically requires a series of three or four appointments with a qualified audiologist or technician for an evaluation, fitting, and follow-up. It's a bit more complicated than obtaining a new pair of eyeglasses. It's also more resource intensive, which is why many MTFs may have limited capacity. Military Health System officials have approved the new policy and indicated they intend to do a supply-and-demand analysis to determine how and where to expand this popular program. If you are a retiree or retiree dependent interested in the RACHAP program, contact your closest MTF to determine whether they participate and find out how to get an appointment. [Source: MOAA Leg Up | July 21, 2017 ++]

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## Zika Virus Update 02 ► Protecting Yourself

### What is Zika and how is it spread?

The Zika virus is a mosquito-borne infection most commonly passed through the bite of a mosquito. The virus is found in warmer, tropical climates and thrives in the summer months. It travels between people through sex or from a pregnant mother to her fetus. Being aware of the risk of Zika and taking preventive steps is important. Talk with your TRICARE authorized provider about Zika if you live in an area with Zika and are pregnant or trying to get pregnant.

### What are the symptoms of Zika?

Symptoms of the Zika virus are generally mild and include a rash, joint pain and red eyes. Some people develop muscle pain or a headache, but others experience no symptoms.

### What are the biggest risks of Zika?

Zika infection poses significant risks for pregnant women. In utero, the Zika virus can cause a brain defect called microcephaly, as well as other birth defects.

### How can I protect myself from Zika?

There is no vaccine to protect against Zika. However, there are many ways to reduce your risk of contracting the Zika virus. Some tips include:

- Protecting yourself by treating clothing with permethrin (an insecticide) and wearing clothes that cover as much skin as possible
- Using insect repellent
- Taking steps to control mosquitoes in and around living areas
- Using condoms or practicing abstinence, especially if Zika risk factors are high
- Staying indoors, keep windows closed or use window and door screens
- Protecting sleeping areas with mosquito nets

**What should I do if I suspect I have contracted Zika?**

See your TRICARE provider if you believe you may be infected. If you are not located near a U.S. Embassy Health Unit military hospital or clinic, please contact your TOP Regional Call Center for additional information. An analysis of symptoms, travel history and a blood or urine test can confirm the diagnosis.

For more information, visit the Centers for Disease Prevention and Control at [www.cdc.gov/zika](http://www.cdc.gov/zika)



[Source: TRICARE Health Matters | ISSUE 2 | 2017 ++]

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**Cancer Detection Update 01 ► New Single Blood Test for 13 Cancers**

A research team led by the Tokyo-based National Cancer Center Japan has developed a new test to diagnose 13 kinds of cancers from a single drop of blood, with a clinical study set to start from next month. The center’s research and ethics screening committee gave the green light to the study in mid-July. The research team will apply to the central government to put the new test into practical use within three years, at the earliest. Thus far, there has been no test to diagnose multiple kinds of cancers at one time. If the new test is introduced in comprehensive medical examinations and other checkups, deaths from cancer could be reduced.

The new test utilizes microRNA (miRNA), a substance that is secreted from cells into the blood and regulates the movements of genes. Types of miRNA differ between cancer cells and normal cells, and they do not decompose for a certain period of time. The team is composed of researchers from the center, Toray Industries Inc. — which has the testing technology — and other institutions. They succeeded in identifying miRNA specific to 13 kinds of cancers, such as breast, lung, stomach, colorectal, esophagus, liver and pancreatic cancers, from the preserved blood of about 40,000 patients, most of whom were cancer sufferers.

From a single drop of blood, the researchers could diagnose all the cancers, including relatively early stage 1 cancers, with more than 95% accuracy. Breast cancer was diagnosed with 97% accuracy.

However, the properties of miRNA could have changed in preserved blood. Therefore, in the planned clinical study, the research team will use fresh blood provided by about 3,000 people, including patients and healthy people. For early detection of cancers such as breast, stomach, lung and colorectal, examinations using X-rays and endoscopy are said to be effective. However, people need to take separate examinations for each part of the body. Even with the new test method, detailed examinations will be required to confirm a diagnosis. Yet Takahiro Ochiya, head of the Molecular and Cellular Medicine Division at the National Cancer Center Research Institute, said: “Patients will not need to take multiple tests. In the future, it will become possible to identify cancer stages and characteristics.”

Prof. Masahiko Kuroda, chief of the Molecular Pathology Department of the Tokyo Medical University, said: “In Europe, research aimed at early detection of diseases using miRNA is being actively pursued, but there haven’t been

any studies where analysis was conducted on so many patients like this one. So this should prove very useful.”  
Cancers that can be diagnosed by the new test include:

- Stomach Cancer
- Colorectal Cancer
- Esophageal Cancer
- Pancreatic Cancer
- Liver Cancer
- Biliary Tract Cancer
- Lung Cancer
- Breast Cancer
- Ovarian Cancer
- Prostrate Cancer
- Bladder Cancer
- Bone and soft tissue tumors
- Glioma

[Source: The Japan News | Yomiuri Shimbun | July 25, 2017 ++]

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## **MHS Transparency Site ► Shows How Your Facility is Performing**

Patients who use military hospitals and clinics will find it easier to see how their facility is performing thanks to 28 JUN changes by the Military Health System (MHS) to its transparency website located at <https://health.mil/Military-Health-Topics/Access-Cost-Quality-and-Safety/Patient-Portal-for-MHS-Quality-Patient-Safety-and-Access-Information> . The MHS has put military hospital and clinic quality, safety, and patient satisfaction information online for years, but not always in ways that could be easily found or understood. The recent changes to the site are a good first step to fixing that problem, said Dr. Jill Sterling, co-chair of the MHS Transparency Initiative Group.

“We put all of our public data on health.mil after the Secretary of Defense review in 2014, and added additional measures when Congress passed the Fiscal Year 2016 National Defense Authorization Act,” said Sterling. “Making so much information public from so many sources as fast as we did meant there wasn’t much time to design with the user in mind. The site wasn’t very easy to use.” The website improvements include:

- Each military hospital and clinic now has a landing page where patients can see all the data in one place. In the past, patients had to download multiple spreadsheets and search for their facility.
- Users can find a U.S. hospital or clinic by ZIP code search. Users can find any hospital or clinic that reports data, including those overseas, through a name search.
- Users can compare up to three nearby hospitals or clinics on one custom report.
- MHS data managers now have a flexible system that lets them update performance measures. They can also add new measures and remove old ones that are no longer used. In the past, adding a new measure could take months. Now MHS can make most changes in days or weeks.

“We think the improvements we just made are a good step forward. However, it is just one step forward. We still have work to do, and we’re looking for feedback from users to improve how we share that data,” said Sterling. The new site includes a random sample survey of users to help the MHS get feedback from patients. The site also includes a way for users to send feedback by email. MHS plans to have volunteers perform user testing at several military hospitals and clinics. This will ensure patients have a say in future improvements.



Users can visit the site directly, or go to the main landing page of the health.mil website <https://health.mil> and click a link to the MHS Transparency pages. Individual military hospital and clinic websites will also link to the transparency site from their webpages. [Source: Health.mil | July 20, 2017 ++]

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## **TRICARE Podcast 406 ► Staying Hydrated | Military Pharmacies | Grilling Safety**

**Staying Hydrated When Temperatures Soar** - Most people know that staying hydrated is important in the summer months. According to the U.S. Army Public Health Center, every summer thousands of service members are treated for heat-related illnesses, including dehydration, heat stroke and heat exhaustion. Mild dehydration doesn't normally cause issues, and may even go unnoticed. However, even mild dehydration negatively affects mood, brain and body functioning. Follow these tips from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to help you prevent heat illness and stay hydrated this summer:

- When working or exercising outside in the heat, drink 8 ounces of water every 15 to 20 minutes.
- Eat foods with high water content.
- And avoid sugary beverages, alcohol and drinks with high caffeine or sugar.

If you feel thirsty, you may already be dehydrated. Pay attention to other signs of dehydration, which include:

- Fatigue
- Lightheadedness or dizziness, and
- Elevated heart rate, blood pressure and/or breathing

If you notice these signs, drinking plenty of water is the first line of defense. Sports drinks or rehydration solutions are important because glucose and electrolyte imbalances can be dangerous. Check out more tips for enjoying a safe and healthy summer from TRICARE at [www.TRICARE.mil/healthwellness](http://www.TRICARE.mil/healthwellness).

