

# RAO

# BULLETIN

## 15 January 2019



### PDF Edition

**THIS RETIREE ACTIVITIES OFFICE BULLETIN CONTAINS THE FOLLOWING ARTICLES**

Pg	Article	Subject
<b>* DOD *</b>		
04	== Burn Pit Toxic Exposure [60] ----	(Advocates Hope to Reignite Debate in 2019)
05	== DoD Medical Billets ----	(Plans To Eliminate 17,000 Uniformed Ones)
07	== DARPA [07] ----	(KAIROS   System to Use AI to Better Understand Global Events)
07	== Toxic Exposure   Moody AFB GA ----	(Nearby Community's Groundwater)
08	== Government Shutdown USCG Impact [02] ----	(Lawmakers Look to 15 JAN Payday)
09	== Government Shutdown USCG Impact [03] ----	(Ethics Rule Work Around)
10	== Government Shutdown USCG Impact [05] ----	(Website Tip Sheet Removed)
11	== Navy Carrier Program [01] ----	(Pentagon Approves Two-Carrier Buy)
12	== Transgender Troops [21] ----	(Circuit Court Backs DoD's Policy)
13	== U.S.-Mexico Border ----	(DHS Requests Additional Support)
13	== DoD Blended Retirement System [03] ----	(Use Overestimated by 66%)
15	== Pentagon Facts [01] ----	(10 Things You Probably Didn't Know About It)
16	== Commissary/Exchange Merger [01] ----	(Merger Task Force Has Finished Its Work)
17	== DoD Fraud, Waste, & Abuse ----	(Reported 01 thru 15 JAN 2019)
19	== POW/MIA Recoveries & Burials ----	(Reported 01 thru 15 JAN 2019   Nine)
<b>* VA *</b>		
21	== HVAC [26] ----	(New Chairman' Goal - Building Up VA, Not Outside Care Programs)
22	== VA Secretary [86] ----	(Sec. Wilkie to Govt. Union: Stop Exploiting Veteran Suicide)

- 23 == VA Private Sector Care ---- (\$55B in Contracts Awarded for First 3 Regions)
- 24 == VA Private Sector Care [01] ---- (Veterans' Medical System Transformation Preps)
- 26 == VA Blue Water Claims [59] ---- (Lawmakers Hope for Swift Action This Year)
- 27 == VA Medical Marijuana [56] ---- (Can It move forward in 2019?)
- 28 == VA Suicide Prevention [53] ---- (What Really Happened With Their Budget)
- 29 == VA Gambling Findings ---- (Addiction | Path to Recovery)
- 39 == VA Health Care [01] ---- (How Medicare Can Work with VA Health Care)
- 31 == VA Blood Drive ---- (January is National Blood Donor Month)
- 32 == VA Loan Limits ---- (2019)
- 33 == VA Health Care Access [62] ---- (Choice Rules May be Completely Rewritten in 2019)
- 33 == VA Prostate Cancer Program [16] ---- (Survivor Care)

**\* VETS \***

- 35 == Homeless Vets [91] ---- (Salt Lake City Valor House Vacancies)
- 36 == Vet Congressional Staffers ---- (Shortage | Needed for Their Perspective in Policy Work)
- 37 == Government Shutdown [23] ---- (Vets Said To Be Disproportionately Affected)
- 38 == GI Bill [275] ---- (Edith Nourse Rogers STEM Scholarship)
- 38 == Vet Myths ---- (Five | Ways the Public Views Vets Isn't Always Accurate)
- 40 == Space Available Flight Eligibility [01] ---- (100% Disabled Vets Now Category 6)
- 41 == Vet Employment [10] ---- (Unemployment Rate Rises to 3.6% for DEC 2018)
- 41 == Vet Groups [03] ---- (Effectiveness and Impact on the Younger Vet Community)
- 43 == Afghan Welcome Home Bonus ---- (OTH Dischargees Win Lawsuit)
- 44 == Vet Fraud & Abuse ---- (Reported 01 thru 15 JAN 2019)
- 45 == Cold War Vets ---- (Pete Schiavo | The Groin Crusher)
- 46 == WWII Vets 181 ---- (Duane Sherman | Birthday Greetings)
- 47 == In Memoriam 2018 ---- (Remembering Military Figures We Lost)
- 47 == Obit: Richard Overton ---- (27 DEC 2018 | Oldest WWII Vet)
- 48 == Obit: John Lyle ---- (05 JAN 2019 | WWII Tuskegee Airman)
- 49 == Obit: Leo Dulacki ---- (04 JAN 2019 | Served in 3 Wars)
- 50 == Vet Hiring Fairs ---- (Scheduled As of 16 JAN 2019)
- 50 == Military Retirees & Veterans Events Schedule ---- (As of 16 JAN 2018)
- 51 == State Veteran's Benefits ---- (Iowa 2019)

**\* VET LEGISLATION \***

- 51 == Government Shutdown USCG Impact [04] ---- (S.21 | Pay Our Coast Guard Act)
- 52 == VA Blue Water Claims [60] ---- (H.R.203 | Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act of 2019)
- 52 == Medicare Dental Coverage ---- (S.22 | Medicare Dental Benefit Act of 2019)

**\* MILITARY \***

- 53 == A-10 Thunderbolt II ---- (Infantryman's Best Friend... The Enemy's Worst Nightmare)
- 54 == USS Fitzgerald (DDG-62) [18] ---- (Collison Causes Worse Than Thought)
- 57 == Military Lodging [04] ---- (Expect Rates to Rise Substantially)
- 58 == Navy Training [01] ---- (Iwo Jima Carrier-Landing Practice Potential Move)/8
- 59 == West Point [06] ---- (Email Change From .mil to .edu)
- 50 == Air Force Bombs ---- (New Designs Needed To Fight Russia And China)
- 60 == Navy | What to Watch for in 2019 ---- (1 thru 9 of 19 Things)
- 64 == Navy | What to Watch for in 2019 ---- (10 thru 19 of 19 Things)

- 66 == GI Bill Transferability [05] ---- (Changes You'll Need to Know About in 2019)
- 67 == UCMJ [04] ---- (Reforms Effective 1 JAN)
- 68 == Railgun [03] ---- (China's Naval Version Ahead of Schedule)
- 69 == Navy Evals ---- (New Criteria)
- 71 == Mk 13 Mod 7 Sniper Rifle ---- (Fielding To Begin in 2019)
- 71 == Navy Terminology, Jargon & Slang ---- (Baby Shit thru BAM)
- 72 == Warships That Will Change the Future ---- (BNS Riachuelo (S40))

**\* MILITARY HISTORY \***

- 73 == Davis Gun ---- (Navy's Attempt to Build a Flying Cannon)
- 75 == Project Blue Book ---- (The Air Force's Covert UFO Investigation is Brought to TV)
- 76 == Black-Eyed Peas ---- (Why Southerners Eat Them on New Year's)
- 77 == War Memorials ---- (Patriots Peace Memorial, Louisville Kentucky)
- 77 == USS Indianapolis (CA-35) [03] ---- (The Final Chapter Video)
- 77 == Operation Magic Carpet ---- (Bringing Home the 8 Million Boys after WWII)
- 79 == Carrier Exchange Pilot ---- (USAF Pilot Assigned to USN Carrier Ops)
- 81 == Emancipation Proclamation ---- (A Strategic "War Measure" to Beat the Confederacy)
- 83 == WWII Bomber Nose Art [22] ---- (Call House Madam)
- 83 == Post WWII Photos ---- (Heinkel He-162 "Volksjaeger" Captured Experimental Aircraft)
- 83 == Every Picture Tells A Story ---- (Almost)
- 84 == Military History Anniversaries ---- (16 thru 31 JAN)
- 84 == Medal of Honor Citations ---- (Robert Merlin Hanson | WWII)

**\* HEALTH CARE \***

- 86 == Hypothermia [01] ---- (Impact on Older Adults)
- 86 == Toxic Exposure Health Monitoring ---- (Gulf War, Post-9/11 Vets & Offspring)
- 88 == TRICARE User Fees [104] ---- (Once Again, In the Crosshairs)
- 88== Medicare Fraud Update 135 ---- (Disclosures 1-14 JAN 2019)
- 91 == Pneumonia [03] ---- (HIV Sufferers at Greater Risk)
- 91 == HIV/AIDS [05] ---- (Air Force Will Now Approves PrEP Use with a Waiver)
- 92 == 3D Bone Printing ---- (DoD \$2M Grant To Help Military Personnel)
- 93 == Glaucoma [05] ---- (Why Vets Need Regular Eye Exams)
- 94 == Health Saving Account [01] ---- (Reasons to Consider Opening One)
- 95 == Inflammations ---- (What They Are & What They Do)
- 97 == Stroke [09] ---- (Fitness Affects Risk)
- 98 == Prescription Drug Costs [21] ---- (Democrats Look To Unlikely Ally on Drug Pricing)
- 99 == TRICARE Podcast 483 ---- (Qualifying Life Events - Publications - New TRICARE Enrollees)
- 100 == TRICARE Podcast 484 ---- (Flu Vaccine - Preventive Services - Virtual Lifetime Electronic Record)

**\* FINANCES \***

- 101 == Hospital Charges [01] ---- (Will Soon Be Available online)
- 101 == Mortgage [11] ---- (Government Shutdown Impact on Getting & Managing)
- 103 == SNAP [08] ---- (Food Stamps Funded thru FEB despite Government Shutdown)
- 104 == Property Tax [01] ---- (Postponement Program)
- 105 == IRS 2018 Filing Season [04] ---- (Four Things You Need to Know)
- 106 == Airline Tickets ---- (Senior Discount Comparisons)
- 107 == Mortgage [10] ---- (Prospective House Hunters Window of Opportunity)