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**Military Pharmacies** Did you know that you can fill your prescriptions at military pharmacies at no cost to you? Military pharmacies can fill prescription written by military or civilian provider for up to a 90-day supply of most drugs. Check with the pharmacy first to make sure they carry your drug. You can find the military pharmacy closest to you at [www.TRICARE.mil/MTF](http://www.TRICARE.mil/MTF).

- Military pharmacies stock most drugs on the basic core formulary and many brand name maintenance on the uniform formulary.
- TRICARE beneficiaries have no copay for prescription drugs at military pharmacies.
- Military pharmacies accept electronic prescriptions from civilian providers, which can save time and cut down on potential errors from using a paper prescription.

If you call the military pharmacy and they can't fill your prescription, you have other choices, including TRICARE Pharmacy Home Delivery and retail network pharmacies. The process to transfer a prescription to a military pharmacy is simple. Just take your prescriptions to the new pharmacy and they'll work with your old pharmacy to move it. Military pharmacies are usually found at a military hospital or clinic but some are free-standing facilities located elsewhere on the post or base. You can find more information about using military pharmacies at [www.TRICARE.mil/pharmacy](http://www.TRICARE.mil/pharmacy).

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**Grilling Safety This Summer** - Every summer, Americans fire up their grills in the hopes of enjoying delicious food and fun in the sun. Still, each year, grills start nearly 9,000 house fires or result in injury. These house fires and personal injuries are preventable with safe grilling practices:

- Learn proper grill procedures. Charcoal grills and gas grills each require their own safety checks and procedures. For charcoal grills, familiarize yourself with proper lighter fluid and coal practices. For gas grills, learn how to check for gas line leaks.
- Check the grill location. Make sure your grill is placed in a well-ventilated area far from areas trafficked by children or pets.
- Keep flammable materials away. Oven mitts, dish towels and aprons can catch fire if they are too close to grilling surfaces.
- And grill to the proper temperature. Use an instant-read thermometer to make sure you're cooking meats to the proper temperatures.
- Don't cross-contaminate raw meats with other foods.
- Always marinate meats in the refrigerator and not on the counter.

Although grilling comes with risks, it can be a safe, fun summer activity. Next time you grill, take steps to protect yourself and your family. Check out more tips for enjoying a safe and healthy summer from TRICARE at [www.TRICARE.mil/healthwellness](http://www.TRICARE.mil/healthwellness).

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The above is from the TRICARE Beneficiary Bulletin, an update on the latest news to help you make the best use of your TRICARE benefit. [Source: <http://www.tricare.mil/podcast> | July 14, 2017 ++]

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## **TRICARE Podcast 408 ► Identity Theft | Protecting Your Skin**

**Identity Theft** -- Did you know that health care is the number one target for identity theft and fraud? Your health information is important to you and your health care provider. But in the wrong hands, it can be valuable to someone else. Would you know if someone stole your medical identity? Identity theft affects millions of people year. The Federal Trade Commission offers several steps you can take to make sure your health care information remains secure.

- First, read your medical and insurance statements regularly and completely. They can show warning signs of identity theft. Look for services you did not receive or providers you did not see. This is like seeing charges on your credit card statement that were not yours.
- Next, read your Explanation of Benefits statement or Medicare Summary Notice that your health plan sends after each treatment. Again, check the name of the provider, the date of service, and the service provided. Do the claims paid match the care you received? If you see a mistake, contact your health plan and report the problem.
- You should also watch for bills if you know part of your care was not covered. If a bill doesn't show up when you expect it, look into it.

Being cyber fit requires us to be mindful of your health information even when you're not using health IT. You are the center of your healthcare. Empower yourself to protect your information. For more information about cyber fitness, visit [www.TRICARE.mil/cyberfit](http://www.TRICARE.mil/cyberfit).

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**Protect Your Skin** -- While exposure to sunlight can be beneficial, getting too much can be harmful. Prolonged sun exposure can damage the skin and increase the risk of skin cancer. The good news is that there are ways you can keep your skin protected and still have fun in the sun. The best way to reduce your risk of skin damage, eye damage and skin cancer is to practice proper sun protection. Follow these sun safety tips from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to help protect yourself:

- Use sunscreen with SPF 15 or higher. Reapply if you stay out in the sun for more than two hours, and after you swim or sweat excessively.
- Wear a hat with a wide brim to shade your face, head, ears and neck.
- Protect your eyes by wearing sunglasses that wrap around and block UV radiation.
- And avoid indoor tanning.

TRICARE covers skin cancer exams for people who are at a higher risk for developing skin cancer. You may be at higher risk because of family or personal history of skin cancer, increased occupational or recreational exposure to sunlight, or clinical evidence of precursor lesions. While the sun can do you good, remember too much exposure without protection can be dangerous. Avoid consequences of prolonged sun exposure by taking steps to protect your skin when you go outside. For more tips for enjoying a safe and healthy summer check out [www.TRICARE.mil/healthwellness](http://www.TRICARE.mil/healthwellness).

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The above is from the TRICARE Beneficiary Bulletin, an update on the latest news to help you make the best use of your TRICARE benefit. [Source: <http://www.tricare.mil/podcast> | July 28, 2017 ++]

**\* Finances \***



**IRS Appeals Update 01 ► Online Pilot Program 90 Day Test**

The IRS will debut a new online pilot program that gives people the option to resolve tax disputes face to face with an IRS representative. The program will use Cisco’s WebEx secure screen-sharing platform to connect any taxpayer with a remote appeals officer, allowing both parties to video chat and share documents. Unlike the agency’s current video conferencing systems that require taxpayers to go to a designated location, anyone with an internet connection can access the new platform, according to the IRS.

The agency said the pilot will launch at each of its 68 nationwide offices on 1 AUG and last for 90 days with the possibility of extension. Appeals officers participating in the program will first offer their clients the option to use WebEx and then email a link to those who accept, according to the IRS. “We hope this is one more option to enable IRS employees to provide timely, efficient and effective service to taxpayers,” said IRS Chief of Appeals Donna Hansberry in the pilot’s announcement on Monday.

As it stands, taxpayers filing appeals with the IRS can meet with officers over the phone, in person or through video conference. While these services meet the needs of most of the 100,000 people who file appeals each year, those wanting to meet face-to-face but living far from an appeals office find themselves with few viable options. The new tool will offer such people easy access to officials who can help settle tax discrepancies. Hansberry sees this technology as a first step in giving all taxpayers virtual access to the appeals office through their electronic devices. [Source: NextGov | Jack Corrigan | July 25, 2017 ++]

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## **Military Times Best for Vets Index ► New Investment Fund**

A new investment fund will allow people to invest in companies with strong records in recruiting and supporting veterans, active duty service members, Guardsmen and reservists, and military families. Financial analysis shows that such companies generally outperform the market. That's the reason a new fund, the Military Times Best for Vets Index, was created by Track One Capital Services, based in New York, and Wilshire Associates Inc., based in Santa Monica, California. Track One Capital Services chose to utilize the Military Times Best for Vets Employers guide as the basis for identifying these companies based on its independence, accuracy and authenticity. This well-established guide has become the standard for identifying companies that create the best employment environment for veterans and members of the military community.

Only companies that have earned a place on the competitive Military Times Best for Vets Employers rankings for three consecutive years are eligible to be included as part of the index investment fund. The companies must also be publicly traded and have a market capitalization of at least \$200 million. A portion of proceeds from the index fund will go to supporting military and veteran causes. "We are proud to be information partners for the Military Times Best for Vets Index, and to have our Best for Vets Employers guide as the qualification for companies listed in the fund. We consider it an extension of our overall company goal: serving those who serve," said David Smith, president of Military Times parent company Sightline Media Group. "Because the Military Times Best for Vets Employers rankings are independent, highly respected and very competitive, they are the ideal way to identify companies for this fund that create focused career opportunities for veterans and the military community."

Companies that incorporate social missions, such as supporting veterans, into their business plans tend to be better-run and produce better returns in the stock market than those that do not, according to Track One Capital Services. "We have for many years recognized the unique skill sets that our military veterans bring to the workplace. The Military Times Best for Vets Index now demonstrates the measurable benefit that these organizations reap," said Joseph Gelin of Track One Capital Services. "We consider the Military Times to be the most well-respected and authoritative brand with the veteran community and we are thrilled to be partnering with them."