- 108 == USAA CFPB Settlement ---- (Pay 66,240 Account Holders \$181.59 Each)
- 109 == IRAs [03] ---- (Why Convert to a Roth IRA?)
- 110 == Restaurant Menus ---- (Ways They Trick You into Spending More)
- 111 == Tax Deductions [04] ---- (Changes for Tax Year 2018)
- 112 == Medicare Outpatient Charges ---- (Procedure Price Lookup Website)
- 113 == Social Security Q & A ---- (190101 thru 190115)
- 114 == Social Security Scam ---- (Callers Pose as Social Security to Steal Your SSN)
- 115 == Tax Burden for Minnesota Retired Vets ---- (As of JAN 2019)

**\* GENERAL INTEREST \***

- 117 == Notes of Interest ---- (01 thru 15 JAN 2019)
- 118 == Government Shutdown Impact on Senate ---- (Democrats Blockade All Legislation)
- 119 == God Bless America ---- (The Song That Galvanized the American Spirit)
- 120 == Personal Security [01] ---- (Your Old Tweets Give Away More Than You Think)
- 122 == Dishwasher Tips [01] ---- (Non-Dish Uses)
- 123 == China's Pacific Expansion [01] ---- (Chinese Domination Key Is Inflicting Mass Casualties)
- 124 == China's Offensive Capability [06] ---- (Anti-Ship Ballistic Missiles Deployment)
- 125 == Iranian Navy [04] ---- (Plans to Deploy Warships into the Atlantic Ocean)
- 125 == Trump Afghanistan Strategy [02] ---- (Don't Tell the Enemy what We're Doing)
- 126 == AP VoteCast Results ---- (Poll Shows High Job Approval for Trump from Veterans)
- 128 == DPRK Nuclear Weapons [25] ---- (Kim Says Ready to Meet Trump Anytime)
- 129 == Interesting Ideas ---- (Virus Alert)
- 129 == One Word Essays ---- (Excitement)
- 129 == Mexican Border Tunnels ---- (Unfinished Tunnel Running Under California Discovered)
- 130 == Have You Heard? ---- (Mexican Book Store | Mother's Dictionary | Immigration Laws)

**NOTE**

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).
3. Recipients of the Bulletin are authorized and encouraged to forward the Bulletin to other vets or veteran organizations.

**\* ATTACHMENTS \***

- Attachment – Iowa Vet State Benefits
- Attachment – Military History Anniversaries 16 thru 31 JAN (Updated)
- Attachment – In Memoriam 2018: Military Figures We Lost



**Burn Pit Toxic Exposure Update 60 ► Advocates Hope to Reignite Debate in 2019**

Toxic exposure from combat burn pits in Iraq and Afghanistan isn't a new topic, but veterans advocates hope it will get new attention in 2019. Several groups — most prominently, Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America — in recent months have been pushing the issue back into the public spotlight, in hopes of spurring more public policy reaction

from lawmakers. The hope is that Congress and Veterans Affairs officials can move more quickly on research and support services before another generation of former military personnel starts showing grave health effects from the chemical poisoning.

In fact, much of 2018's veterans policy on Capitol Hill revolved around Vietnam veterans' exposure to the chemical defoliant Agent Orange during that conflict. Decades later, the substance has been linked to numerous rare cancers and other detrimental health effects, and veterans groups are still lobbying VA to expand their illness definitions to expand veteran benefits. Younger veterans see comparisons in that fight with the burn pits. The trash fires — some small, short-time disposal areas, others massive waste burns fueled by gasoline — often contained a mix of different dangerous chemical fumes. But because the size and composition varied from base to base, collecting hard scientific evidence on the adverse health effects has been difficult.

Advocates have pushed for expanded research and better tracking tools for veterans exposed to the fires. Lawmakers have been sympathetic but also slow to action on the issue. Meanwhile, while health care is available to veterans facing serious consequences from toxic exposure, VA officials have been leery to extend disability benefits to those veterans without a better scientific backing. The use of unregulated burn pits has all but disappeared for U.S. troops overseas, but the health effects won't fade away as quickly. Advocates insist they need to remind Congress and federal officials of that fact as often as possible. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | January 2, 2018 ++]

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## **DoD Medical Billets ► Plans To Eliminate 17,000 Uniformed Ones**

The Army, Navy and Air Force are finalizing plans to eliminate over the next few years more than 17,000 uniformed medical billets -- physicians, dentists, nurses, technicians, medics and support personnel. The reduction will allow those billets to be repurposed as war fighters or combat-support skills to increase lethality and size of operational units. Another goal is to deepen the workload of remaining medical billets at base hospitals and clinics to strengthen medical skills and also to improve quality of care for beneficiaries, defense officials explained. One senior service official shared the latest figures he has seen showing the uniformed Army medical staff falling by almost 7,300, the Navy by almost 5,300 and the Air Force by just over 5,300.