Investment funds allow groups of people to pool their money in shares of multiple publicly traded companies. The value of the investment grows or shrinks with changes in the corresponding stock prices. The index will open up for investment later this year. Keep an eye on Military Times for more details in the coming months. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Staff Report | July 29, 2017 ++]

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## **Mortgage Update 06 ► Can You Really Get A No-Cost One?**

Mortgage interest rates remain near historic lows. But as the economy continues to improve, so do the odds of higher interest rates, which means now could be a great time to refinance. But before you consider a new mortgage with a lower rate, consider all the costs. Following is a question I originally received some time ago. While the numbers have changed a bit since it was originally submitted, the advice remains the same.

*My bank called and offered me to refinance at no charge: no appraisal fee, no refinance fee for a rate of 4.5 percent. My current rate is 5.375 percent. What's more beneficial for me? The difference in price each month is about \$100 less if I get the re-fi at 4.5 percent. What should I do?*

*– Corinne*

Here's how Corinne — and anyone else in her situation — can answer their own refinance question. Simply divide the cost of the refinance by the monthly savings. That will reveal how many months it will take to make the refinance profitable. For example, if the fees you pay to refinance are \$2,000 and you save \$100/month as a result, it will take 20 months to recoup the cost. If you're going to stay in the house exactly 20 months, you break even. If you move sooner, you lose money. For every month you stay longer, you come out \$100 ahead.

<sup>4</sup> Corinne says she'll have no cost to refinance: "My bank called and offered me to refinance at no charge: no appraisal fee, no refinance fee." If we really could refinance at no cost, we should do so every time rates fall by even 1/10 of a percent, since there would be no cost and all benefit. But despite what the lender advertisements say, is there really any such thing as refinancing at no charge? [Source: MoneyTalksNews | Stacy Johnson | July 28, 2017 ++]

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## **Battery Lawsuit ► Claim Your Share of 45M Settlement**

If you bought electronics that use lithium-ion batteries — or bought replacement batteries for such electronics — between 2000 and 2011, there's a good chance you are owed money. This potential payout stems from a class-action lawsuit against battery manufacturers accused of fixing prices. A law firm involved in the case, Hagens Berman Sobol Shapiro LLP, recently explained: "The lawsuit alleges that defendants and co-conspirators conspired to raise and fix the prices of cylindrical [lithium-ion battery] cells for more than ten years, resulting in overcharges to indirect purchasers of portable computers, camcorders, and power tools containing li-ion cylindrical batteries."

The phrase "indirect purchasers" refers to people who bought these items from a third party, like a retailer, rather than directly from a manufacturer. According to the lawsuit website, you might be eligible for compensation from the \$45 million settlement if you both:

- Lived in the U.S. from Jan. 1, 2000, to May 31, 2011.
- Bought for yourself (rather than for resale) a product that is covered by the settlement at any brick-and-mortar or online retailer between Jan. 1, 2000, and May 31, 2011.

The products covered by the settlement are:

- Portable computers (including laptop PCs, notebook PCs, and netbook computers — except for Panasonic Toughbook products)
- Mobile phones, tablets, digital audio players and cameras (including smartphones)
- Camcorders
- Cordless power tools (including driver drills and battery-powered saws)
- Replacement batteries for these electronics are also covered by the settlement.

### **How to submit a claim for payment**

You can submit a claim for payment by filling out the online claim form on the "Claim Form" section of the lawsuit website <https://www.reversethecharge.com/> by the deadline of 11:59 p.m. PT on Nov. 29. According to the website, this process is "fast, easy, and takes less than 5 minutes." Proof of purchase of an eligible electronic is not required to file a claim. Payments will be issued after the court has approved the final settlement and the claim submission process closes. You will be contacted before payments are issued to specify which payment option you prefer.

[Source: MoneyTalksNews | Karla Bowsher | July 20, 2017 ++]

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## Lost Pet Scam ► Beware Phony Responses Seeking Money

Posting on social media is a great way to alert a wide range of people about a lost pet. Unfortunately, that same publicity can put you at risk for scams. Con artists comb social posts to find targets who have lost their beloved pets.

### How the Scam Works

- You recently lost your pet, so you turn to social media to alert friends and neighbors. You create a public post – or even a group – to help spread the word. You share your phone number and other details, so people can easily reach you.
- A few days later, you get a text message from someone claiming to have found your lost dog or cat. You ask them to describe your pet and/or send a photo, but the conversation quickly takes a strange turn. The scammer will give excuses, such as being out of town or not having a working smartphone, for why they can't snap a photo. Instead, the person will pressure you for money (or a gift card) to return your pet. Although you may be tempted to do anything to see your dog or cat returned safely, don't pay up! The scammer doesn't have your pet. They will just take the money and disappear.

**How to Avoid a Lost Pet Con:** Follow these tips to prevent falling victim to a pet loss scam:

- Limit the information in your social posts : If you post on Facebook or other social media, omit information about unique physical attributes. This can help you verify if someone really found your pet.
- Watch for spoofed numbers : If you get a call from someone claiming to have your pet, ask them for a phone number where you can call them back. Scammers often spoof phone numbers, so they appear to be calling from somewhere else.
- Ask for a photo : If a caller claims to have your pet in their possession, ask them to send a current picture. If the "finder" gets defensive or makes a lot of excuses, it's a red flag.
- Never wire money or use a prepaid debit card to pay anyone you don't know . This is the same as sending cash.
- Microchip and/or ID tag your pet : Consider having your veterinarian microchip your pet, or make sure they always wear a collar and ID tag.

For more information check out coverage of the scam on BuzzFeed including screen shots of phishing text messages at [https://www.buzzfeed.com/leticiamiranda/a-scammer-is-demanding-money-from-people-to-return-their?utm\\_term=.dsPZoXwa8#.lqMXENzG7](https://www.buzzfeed.com/leticiamiranda/a-scammer-is-demanding-money-from-people-to-return-their?utm_term=.dsPZoXwa8#.lqMXENzG7). To learn more about scams, go to BBB Scam Tips ([bbb.org/scamtips](http://bbb.org/scamtips)). To report a scam, go to BBB Scam Tracker ([bbb.org/scamtracker](http://bbb.org/scamtracker)). [Source: BBB Scam Alert | July 21, 2017 ++]

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## Energy Bill Scam ► Phony Home Energy Programs

It's the middle of summer, and much of the US and Canada is running their air conditioners to beat the heat. But these cooler homes translate into higher electricity bills. Scammers use this opportunity to tempt consumers with the promise of lower energy payments. Don't fall for this con.

### How the Scam Works

- You get a call from someone claiming to represent a local energy company or government agency. This "representative" says that they are part of a program to help homeowners lower their energy bills. The details vary; this "program" may involve registering for tax credits, enrolling in an alternative energy program, or signing up with a competitive energy supplier.
- Be sure to do your homework before accidentally falling for a scam! In some cases, con artists want to enroll you in a non-existent program or sign up for tax credits, which requires you sharing personal



information, such as your Social Security or Social Insurance number. This opens you up to the risk of identity theft. In other versions, the "program" involves paying upfront for future energy savings that never materialize.

**Tips to avoid an energy bill scam:** Here are some tips for spotting scams that claim to help you lower your energy bills:

- Verify the program before enrolling. Before you sign up, confirm that you are dealing with a representative of a real program. Call your energy company or government agency using the number on their website or your energy bill.
- Understand your energy options: Some municipalities in the US and Canada now allow "competitive energy suppliers," (List of US state laws) alternatives to traditional utility companies that may be able to offer a better rate on your energy bills. But like any opportunity, be sure you understand the terms of the new contract and how it differs from your existing one.
- Check out BBB Tips: Many scams use similar techniques, see [www.bbb.org/utilityscam](http://www.bbb.org/utilityscam) and [www.bbb.org/grantscam](http://www.bbb.org/grantscam) for more advice.

The American Collation of Competitive Energy Suppliers provides resources for consumers to evaluate competing energy company offers. To learn more about scams, go to BBB Scam Tips ([bbb.org/scamtips](http://bbb.org/scamtips)). To report a scam, go to BBB Scam Tracker ([bbb.org/scamtracker](http://bbb.org/scamtracker)). [Source: BBB Scam Alert | July 14, 2017 ++]

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## **Death Benefit Scam ► Pay Unpaid Portion of Deceased's Insurance**

Another egregious scam is making its way around the country, and this scam is targeting family members of deceased veterans. The scammers are using very sophisticated technology to create the kind of ruse to make it look as if they are the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) or local Funeral Home.