Spread across a combined medical force of 130,000, both active-duty and reserve, the planned cuts would lower uniformed medical strength by roughly 13 percent, a drop steep enough to alarm some health care leaders as well as advocates for military health care beneficiaries. "If the goal is to tear down the military health system, this would be a reasonable way to do it," warned one service health official who asked not to be identified. Given the numbers involved, said retired Navy Capt. Kathryn M. Beasley, director of government relations for health issues at the Military Officers Association of America, the staff cuts eyed are worrisome for patient access, particularly to physicians young families rely on such as pediatricians and obstetricians. "We need to see the final numbers to understand the impact," she said.

But senior defense officials, who say they collaborated closely with the services on overall staff reduction plans, contend the current force is larger than needed to meet today's operational missions and is overloaded with skill sets not useful for deployment and delivering of battlefield care. Also, they contend, the oversized staffs harm quality of care because, at too many base hospitals and clinics, these care providers don't treat enough patients to keep skills sharp. "So, part of this drill is to realign our people to the appropriate level of workload so that their skills, both for battlefield care and for beneficiary care, improve," said one Defense Department official. Top defense officials agreed to discuss reasons behind the planned staff cuts for the military health care system, but declined to confirm any numbers for medical slots targeted, which some service officials did share, because no figures will be firm until the fiscal 2020 defense budget request is approved by the White House and sent to Congress in February.

If Congress approves the cuts, to be presented billet by billet, the reductions would begin to take effect in fiscal 2021. Preliminary Navy documents show uniformed staff at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center falling by 534 personnel, with, for example, 82 taken from director of clinical support, including 28 of 39 corpsmen, 5 of 12 radiological diagnosticians, 4 of 7 pharmacists, 8 of 19 pharmacy techs, and 9 of 45 medical lab technicians. Defense officials described a year-long collaboration between service medical departments, the Joint Chiefs, the Defense Health Agency and CAPE, the Cost Analysis and Program Evaluation Office of the Secretary of Defense. The force cuts are just one part of an enormous transformation occurring across military medicine.

Control of all medical facilities is being transferred to the Defense Health Agency (DHA), where functions of the three separate service medical departments already are being consolidated to streamline health care operations, slash support costs and standardize practices and procedures, from scheduling appointments to reporting on provider errors. Meanwhile, the military health system is adopting MHS Genesis, a new electronic health record system. Just as Congress directed these changes, it told the secretary of defense in its fiscal 2017 National Defense Department Authorization Act to collaborate with service branches on defining medical and dental personnel requirements to ensure operational readiness, and to convert military medical positions to civilian positions if deemed unnecessary to meet operational readiness needs.

The medical force reduction effort, however, isn't being funded for a mass conversion of military billets to civilian medical positions. Instead, the emphasis is on providing more effective and efficient care, on battlefields and through military treatment facilities to troops, families and retirees, using smaller staffs that are sized to gain more experience and be better trained for military operations. To understand what's about to happen, said a senior official familiar with the staff cut plans, it is helpful to grasp a notion that sounds counterintuitive: "Reducing the number of people providing a particular service within a facility does not mean a degradation of care within that facility." A "truism in the medical arena," he added, "is that the more times a provider performs a procedure, the better that provider is at performing that procedure." If a military hospital now staffed with five orthopedic surgeons performs 10 knee replacements a month, that's only two operations per surgeon. If staff is cut to one surgeon able to still comfortably perform 10 procedures a month, both quality of patient care and the readiness of that surgeon for war will improve. That argument for a careful reduction of staff isn't persuasive to some career medical personnel.

One said he is worried that staff cuts this deep could leave hospitals short of personnel to deploy or to receive patients if old wars escalate or new ones break out in Korea, Eastern Europe or the South China Sea. He also worries about finding civilian replacements when needed, noting chronic staff shortages within the Department of Veterans Affairs medical system that can't be filled even in peacetime. "I don't believe it's doable when you take your platforms down to this degree and you're still putting people on [forward] deployment schedules," said this senior service official. "You can argue on the margins whether you need quite as many people here or there. But these hospitals support training as well as provide care and [they] keep people in operational units." After deep staff cuts, "you're going to have a very hard time keeping docs, especially in uniform," he said. Ironically, he added, these staff cut plans arise near the end of wars in Iraq and Afghanistan where U.S. military medicine produced "the best outcomes in combat casualty care in the history of the world."

Senior defense officials answered such concerns with assurances DHA and the services are giving careful consideration to readiness needs, including wartime requirements. Military facilities still will have robust civilian staffs, they added, and will be able to backfill with reserve medical personnel and civilian contracts. Officials conceded the staff cuts, and refocusing on deployable skills, over time will change the mix of providers delivering care on base, forcing more family care off base and onto Tricare provider networks. "We will expect to see an increase in certain skill sets [and] a decrease in other skill sets. More trauma surgeons, fewer pediatricians, for example. Those kinds of changes are right at the heart of what Congress has directed us to do," said one official.