### **How the Scam Works**

- Shortly after a veteran passes away, a family member, namely a spouse, is seemingly contacted by the VA or local funeral home. The representative (scammer) will inform the family member that the veteran has a host of death benefits from the VA that is obtainable to the next of kin. The scammers provide a very long and detailed list of benefits that the next of kin is eligible to obtain. The scammers then transition to a cancelled insurance policy that will pay the next of kin \$50k, \$60k, \$70k and in some cases over \$100k.
- The scammers go on to instruct the next of kin to purchase an insurance card (what essentially is a gift card) from the local bank, with some amount determined by the scammer. According to the scammers, the "insurance card" is used to pay the nominal unpaid portion of the insurance policy, so that the next of kin could get up to \$100k in some cases.
- If the next of kin passes on the getting the "insurance card," or hangs up the phone on the scammer, within 15 to 30 minutes, the next of kin will get a telephone call from what appears to be a local funeral home as showing on caller ID [this part of the scam is where the scammers get most of their victims]. The phony funeral home representative (scammer) will inform the next of kin that the person who called from the "VA" was legitimate. The very persuasive scammer will then take control of the process and inform the next of kin they will handle the situation for the next of kin.
- The scammers will use actual names of people who work at local funeral homes. As instructed previously, the funeral home scammer will direct the next of kin to wire money to the phony funeral home or send the so called insurance card immediately.

### **Tip to avoid this scam:**

- Remember, the VA will conduct benefits business by mail, not the telephone.

[Source: <http://www.armedforceslocator.com/locate-scams4.html> | July 14, 2017 ++]

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## **CVA Charity Scam ► Donations to Vets/Vet Charities**

Veterans and dependents are being warned to keep an eye out for a charity scam that's taking advantage of their generosity to give to veterans and veterans organizations. The scam charity goes by the name "Coalition for Veterans of America."

### **How the Scam Works**

- Hundreds of boiler room callers from the scam charity are reaching out to veterans and dependents and informing them they have been selected to assist with a small tax deductible donation that will help aid veteran homelessness and pay for veterans' medical expenses.
- The scammers go on further to inform the veteran or dependent that a nominal thank you gift will be mailed to them as soon as an accurate address is provided. The scammers are collecting address information to sell, and taking money from veterans and dependents who believe they are helping a worthy cause.

Be advised, that if you are not familiar with a charity or organization claiming to help veterans, you can verify their authenticity by visiting [www.charitynavigator.org](http://www.charitynavigator.org) . Charity Navigator has become the nation's largest and most-utilized evaluator of charities.

### **Tips to avoid this scam:**

- First, do not feel obligated to send money or financial information over the phone.
- Beware of charities that sound similar to others.
- Be cautious of invitations to donate via social media; some may be legitimate, but they should be verified before you make a commitment to donate.
- You should always ask solicitors what percentage of your donation will be given to relief efforts. By law, the solicitor must tell you if you ask.
- Make sure to avoid wire transfers or giving gift cards as a donation method (major red flag).

[Source: <http://www.armedforceslocator.com/locate-scams4.html> | July 27, 2017 ++]

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## **Movie & TV Freebies ► 17 Online Sites For Free**

No matter what you enjoy watching, you can find it online for free — from silent films and old Westerns to Lifetime TV movies and "The Daily Show." The following streaming video services collectively offer millions of films and TV series that you can find and view for free online or, in most cases, on a variety of other devices.

1. **Classic Cinema Online**: Free online streaming service offering classic and vintage films, including silent films.
2. **Crackle**: Sony's free streaming service that offers movies, series and original content. **Supported devices** include mobile devices, smart TVs, streaming media players and gaming consoles.
3. **Free Movies Cinema**: Free service that promotes fan films by streaming "independent films published through official channels by directors or production companies that come to [the company's] attention." TV series are also available.

4. **Hulu:** Subscription-based streaming service that offers movies, series and original content. A free account includes access to a limited number of episodes. A paid account, which costs \$7.99 per month, includes unlimited access. Supported devices include mobile devices, TVs/Blu-ray players, streaming media players and gaming consoles.
5. **Internet Archive's Moving Image Archive:** The Internet Archive is a 19-year-old nonprofit organization “founded to build an Internet library. Its purposes include offering permanent access for researchers, historians, scholars, people with disabilities, and the general public to historical collections that exist in digital format.” Its Moving Image Archive is a video library containing nearly 2 million user-uploaded items that “range from classic full-length films to daily alternative news broadcasts to cartoons and concerts.”
6. **MoviesFoundOnline.com:** Free streaming service that curates video content freely available on video-hosting websites like YouTube and Vimeo. Content ranges “from old cult classics to new independent movies” and also includes short films, documentaries, animations and series.
7. **MovieZoot:** Free streaming service that offers “first-rate films of all categories” as well as TV shows.
8. **OnlineShortFilms.net:** Self-described “biggest source of free short films to watch online.” This service is the short-film version of WatchDocumentary.org (see below), although it’s still in beta.
9. **Popcornflix:** Free streaming service owned by Screen Media Ventures, an independent distributor of movies to the TV market, that offers movies and original content. Supported devices include mobile devices, smart TVs, streaming media players and gaming consoles.
10. **Retrovision Classic Movies:** Free streaming service similar to Classic Cinema Online that offers more than 600 classics that have become part of the public domain. An extension is available for Chrome browsers.
11. **SnagFilms:** Free streaming service that offers more than 5,000 independent movies, TV shows and documentaries. An app is available for Android and Apple mobile devices and other supported devices include streaming media players and gaming consoles.
12. **Top Documentary Films:** Free streaming service that offers more than 3,000 documentaries divided into 25 categories from external video-hosting sites like YouTube, Vimeo and Daily Motion.
13. **TV networks’ websites:** Full episodes can be found on websites ranging from those of broadcast channels like ABC and NBC to cable channels like Comedy Central and Lifetime.
14. **Viewster:** Online video service with its own film festival that offers movies and series, including those “that are hard to find anywhere else ... niche movies, cult series, acclaimed festival darlings, all the classics, hidden gems from all around the world.” Supported devices include mobile devices and smart TVs.
15. **WatchDocumentary.org:** Self-described “biggest source of free documentaries to watch online.” Films are culled from external video-hosting sites like YouTube. An app is also available for viewing on Android mobile devices.
16. **YouTube:** 10-year-old video-sharing website whose offerings include paid and free movies and series. To narrow movie options down to freebies, visit this page and change the filter from “All Videos” to “Free movies.” To browse paid and free TV shows, visit this page.
17. **Yidio:** “Free service that allows you to search, discover, personalize and watch TV shows and movies across Netflix, Hulu, Amazon and hundreds of other providers in one place.” (“Yidio” is short for “Your Internet video.”) Supported devices include mobile devices and smart TVs.

To learn more about paid streaming services and other viewing options that offer cheaper alternatives to traditional cable, check out “[How to Choose the Right Cord-Cutting TV Service](#).” Additionally, if you already pay for an [Amazon Prime subscription](#), you have instant access to thousands of movies and TV shows at no additional cost, Amazon says. This Prime perk is called [Amazon Video](#) and costs \$10.99 a month if you don’t have Prime. The online video services you hear of most often — such as Netflix and Hulu — are generally paid services, but still tend to cost less than cable. For example, Netflix and Hulu plans start at \$7.99 a month.

Money Talks News contributor Geof Wheelwright drastically reduced his monthly expenses when he ditched cable TV for online video services. He used to pay more than \$100 a month for what he described as “a fairly basic cable TV package with local TV channels.” Now he has access to more content for less than half the price — \$45.30 a month. For a detailed breakdown of how he pulled that off that savings of least \$650 a year, check out “[How to Cut the Cable TV Cord in 2017](#).” [Source: MoneyTalksNews | Karla Bowsher | June 17, 2015 ++]

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## **SSA Fraud, Waste & Abuse ► SSA Employee Impersonation Scheme**

The Acting Inspector General of Social Security, Gale Stallworth Stone, is warning citizens about a new Social Security Administration (SSA) employee impersonation scheme. SSA and its Office of the Inspector General (OIG) have recently alerted citizens about an OIG employee impersonation scheme and a scheme targeting former clients of Kentucky disability attorney Eric Conn; the agencies are now receiving reports from citizens across the country about other phone calls from an individual posing as an SSA employee. The caller attempts to acquire personally identifiable information from victims to then edit the victims’ direct deposit, address, and telephone information with SSA.