The same shift in medical skill sets for hospital staffs will begin to reshape graduate medical education pipelines. "The reason why we do graduate medical education is to be able to supply that ready medical force," said another senior official. "We need to expand our capacity in some areas" but will see them "contract" in others. Some critics of

the staff cuts suggest a desire for budget savings is a key factor. Navy documents identify "expected total savings of \$1.14 billion" from that service's uniformed medical "end-strength divestiture" plan. Senior defense officials deny that's the case, citing an "unwavering commitment" to improving medical readiness and quality of care. "How do we get higher levels of medical readiness for the next major conflict? That central question is going to drive a lot of changes throughout the military health care system." [Source: Military.com | Tom Philpott | January 10, 2019 ++]

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## **DARPA Update 07 ► KAIROS | System to Use AI to Better Understand Global Events**

The Department of Defense hopes to use artificial intelligence to better understand global events in an increasingly complex world. According to a new announcement from the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) is looking for proposals to develop a semi-automated system that can identify and draw correlations between seemingly unrelated events to help create broad narratives about the world. Here's how DARPA is thinking about the problem: an event is a recognizable and significant change in either the natural world or human society. So-called "events of interest" can either create changes that have significant impact on national security, the notice stated.

DARPA's program, called Knowledge-directed Artificial Intelligence Reasoning Over Schemas, or KAIROS, will use something called schema-based AI to better comprehend events around the world, specifically helping uncover complex events found in multimedia information and bring them to the attention of system users. Schemas are units of knowledge that humans reference to make sense of events by organizing them into commonly occurring narrative structures, DARPA said. DARPA wants to create a schema-based AI that can "enable contextual and temporal reasoning about complex real-world events in order to generate actionable understanding of these events and predict how they will unfold." The program will be broken into four technical areas. DARPA said it anticipates multiple awards for the first two technical areas and single awards for the third and fourth technical areas. [Source: C4ISRNET | Mark Pomerleau | January 7, 2019 ++]

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## **Toxic Exposure | Moody AFB GA ► Nearby Community's Groundwater**

Groundwater near Georgia military bases remains contaminated from a toxic firefighting foam used for decades by the U.S. Air Force, prompting fears among residents about their exposure to the chemicals. Recent tests at Georgia's three air bases show extensive environmental contamination of groundwater, The Atlanta Journal-Constitution reported. Environmentalists say that contamination from the foam exposed Georgia communities to chemicals linked to cancer and a variety of other health problems. The Air Force has said that Georgia's drinking water is safe for the thousands of people living around its installations. But experts and nearby residents question those findings, saying the military's review was too narrow and failed to test water off-base.

"Given that there are concentrations of these compounds on site, over time they're going to move off of the site. That's just common sense," said Jamie DeWitt, an associate professor of pharmacology and toxicology at East Carolina University. "No contaminant obeys property lines." Nationwide, the Air Force has acknowledged contaminating drinking water in communities close to its bases in more than a dozen other states. In Georgia, Dobbins Air Reserve Base in Cobb County, Robins Air Force Base in Houston County and Moody Air Force Base in Lowndes County used the firefighting foam in training exercises and to put out fires when planes crashed. The foam also sometimes leaked out of its storage tanks, the Journal-Constitution reported. Thousands of gallons of foam soaked into the ground or washed into creeks and wetlands, killing fish and imperiling those who use the affected waterways for fishing, swimming and boating, the newspaper reported.

The contamination, which is linked to a class of chemicals known collectively as per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances, or PFAS, was laid out in a series of site inspection reports completed by the Air Force last year. Those reports concluded that despite high levels of groundwater pollution, there was no immediate risk to human health through contamination of drinking water. That claim was met with skepticism, particularly in rural areas where many people rely on wells for drinking and irrigation. “Everything in this area depends on groundwater,” said John Quarterman, the Suwannee Riverkeeper in Lowndes County, where Moody is located. The Pentagon’s MAR 2018 report at [https://partner-mco-archive.s3.amazonaws.com/client\\_files/1524589484.pdf](https://partner-mco-archive.s3.amazonaws.com/client_files/1524589484.pdf) lists contaminated bases.

In a statement, the Air Force said its response is constrained by a lack of regulation for PFAS chemicals. The two that are the focus of most testing are known as PFOS and PFOA. “Because PFOS/PFOA are unregulated and Georgia or federal entities have not established standards for non-drinking water sources, we cannot expend government resources on those water sources,” the Air Force said. Moody Air Force Base in south Georgia recorded the highest levels of groundwater contamination out of the three Georgia installations — more than 5,000 times the screening level. The base, which started as a flight training facility during World War II, sits 14 miles northeast of Valdosta. It’s bisected by Beatty Branch creek, which ultimately flows into the Withlacoochee River. Surface water from the base runs south into Grand Bay Swamp, a protected wildlife refuge and the state’s second largest blackwater wetland after the Okefenokee Swamp, home to fish, alligators and migrating birds.

Tests of Moody’s drinking wells showed no reportable contamination. In a news release published last May, the base celebrated the fact that its drinking water had been deemed safe, emphasizing that its wells plunge down more than 400 feet into a protected aquifer. But local residents say their wells don’t go nearly as deep, and the Lowndes County public water system has not been tested for the chemicals. “I’m very concerned, because I live practically adjacent to the base,” said Debra Tann. Tann, an educator married to a retired Navy veteran with family ties to the area, lives less than a mile from Moody. Her well only goes down 230 feet, which could make it more vulnerable to contamination. Tann added that her husband often fishes from local creeks and rivers that could have been polluted with cancer-causing chemicals.

In response to questions, a spokesperson for the Air Force wrote that “since results showed no drinking water impacts on base and indicated there was not a pathway or proximity to off-base drinking water supplies, we did not sample outside the installations.” Site inspections of Dobbins and Robins also found groundwater contamination and pollution of creeks that flow from the bases into the Chattahoochee and Ocmulgee Rivers. But, as was the case at Moody, the Air Force said it was only authorized to address drinking water, and it did not detect contamination in its own drinking water. Therefore, it did not test any water off-base. [Source: The Associated Press | January 6, 2018 ++]

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## **Government Shutdown USCG Impact Update 02 ► Lawmakers Look to 15 JAN Payday**

With fears the partial government shutdown could drag on for weeks, the Senate is moving legislation that would pay Coast Guard service members, even if the budget stalemate continues. This week, Sen. John Thune, R-S.D., introduced the “**Pay Our Coast Guard Act**” to keep paying personnel even during a lapse in appropriations. The exemption also would cover Coast Guard retired benefits, death gratuities and other related payouts. As of 5 JAN seven other senators — three Republican and four Democrats — already have signed on as co-sponsors of the bill and Senate leaders fast-tracked the legislation so that the chamber could vote on it as soon as next week.

If the shutdown continues another week, it will imperil paychecks scheduled for 15 JAN to more than 50,000 members of the Coast Guard. About 42,000 of them are required to report to work without pay because they’re deemed essential employees. Salaries for members of the Army, Navy, Air Force and Marine Corps are not affected by the latest government shutdown because the Department of Defense had its full fiscal year funding approved last fall. But



the Coast Guard is funded through the Department of Homeland Security, one of multiple agencies whose budgets lapsed late last month amid a squabble between the White House and congressional Democrats over President Donald Trump’s controversial southern border wall project.

After a week of warning that the shutdown would halt all Coast Guard paychecks, service officials announced on 29 DEC that Homeland Security officials had found a work around to cover about \$75 million needed for the 31 DEC pay period. But they also warned that if the shutdown continued they would be unable to repeat that action for the mid-January paychecks. On 4 JAN, Trump called his most recent meeting with Democratic leaders on the budget impasse “productive” but also confirmed that he told lawmakers he was prepared to keep the government shutdown “for months or years” if they don’t agree to adequately fund his border wall project. “We won’t be opening the government until this (immigration problem) is solved,” he said. “It’s a bigger problem.”

The Senate legislation — which would also have to be adopted by the House and signed by the president — is among several proposals being discussed on Capitol Hill to blunt some of the impact of the shutdown on about 800,000 federal workers. More than half of the employees are required to continue working without pay. The others have been furloughed since 22 DEC. Coast Guard officials insist most of their operations have continued uninterrupted during the funding lapse. Service exchange locations are scheduled to remain open for now, as will day care centers on Coast Guard bases but several public affairs and public outreach offices have been shuttered. Cuts to child care subsidies and non-essential travel also loom in the coming days.

Thune’s pay legislation had drawn support from more than a dozen veterans organizations, who say the Coast Guard should be safeguarded from political bouts. “Many of our members have little tenure in the Coast Guard, which hasn’t allowed ample time for saving enough money to sustain the lapse in even one paycheck,” said Coast Guard Enlisted Association National President Casey Lawrence in a statement. “Many of our members feel that they have been overlooked due to the potential pay lapse.” Mike Little, a Coast Guard spouse and executive director for the Sea Service Family Foundation, said passing the legislation early in the new Congress would send a strong message of support to the Coast Guard. “This shutdown has taken away from valuable time (servicemembers) should have been using to enjoy their families, but instead they spent it stressed beyond belief,” said Little, [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | January 5, 2018 ++]

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## **Government Shutdown USCG Impact Update 03 ► Ethics Rule Work Around**

As the partial government shutdown continues, the U.S. Coast Guard training facility is asking organizations collecting goods for employees and enlistees working without pay to open their drive up to all federal workers. That would allow Coast Guard recipients to get around ethics rules that block them from accepting more than \$20 worth of goods. Enlistees and civilian employees received pay on the first of the year, said John Edwards, spokesman for the facility, though the source of the allocated funds was not identified. Should the shutdown continue, workers will not receive a paycheck 15 JAN, the next pay cycle. “Then the word ‘need’ would really become applicable,” he said.