The reports indicate that the impersonator calls from a telephone number with a 323 area code. The caller claims to be an SSA employee, and in some instances, tells the victim that they are due a 1.7 percent cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) increase of their Social Security benefits. The impersonator goes on to ask the victim to verify all of their personal information including their name, date of birth, Social Security number (SSN), parents’ names, etc. to receive the increase. If the impersonator is successful in acquiring this information, they use it to contact SSA and request changes to the victim’s direct deposit, address, and telephone information.

SSA employees occasionally contact citizens by telephone for customer-service purposes, but they will not request sensitive personal information from a citizen over the phone. If a person receives a similar suspicious call from someone alleging to be from SSA, citizens may report that information to the OIG at 1-800-269-0271 or online via <https://oig.ssa.gov/report>. Acting Inspector General Stone continues to warn citizens to be cautious, and to avoid providing information such as your SSN or bank account numbers to unknown persons over the phone or internet unless you are certain of who is receiving it. “You must be very confident that the source is the correct business party, and your information will be secure after you release it,” Stone said.

If you has questions about any communication—email, letter, text or phone call—that claims to be from SSA or the OIG, contact your local Social Security office, or call Social Security’s toll-free customer service number at 1-800-772-1213, 7 a.m. to 7 p.m., Monday through Friday, to verify its legitimacy. (Those who are deaf or hard-of-hearing can call Social Security’s TTY number at 1-800-325-0778.) {Source: Social Security Article at <https://blog.socialsecurity.gov/inspector-general-warns-public-about-ssa-employee-impersonation-scheme> | July 20, 2017 ++]

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## **Car Dealer Secrets ► Six They Hope You Do Not Know**

“You’re killing me on this,” car sales managers say as you negotiate to bring the price lower and lower. “I’m not making any money on this deal.” That is a fib. New car dealers bank on huge bonuses from car manufacturers for selling their cars. Some automakers offer dealers stair-step incentives. Basically, that’s a payment for each car — for example, \$500 a car — paid when a dealer sells a specific number of designated models during a set time period. Some automakers have discontinued stair-step incentives at the insistence of dealers. But there are plenty of other ways to make sure you snare the best possible deal on a ca

**1. Shop at large dealerships** -- Forget the adage that small dealerships will give you better deals. Large dealers can move hundreds of cars every month, so they can likely afford to sell at least a few cars for less than the invoice price. Remember, some automakers still offer stair-step awards to dealers. And even if they don't, they may offer other incentives for meeting sales targets or moving specific models.

**2. Allow dealers to compete for your sale** -- There's no need to drive all over town and haggle. Once you have made a list of the models you want to consider, simply go to the automakers' websites. Use the "find a dealer" tool and allow dealers to contact you. Don't shy away from letting dealers know you are talking to others. That puts you in a position of power. One tip: Make sure you get an "out-the-door" price that includes all taxes, fees and extras. You don't want to bank on an ultra-low price only to discover you also have to pay for multiple extras. If you need a car loan, don't forget to shop for the best deal on that as well.

**3. Be pleasant** -- Do you want to work with someone who is unpleasant or hostile? Neither do car salespeople. Yes, they want to sell cars for as much money as possible. They know you want to pay as little as possible. But if your salesperson likes you, they may well point you to models that better suit your needs and save you money. They may also sway their sales managers to give you some extras or even a price break.

**4. Remember, loyalty pays off** -- If you or a friend has worked with a specific salesperson in the past, email him or her directly when you are in the market for a new car. Salespeople who have established client bases are valuable to dealerships. They will work hard to win you a good deal because that increases their professional value.

**5. Consider a soon-to-be-discontinued model** -- Consider models you knew dealers are anxious to move. Perhaps a dealer test car with low mileage on it. Since it is used it will yield another major price cut.

**6. Don't negotiate on dealer holdbacks** -- Car pricing is more complicated than many buyers realize. Auto manufacturers build in what are known as "dealer holdbacks," which give dealers pricing leeway. Again, the amount varies, but holdbacks basically give dealers the ability to price some cars below the invoice price and still make a profit. Holdbacks are something akin to sacred ground for car dealers, though, with most dealers unwilling to share them with buyers, [Edmunds says](#). Don't even try to negotiate into the holdback.

[Source: MoneyTalksNews | Nancy Dunham | July 28, 2017 ++]

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## **Tax Burden for South Carolina Retired Vets ► As of JUL 2017**

Many people planning to retire use the presence or absence of a state income tax as a litmus test for a retirement destination. This is a serious miscalculation since higher sales and property taxes can more than offset the lack of a state income tax. The lack of a state income tax doesn't necessarily ensure a low total tax burden. States raise revenue in many ways including sales taxes, excise taxes, license taxes, income taxes, intangible taxes, property taxes, estate taxes and inheritance taxes. Depending on where you live, you may end up paying all of them or just a few. Following are the taxes you can expect to pay if you retire in South Carolina.

### **Sales Taxes**

**State Sales Tax:** 6% (prescription drugs and unprepared food items exempt); 25 counties impose an additional 1% local option sales tax; a number of counties impose a 2% sales tax or 3%. Seniors 85 and older pay 5%.

**Gasoline Tax:** 35.15 cents/gallon (Includes all taxes)

**Diesel Fuel Tax:** 41.15 cents/gallon (Includes all taxes)

**Cigarette Tax:** 57 cents/pack of 20

### **Personal Income Taxes**

**Tax Rate Range:** Low – 0%; High – 7%

**Income Brackets:** Six. Lowest – \$2,920; Highest – \$14,600.

**Personal Exemptions:** Single – \$3,950; Married – \$7,900; Dependents – \$3,950. State allows personal exemption or standard deductions as provided in the Internal Revenue Code.

**Standard Deduction:** Single – \$4,000; Married filing jointly – \$8,000; Dependents - \$4,000 ea

**Medical/Dental Deduction:** Federal amount

**Federal Income Tax Deduction:** None

**Retirement Income Taxes:** Retirement income is taxed. Social Security is exempt. Under age 65, \$3,000 in pension income is exempt. If you are 65 or older you may exempt \$15,000 of retirement income. You can take this deduction for income received from any qualified retirement plan. If both spouses receive retirement income, each spouse is entitled to an individual deduction. The \$15,000 deduction must be offset by any other retirement deduction that is claimed. A surviving spouse may continue to take a retirement deduction on behalf of the deceased spouse. Some taxpayers age 65 and older may not have to file a tax return if they meet certain conditions.

**Retired Military Pay:** Retirees with 20 or more years of active duty can deduct up to \$3,000 annually until age 65 and up to \$10,000 per year after age 65. This deduction extends to the surviving spouse. Pension or retirement income received for time served in the National Guard or Reserve components is not taxable. Survivor benefits are taxed following federal tax rules.

**Military Disability Retired Pay:** Retirees who entered the military before Sept. 24, 1975, and members receiving disability retirements based on combat injuries or who could receive disability payments from the VA are covered by laws giving disability broad exemption from federal income tax. Most military retired pay based on service-related disabilities also is free from federal income tax, but there is no guarantee of total protection.

**VA Disability Dependency and Indemnity Compensation:** VA benefits are not taxable because they generally are for disabilities and are not subject to federal or state taxes.

**Military SBP/SSBP/RCSBP/RSFPP:** Generally subject to state taxes for those states with income tax. Check with state department of revenue office.

### **Property Taxes**

Property tax is assessed and collected by local governments. Both real and personal property are subject to tax. The market value of a legal residence and up to 5 acres of surrounding land is assessed at 4%. For homeowners 65 and older, the state's homestead exemption allows the first \$50,000 of their property's fair market value to be exempt from local property taxes. South Carolina imposes a casual excise tax of 5% on the fair market value of all motor vehicles, motorcycles, boats, motors and airplanes transferred between individuals.

### **Inheritance and Estate Taxes**

There is no inheritance tax or estate tax.

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For further information, visit the South Carolina Department of Revenue site [www.sctax.org](http://www.sctax.org) or call 800-763-1295. If you are planning to move to South Carolina, some helpful information is available at <http://www.lex-co.sc.gov/departments/DeptAH/auditor/Documents/PUB192905.pdf> .