The drive, led by the American Legion in Wildwood and the Seaville Fire & Rescue Company, has collected diapers, food, baby formula, cash and gift cards. It was started independent of the Coast Guard, Edwards said. “We didn’t start getting wind of the donations and the drives until we started fielding calls from the media,” he said. The Chief Petty Officers Association has agreed to accept and disperse the collected goods, Edwards said, since they aren’t under the purview of the federal government. The Coast Guard is also asking the organizations to direct any monetary collections to the Coast Guard Mutual Assistance fund and forward a letter spelling out that the donations came from residents to ensure that no prohibited organizations were involved.

The Code of Federal Regulations does not allow federal employees to solicit gifts or accept ones that are contingent on their position. “Any agency, any person impacted by the partial shutdown, should be allowed to this benefit,”

Edwards said. The code says they can't accept gifts that "create the appearance that the donor is receiving preferential treatment or would cause a reasonable person to question the employee's integrity or impartiality." Some 42,000 members across the Coast Guard are working without pay, including employees at Training Center Cape May. Unlike other branches of the military, the Coast Guard falls under the Department of Homeland Security, not the Department of Defense, which remains fully funded. Ninety-eight civilian employees are affected by the shutdown at the Cape May Coast Guard facility. Twenty-four are deemed essential and are working without pay, while the remaining 74 are furloughed.



Vince DePrinzio, adjutant at the American Legion in Wildwood, sifts through goods donated for furloughed Coast Guard employees last week.

Vince DePrinzio, adjutant at the American Legion in Wildwood, said the squabble over border funding is wrongheaded, especially with workers going without pay. "We have a motto: 'Veterans helping veterans,' " he said. "We feel it's important because, hey, there are families there. They don't have any money to buy anything. So we're gonna do the best we can do to help them." Donations are still coming in, DePrinzio said. "A little bit here, a little bit there. We're in pretty good shape," he said. "And we'll do what they want to do; we'll go by the rules." [Source: Cape May County News | Colt Shaw | January 6, 2018 ++]

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## Government Shutdown USCG Impact Update 05 ► Website Tip Sheet Removed

The cash-strapped US Coast Guard has quietly removed a "tip sheet" it had posted on its website suggesting that employees hold garage sales, babysit, or take up other odd jobs to make ends meet during the government shutdown. The memo advised employees to "be creative" and offered some rather patronizing suggestions to make quick cash: "offer to watch children, walk pets or house-sit," "turn your hobby into income," even "have a garage sale – clean out your attic, basement, and closets at the same time." The more adventurous could even "become a mystery shopper. Retailers are desperate to check how their in-store customer service is and will employ you to shop and rate their service."

*"While it may be uncomfortable to deal with the hard facts, it's best to avoid the 'hide your head in the sand' reaction,"* the tip sheet sagely advised. *"Stay in charge of the situation by getting a clear understanding of what's happening."* The pamphlet was removed after the Washington Post linked to it; service spokesman Lt. Cmdr. Scott McBride claimed it did not *"reflect the Coast Guard's current efforts to support our workforce during this lapse in appropriations."* Some of the "advice" was just pathetic: "Acknowledge that this is hard work. Give yourself credit for doing a tough job!" Other lines were notable for their sanity: "Don't use credit to supplement your income." A reminder that "bankruptcy is a last option" was more worrisome, suggesting that even during flush times Coast Guard employees don't make nearly as much as their colleagues at the Pentagon.

Republicans introduced the "Pay Our Coast Guard Act" in the Senate last week, with bipartisan support, in an attempt to keep the agency afloat, though President Trump has vowed to veto any and all attempts to reopen parts of

government until he gets his wall funding. House Democrats have nevertheless begun passing individual bills to reopen the shuttered agencies, hoping to put pressure on Senate Republicans who have thus far declined to “waste time” taking up bills sure to be vetoed by the president. While Trump claims government workers support him, the absence of a paycheck tends to erode political posturing. Coast Guard wife Natalie Daniels condemned both parties for “*playing a game of political chicken with Americans.*”

While the Pentagon remains fully funded during the shutdown, the Coast Guard is part of the Department of Homeland Security. In addition to 41,000 active-duty service members, 2,100 civilian employees have been designated “*essential*” and must work without pay; 6,400 others have been furloughed since the shutdown began nearly three weeks ago. [Source: <https://www.rt.com/usa/448434-coast-guard-babysitting-shutdown> | January 10, 2019 ++]

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## **Navy Carrier Program Update 01 ► Pentagon Approves Two-Carrier Buy**

The Navy’s coming request for the 2020 fiscal year is still under wraps, but one important piece of the Navy’s future plans appears increasingly certain: the service will commit billions to buy two new Ford-class aircraft carriers under the same contract. While most of that money won’t be spent in ’20, it’s still a tremendous long-term commitment that, advocates say, should save 5 to 10 percent over buying each carrier separately.