[Source: <http://www.retirementliving.com> | JUL 2017 ++]

**\* General Interest \***





## Notes of Interest ► 16 thru 31 JUL 2017

- **CPI.** The June CPI is 238.813, 1.6 percent above the FY 2016 COLA baseline. The CPI for July 2017 is scheduled to be released on August 11, 2017.
- **NDAA 2018.** The U.S. House passed a \$696.5 billion defense policy bill in a bipartisan vote on 14 JUL, but it exceeds statutory budget caps, setting up a showdown. The House's version of the 2018 National Defense Authorization Act now awaits Senate passage of its bill so the two can be reconciled. The Senate has yet to take up the \$700-billion NDAA passed by the Senate Armed Services Committee on 28 JUN.
- **Soccer Parents.** The American Council on Science and Health has sharply criticized a company which claims that its \$299 "DNA Soccer Test" can help parents assess and enhance a child's potential as a soccer player.
- **RP Martial Law.** Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte has requested Congress to extend martial law in the country's south until 31DEC, his spokesman said 18 JUL, amid continued fighting between government troops and Islamic State-linked militants.
- **God Bless America.** Younger vets may not recognition the singers of this song but I am sure you older vets will. Check out <https://biggeekdad.com/2014/09/john-wayne-1970>.
- **Coast Guard Search.** The U.S. Coast Guard racked up \$311,000 in expenses searching for an Alaska man who faked his own death to avoid going to prison in a sexual assault case, according to federal prosecutors. An indictment released 20 JUL charges Ryan Meganack, a commercial fisherman and boat captain from Port Graham, with conspiracy and "false distress" for planting evidence that he had been lost at sea while he hid out at a camp in the woods near the fishing village.
- **Household Rentals.** The share of households that rent rather than own is at a 50-year high. As of last year, 36.6 % of households in the U.S. rent their homes, according to a recent report from the nonprofit Pew Research Center. The report is based on U.S. Census Bureau data. The 2016 high surpasses the peak reached in 1986 and 1988 (36.2%), making it the highest share of renters since 1965, when the figure reached 37%.
- **Mexico Drug War.** Bloodshed in Mexico has spiked to record levels, with more homicides recorded in June than in any month in at least two decades. Prosecutors opened 2,234 homicide investigations last month, according to government statistics released 21 JUL. That's an increase of 40% over June of last year and 80% over June of 2015.
- **Weapons.** Check out <https://www.youtube.com/embed/dN1SeHA15E> to view some 2016 weapon tests at the Navy's China Lake Training Facility.

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## Laundry Detergents ► 7 Worst | Make Your Own

Sometimes products fare so poorly in Consumer Reports' testing that the nonprofit calls them out for it.

That was recently the case for a handful of laundry detergents. In an article made available to the general public — rather than just Consumer Reports subscribers — the consumer advocacy publication cites seven detergents that it advises you to simply "skip." Those products, along with some of Consumer Reports' comments about them, are as follows. Note that Consumer Reports says the first two on this list "cleaned only slightly better than plain water":

- Xtra ScentSations
- Trader Joe's Liquid Laundry Detergent
- Woolite Everyday
- Home Solv 2X
- Xtra Plus OxiClean
- Sun Triple Clean

- Arm & Hammer Toss ‘N Done Ultra Power Paks — “the lowest scoring of the pods/packs we tested”

In case you’re wondering, the detergents that Consumer Reports rated most highly were Tide Plus Ultra Stain Release and Persil ProClean Power-Liquid 2in1. Both of these liquid detergents designed for high-efficiency and regular laundry machines earned scores of 82 out of 100. But while those two detergents are highest rated, they’re also costly — at least compared with do-it-yourself detergent. Consumer Reports subscribers who have paid \$6.95 monthly or \$35 annual can view all of the publications’ ratings of laundry detergents on its website <http://www.consumerreports.org/products/laundry-detergent/ratings-overview>.

### **DIY laundry detergent**

A dirty little secret that the suds salesmen don’t want you to know: Some people get OK results with no detergent at all. Others save 90 percent of the cost of store-bought by making it themselves. Yes, you can make your own laundry detergent for pennies on the dollar as is explained in the MoneyTalksNews article at <https://www.moneytalksnews.com/yourself-laundry-detergent>. Check out that article for a recipe that requires only a few ingredients, most of which you probably already have on hand.

### **DIY fabric softener**

Fabric softener is even easier to make for pennies on the dollar. As we detail in “9 Expensive Cleaning Supplies You Can Easily Make For Pennies at <https://www.moneytalksnews.com/9-expensive-cleaning-supplies-you-can-easily-make-for-pennies>”, adding a half-cup of white vinegar to the rinse cycle will do the trick. And you can buy vinegar for a few cents an ounce. Baking soda is another cheap and effective option. [www.MarthaStewart.com](http://www.MarthaStewart.com) has described it as “an effective cleaner, deodorizer, and fabric softener” that’s safe enough to use on baby clothing.

Another Martha Stewart publication, Whole Living, recommends both vinegar and baking soda as softeners: Martha says, “A quarter to one cup of white vinegar added to a final rinse (after any chlorine products have been washed away to avoid dangerous fumes) can help to fluff, deodorize, and prevent lint, and a quarter cup of baking soda added to the wash cycle can help to reduce static cling.” White vinegar — and sometimes baking soda — is the only fabric softener I’ve used in decades. I buy both in bulk at Costco. That they are dirt-cheap is just icing on the cake for me, though. Vinegar and baking soda are the only fabric softeners I allow in my home because I know what they are, and I know that they are nontoxic. Heck, both are used in cooking, so they’re safe enough to consume. Can you say that about your fabric softener? [Source: MoneyTalksNews | Karla Bowsher | July 14, 2017 ++]

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## **Retirement Ceremony Lawsuit ► Mentioning 'God' in Speeches**

An organization representing a retired airman who was forcibly removed from a retirement ceremony last April is suing the Air Force, seeking more information on the incident. Retired Senior Master Sgt. Oscar Rodriguez was thrown out of a friend’s retirement ceremony at Travis Air Force Base in California after he began delivering a speech mentioning God during the flag-folding portion of the ceremony. The retiring airman, Master Sgt. Chuck Roberson, asked Rodriguez to perform the speech, which Rodriguez wrote himself and had performed more than 100 times at ceremonies. But base leaders told Rodriguez multiple times that he was not to participate in the official, on-base retirement ceremony.

The First Liberty Institute, a religious freedom organization representing Rodriguez, said 27 JUL that the Air Force is violating the Freedom of Information Act by improperly withholding one of its two investigations it conducted into the incident. “The Air Force is clearly hiding something,” said Mike Berry, director of military affairs for First Liberty, in a news release. “Federal law requires the government to make a determination within 20 days of a FOIA request, yet it’s been over 200 days and we haven’t received anything but delays. Whatever the Air Force is hiding, it must be really bad for them.”



*Retired Senior Master Sgt. Oscar Rodriguez is removed from a retirement ceremony at Travis Air Force Base, California, in April 2016.*

First Liberty said that Lt. Col. Michael Sovitsky, commanding officer of the 749th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron at Travis, tried to stop Rodriguez from attending the ceremony or delivering the speech once he learned Rodriguez planned to reference God in his speech. The Air Force Inspector General said in a report released last September that investigators found Rodriguez was removed because he was delivering an unofficial speech — not because of its religious nature. The report noted that, at Roberson’s request, the ceremony began with a chaplain’s invocation that closed with the words “in Jesus’ name,” and officials did not object to that prayer.

However, the incident led the Air Force to relax its rules governing the flag-folding portion of official retirement ceremonies to allow unofficial scripts to be read, if the retiree so chooses. First Liberty said the investigation that was released concerned claims that Rodriguez’ First Amendment rights were violated. The second, unreleased report has to do with claims of Fourth and Fifth Amendment violations. [Source: AirForceTimes | July 29, 2017 ++]

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## **Moving Update 01 ► 3 Most Common Nightmares**

Nightmares aren’t supposed to take place in broad daylight, but some common life events bring so much tension, uncertainty and anxiety that they can easily rank as “quality nightmares.” Moving house tops the list of stressful experiences that can feel like a bad dream — and it can easily come true unless you take precautionary measures. Problems can occur at every stage of the relocation process: A violent storm hits just when the moving truck is parking in front of your door. The elevator is out of order when you arrive at your new high-rise building. You lose the keys to your car on the morning of moving day. The list goes on. However, the most common moving nightmares fall into three main categories. Here’s how they typically play out — and how to avoid them.

### **Bad Movers**

Many moving horror stories involve rogue or incompetent movers.

- **The movers are late or don’t show up at all.** The agreed-upon time comes and goes, but you see no sign of an approaching moving truck. When you call the moving company to demand an explanation, your relocation nightmare begins. Regardless of the excuses you receive (a traffic jam, a breakdown, a delay on a previous job, a mistaken date, etc.), the inevitable result will be lots of stress and wasted time. Worst of all, you may not be able to reach the moving company at all: fraudulent movers may have taken your deposit money and disappeared with it.
- **The movers are careless or inexperienced.** If your movers arrive late, in a smaller moving truck than needed, or lack the required know-how and the proper equipment to handle your items safely and efficiently, your relocation can quickly turn into a nightmarish experience. The amateur movers may drop

your plasma TV, break your heirloom china, scratch your antique dresser, dent the floors, or cause other overwhelming emotional and financial damage.

- **The movers are scam artists.** In the worst case scenario, you may fall victim to unscrupulous moving scams. Rogue movers will often request much more money than previously negotiated based on some alleged extra services. They may hold your belongings hostage until you pay a considerable extra “fee” as ransom, or steal your more expensive belongings and just discard the rest.

The good news is that there is an easy way to avoid such nightmares. All you need to do is carefully research your movers before hiring them to make sure you are dealing with licensed and experienced professionals you can trust. It’s also a good idea to purchase appropriate insurance for your belongings, just in case.

### **Traffic Problems**

Heavy traffic or road accidents can also turn your move into a real nightmare.

- **Traffic jams.** The moving truck is delayed and there may not be enough time to proceed with your move as planned. You may have to postpone the relocation to another day, or you may miss your flight.
- **Traffic accidents.** If there has been an accident on the road, the moving truck will have to wait until the damaged vehicles are removed and normal traffic is restored. However, the scenario could get much worse: You may lose all your possessions or receive them badly damaged if the moving truck crashes, catches fire, or gets trapped somewhere because of adverse weather conditions like heavy snowfall or torrential rains. It’s even possible that thieves could break into the vehicle and steal your goods.
- **Breakdown.** If the moving truck breaks down on the road, you’ll have to wait for the moving company to send another vehicle. What’s more, your items can easily get damaged while being transferred.
- **Parking issues.** The moving truck has to circle the neighborhood for hours until an appropriate parking space is vacated, or the movers have to park far away from the entrance to your home. In such cases, you’ll not only lose valuable time, but will also have to pay an extra fee for the delay or an additional long-carry fee.

Of course, there’s nothing you can do to prevent traffic accidents or breakdowns. But you can at least reserve a parking place directly in front of your old and new homes, and choose a moving company that has experienced drivers and several moving vehicles in good condition.

### **Poor Organization**

The only way to avoid problems when moving house is to plan each phase of your relocation adventure in meticulous detail and stay one step ahead all the time. Otherwise, you may find yourself facing any of the following all-too-common moving ordeals.

- **Packing chaos.** It may turn out that you’ve packed more items than previously discussed with the movers; packed items that can’t be loaded onto the moving truck; haven’t labeled the boxes properly; or forgotten to prepare an “essentials box.” Worst of all, you may not be ready when the movers arrive. All these packing mistakes will result in lost time and money.
- **Furniture troubles.** If your large furniture doesn’t fit through the doors, you may be forced to leave some treasured pieces behind, or request hoisting services that will cost you dearly and will delay your move considerably.
- **Paperwork problems.** If you forget to transfer the utilities, you won’t have electricity, gas, and water on move-in day. If you forget to change your address, you won’t have your mail delivered to your new home. If you forget to update your driver’s license and car registration in time, you’ll be fined. Not taking proper care of your documents will most certainly get you in trouble.

- **Overspending.** If you book your movers at the last moment, require too many extra services, fail to create a realistic moving budget, pack all your items without sorting them out first, or allow any other financial imprudence, you'll end up paying much more than you expected.
- **Safety issues.** Make every effort to prevent injuries and accidents on moving day, as getting hurt is one of the worst things that can happen during your relocation endeavor.

[Source: Zillow Porchlight | Moving Tips | July 17, 2017 ++]

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## Railroad Tracks ► Horse Ass Size Impact on Space Shuttle

The U.S. Standard railroad gauge (distance between the rails) is 4 feet, 8.5 inches. That's an exceedingly odd number.

- Why was that gauge used? Because that's the way they built them in England, and English expatriates designed the U.S. Railroads.
- Why did the English build them like that? Because the first rail lines were built by the same people who built the pre-railroad tramways, and that's the gauge they used.
- Why did 'they' use that gauge then? Because the people who built the tramways used the same jigs and tools that they had used for building wagons, which used that wheel spacing.
- Why did the wagons have that particular Odd wheel spacing? Well, if they tried to use any other spacing, the wagon wheels would break on some of the old, long distance roads in England, because that's the spacing of the wheel ruts.
- So, who built those old rutted roads? Imperial Rome built the first long distance roads in Europe (including England) for their legions. Those roads have been used ever since.
- And the ruts in the roads? Roman war chariots formed the initial ruts, which everyone else had to match for fear of destroying their wagon wheels. Since the chariots were made for Imperial Rome, they were all alike in the matter of wheel spacing.

Therefore, the United States standard railroad gauge of 4 feet, 8.5 inches is derived from the original specifications for an Imperial Roman war chariot. In other words, bureaucracies live forever. So the next time you are handed a specification, procedure, or process, and wonder, 'What horse's ass came up with this?', you may be exactly right. Imperial Roman army chariots were made just wide enough to accommodate the rear ends of two war horses.

Now, the twist to the story: When you see a Space Shuttle sitting on its launch pad, you will notice that there are two big booster rockets attached to the sides of the main fuel tank. These are solid rocket boosters, or SRBs. The SRBs are made by Thiokol at their factory in Utah. The engineers who designed the SRBs would have preferred to make them a bit larger, but the SRBs had to be shipped by train from the factory to the launch site. The railroad line from the factory happens to run through a tunnel in the mountains and the SRBs had to fit through that tunnel. The tunnel is slightly wider than the railroad track, and the railroad track, as you now know, is about as wide as two horses' behinds.

So, a major Space Shuttle design feature of what is arguably the world's most advanced transportation system was determined over two thousand years ago by the width of a horse's ass. And you thought being a horse's ass wasn't important! Now you know, Horses' Asses control almost everything. Explains a whole lot of stuff, doesn't it?

[Source: Brian Colfack | June 20, 2017 ++]

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## Trump Salary Donations ► \$178k to Education Dept/National Park Service

The Education Department could offer few details on President Trump's donation to the agency after Secretary Betsy DeVos announced the gift on 26JUL, saying only it would be going toward a camp. DeVos briefly discussed Trump's donation of his second quarter salary at a White House press briefing, explaining the \$100,000 check would go toward a camp focused on science, technology, engineering and mathematics. A spokesperson for the department declined to elaborate when asked for more details on the camp, whether it was a new program, if it would receive other funds and the mechanism by which Trump was making the contribution.

The announcement follows a \$78,000 donation the president made with his first three months of salary to the National Park Service, which went toward restorations to the Antietam National Battlefield in Maryland. "Today's and tomorrow's economy requires students prepared for STEM careers," DeVos said Wednesday. "That's why we've decided to use the President's second-quarter salary to host a STEM-focused camp for students at the Department of Education. We want to encourage as many children as possible to explore STEM fields in the hope that many develop a passion for these fields." She added the department looks forward to the "exciting endeavor" and thanked the president for his "generous gift."

In his budget for fiscal 2018, Trump proposed cutting more than \$9 billion from Education's appropriations, a 13 percent reduction. The House Appropriations Committee approved a bill last week that would cut the department's funding by \$2.5 billion, or 3.5 percent. Detractors of Trump's proposal noted the blueprint would cut programs aimed at boosting STEM education, such as the 21st Century Community Learning Centers. **Trump has vowed to donate his entire salary throughout his tenure as president.** [Source: GovExec.om | Eric Katz | July 26, 2017 ++]

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## PRK Nuclear Weapons Update 14 ► Continental USA Reachable in 1-Yr

American intelligence agencies have shortened their estimate — to one year — of how long it is likely to take North Korea to put the finishing touches on a missile that can reach the continental United States, according to several administration officials briefed on the new assessment. Until a few weeks ago, the official estimate was that it would take roughly four years, give or take 12 months, for North Korea to develop a missile that could carry a nuclear weapon small enough to fit into the missile's warhead and capable of surviving the stresses of re-entry and deliver it to the United States.

But the realities of the past few months, especially a 4 JUL test that crossed a major threshold — if just barely — has forced intelligence experts to conclude that their estimates have been too conservative. In the test this month, a missile carried a warhead 1,700 miles into space, and returned it at high speed in a sharp parabola. If the trajectory was flattened out, the missile could strike Alaska. That forced government experts, reflexively cautious after overestimating Iraq's weapons of mass destruction 14 years ago, back to the drawing board. Behind the new assessment, officials said, was a growing recognition that they underestimated the determination of Kim Jung-un, North Korea's leader, to race ahead with a weapon that could reach American soil, even if it is crudely engineered and inaccurate.

General Paul Selva, the vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, put the best case forward last week when testifying before the Senate Armed Services Committee. The most recent test, he said, stopped short of demonstrating that North Korea possesses "the capacity to strike the United States with any degree of accuracy or reasonable confidence of success." But that statement went far beyond what most Pentagon officials had been allowed to say in public before the most recent test. And it reflects a growing view, from the Defense Intelligence



Agency to the C.I.A., that at this point Mr. Kim’s missile engineers, while still refining the technology, have cleared most of the major hurdles.

It is unclear how, if at all, that will change the calculus for President Trump. He has vowed to dispense with the Obama-era strategy of “strategic patience” toward North Korea. American military officials have been asked to come up with new potential strategies, from stepped-up economic pressure to increased cyber attacks on the missile testing regimes. But there is a lurking sense, one senior intelligence official said last week at the Aspen Security Forum, that at this point the best the United States can do is delay the day when North Korea demonstrates it can reach beyond Alaska and Hawaii.

“It’s a big long supply chain to build this thing out,” the director of the Central Intelligence Agency, Mike Pompeo, said at the security conference, the first public reference to a long-running covert program to undermine the parts and technologies that flow into North Korea. “As for the regime, I am hopeful we will find a way to separate it” from its missile and nuclear capabilities. But the essence of the new assessment, which was first reported by the Washington Post, is that Washington has no more time. If the 2018 estimate is right, North Korea will have a crude capability to reach the continental United States before the nation’s missile defenses are upgraded.

Quietly, the Pentagon has been refining longstanding contingency plans, from intercepting missile parts at sea to attempting, if Mr. Trump should decide to do it, to destroy a missile on the launchpad, before it is tested. But it is more likely that the United States would first try a variant of the effort developed during the Obama administration to sabotage the launches with cyber and electronic warfare techniques, and with a steady flow of bad parts.

A spokesperson for the Office of the Director of National Intelligence issued a statement from Scott Bray, the national intelligence manager for East Asia, that walked to the edge of acknowledging that judgments are shifting. “North Korea’s recent test of an intercontinental range ballistic missile — which was not a surprise to the Intelligence Community — is one of the milestones that we have expected would help refine our timeline and judgments on the threats that Kim Jong Un poses to the continental United States,” Mr. Bray wrote. “This test, and its impact on our assessments, highlight the threat that North Korea’s nuclear and ballistic missile programs pose to the United States, to our allies in the region, and to the whole world.”

The steady frequency of the North Korean missile tests, using a new solid fuel technology, came as a surprise to many intelligence experts, providing a different lesson than the one that emerged from Saddam Hussein’s weapons-of-mass destruction program in Iraq. In the Iraq case, the intelligence agencies overestimated Saddam Hussein’s ability to reconstitute what was once a healthy nuclear weapons program. In the North Korean case, one senior intelligence official noted last week, the speed and sophistication of the program have been consistently underestimated — much as it was with the Soviet Union 70 years ago, and China more than 50 years ago. [Source: New York Times | David E. Sanger | July 25, 2017 ++]

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## **Have You Heard? ► Retirement | According to Some Philosophers**

- I changed my car horn to gunshot sounds. People get out of the way much faster now.
- Gone are the days when girls used to cook like their mothers. Now they drink like their fathers.
- You know that tingly little feeling you get when you really like someone?
- That's common sense leaving your body.
- I didn't make it to the gym today. That makes five years in a row.
- I decided to stop calling the bathroom the “John” and renamed it the “Jim”. I feel so much better saying I went to the Jim this morning.
- Old age is coming at a really bad time.

- When I was a child I thought “Nap Time” was a punishment. Now, as a grownup, it feels like a small vacation.
- The biggest lie I tell myself is...“I don't need to write that down, I'll remember it.”
- I don't have gray hair; I have "wisdom highlights." I'm just very wise.
- Teach your daughter how to shoot, because a restraining order is just a piece of paper.
- If God wanted me to touch my toes, He would've put them on my knees.
- Last year I joined a support group for procrastinators. We haven't met yet.
- Why do I have to press one for English when you're just going to transfer me to someone I can't understand anyway?
- Of course I talk to myself; sometimes I need expert advice.
- At my age "Getting lucky" means walking into a room and remembering what I came in there for.
- Life is great. I have more friends I should send this to, but right now I can't remember their names.

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### **According to some philosophers**

*~ John Glenn...*

As I hurtled through space, one thought kept crossing my mind - every part of this rocket was supplied by the lowest bidder.

*~ Desmond Tutu...*

When the white missionaries came to Africa they had the Bible and we had the land. They said 'Let us pray.' We closed our eyes. When we opened them we had the Bible and they had the land.

*~ David Letterman...*

America is the only country where a significant proportion of the population believes that professional wrestling is real but the moon landing was faked.

*~ Howard Hughes...*

I'm not a paranoid, deranged millionaire. I'm a billionaire.

*~ Old Italian proverb...*

After the game, the King and the pawn go into the same box.

*~ Betsy Salkind...*

Men are like linoleum floors. Lay 'em right and you can walk all over them for thirty years.

*~ Jean Kerr...*

The only reason they say 'Women and children first' is to test the strength of the lifeboats.

*~ ZsaZsa Gabor...*

I've been married to a communist and a fascist, and neither would take out the garbage.

*~ Jeff Foxworthy...*

You know you're a redneck if your home has wheels and your car doesn't.

~ *Prince Philip...*

When a man opens a car door for his wife, it's either a new car or a new wife.

~ *Emo Philips...*

A computer once beat me at chess, but it was no match for me at kickboxing.

~ *Harrison Ford...*

Wood burns faster when you have to cut and chop it yourself.

~ *Spike Milligan...*

The best cure for Sea Sickness, is to sit under a tree.

~ *Robin Hall...*

Lawyers believe a person is innocent until proven broke.

~ *Jean Rostand...*

Kill one man and you're a murderer, kill a million and you're a conqueror

~ *Arnold Schwarzenegger...*

Having more money doesn't make you happier. I have 50 million dollars but I'm just as happy as when I had 48 million.

~ *WH Auden...*

We are here on earth to do good unto others. What the others are here for, I have no idea.

~ *Jonathan Katz...*

In hotel rooms I worry. I can't be the only guy who sits on the furniture naked

~ *Johnny Carson...*

If life were fair, Elvis would still be alive today and all the impersonators would be dead.

~ *Warren Tatum...* (School photo album).

I don't believe in astrology. I am a Sagittarius and we're very skeptical

~ *Steve Martin...*

Hollywood must be the only place on earth where you can be fired by a man wearing a Hawaiian shirt and a baseball cap

~ *Jimmy Durante...*

Home cooking. Where many a man thinks his wife is.

~ *Doug Hanwell...*

America is so advanced that even the chairs are electric.

~ *George Roberts...*

The first piece of luggage on the carousel never belongs to anyone

~ *Jonathan Winters...*

If God had intended us to fly he would have made it easier to get to the airport.

~ Robert Benchley...

I have kleptomania, but when it gets bad, I take something

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## Garage Door Billboards ► Making Yours Stand Out (06)



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***RAO Bulletin Editor/Publisher:***

Lt. James (EMO) Tichacek, USN (Ret) Tel: (858) 432-1214 Email: [raoemo@sbcglobal.net](mailto:raoemo@sbcglobal.net)  
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***RAO Baguio Director:***

SMSgt Leonard (Len) D. Harvey, USAF (Ret) PSC 517 Box 4036, FPO AP 96517-1000, Tel: 63-74-442-3468;  
Email: [lenharvey@live.com.ph](mailto:lenharvey@live.com.ph)

***RAO Baguio Office:*** Mountain Lodge, 27 Leonard Wood Road, Baguio City, 2600 Philippines  
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