The Navy says that the long-troubled Ford program has turned a corner, and it is pushing ahead with remaining fixes while planning to save up to \$4 billion by buying the next two flattops on a single massive contract. That mega-deal would remove uncertainty for the builder, HII’s Newport News Shipbuilding, and help keep production lines humming with no expensive stop-and-start in construction or ramping up and down of supply chains, which spreads across dozens of states. Congress first has to review the plan over the next 30 days before Navy can award the contract.

News of the potential buy — which was expected by the end of the year — came from Virginia Senator Tim Kaine, who put out a statement on New Year’s Eve saying he was “thrilled the Navy has decided to pursue a block buy for aircraft carriers, something I’ve been advocating to save billions in taxpayer dollars and offer more certainty to the Hampton Roads defense community.” Kaine, a longtime proponent of the block buy, also represents the state where the work will be done. “This smart move will save taxpayer dollars and help ensure the shipyards can maintain a skilled workforce to get the job done,” he said.

Virginia Congressman Rob Wittman, outgoing chairman of the Seapower and Projection Forces Subcommittee, said he’s “thrilled” about the notification which will allow the Navy “to build to a fleet of 12 aircraft carriers and 355 ships.” Wittman attached an amendment to the FY 2019 DoD appropriations bill calling for the dual buy, which he says “will not only save the taxpayers \$4 billion, it provides important certainty to our defense industrial base that build and maintain these ships.” Wittman was the author of the “Securing the Homeland by Increasing our Power on the Seas Act,” which transformed the Navy’s goal of 355 ships into official government policy. President Trump signed the bill into law in 2017.

Both senators said the contract will keep the ships at or under the construction cap set by Congress of \$12.9 billion each. Last May, however, the first ship of the class, USS Gerald R. Ford, blew past that cap by \$120 million thanks to a litany of fixes identified by shipbuilder Huntington Ingalls Industries., including replacing propulsion components damaged in a previous failure, extending the repair schedule to 12 months from the original eight, and correcting problems with the ship’s eleven Advanced Weapons Elevators. The elevators, used to bring munitions from below deck up top for installation on aircraft, are powered by magnets as opposed to cables, and were supposed to be installed by the ship’s delivery date in May 2017, but issues have delayed their completion.

Navy spokesman Capt. Danny Hernandez told me that the eleven elevators remain “in varying levels of construction, testing and operations,” and the first one was turned over to the crew in December. The plan is to complete installation and testing of the elevators before the ship’s scheduled “sail away date” in July. Hernandez

added that “there will be some remaining certification documentation that will be performed for 5 of the 11 elevators after” July, and “a dedicated team is engaged on these efforts and will accelerate this certification work and schedule where feasible.”

James Geurts, assistant secretary of the Navy for research, development and acquisition, promised a Congressional panel in November that the Ford would leave HII’s Newport News shipyard with all systems in working order. “I would say of all of the technologies on the CVN 78, of which there were many we proved out on this lead ship, the weapons elevator is the last one that we need to get tied up and work our way through,” Geurts said. “We are making progress,” he said. The second ship of the class, CVN 79, USS John F. Kennedy, is currently under construction.\\\

Huntington spokesperson Beci Brenton said in a statement the company is “pleased to have come to an agreement with the Navy regarding a two-ship acquisition approach for CVN 80 and 81, a significant step toward building these ships more affordably. Although there is more work to be done it is important to note that the multi-ship purchase of aircraft carriers helps stabilize the Newport News Shipbuilding workforce, enables the purchase of material in quantity, and permits a fragile supplier base of more than 2,000 in 46 states to phase work more efficiently.” After decades of dominance however, the Ford-class carriers might be the last of the line for US nuclear-powered supercarriers, given the increasing threat being presented by land-based “ship-killer” standoff weapons being fielded by China and Russia.

Speaking at a Heritage Foundation event last month, Bryan Clark, senior fellow at the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, said that optimistically, a carrier strike group could likely knock down 450 incoming missiles, but “that is not enough. You are looking at a threat that is at least 600, and maybe more weapons” that the Chinese can launch from their coast on short notice. Jerry Hendrix, vice president of the Telemus Group, added that the threat could be somewhat mitigated by keeping ships father from shore and putting more drones in the air both as scouts and attack aircraft. The “carrier air wing must increase its range by investing in an unmanned, air combat strike platform,” Hendrix said.

Any moves to increase range must first fight for primacy with the navy’s other massive investment in hulls, from new aircraft carriers to Columbia-class submarines to a new frigate. When the 2020 budget comes out next month, we’ll likely have a better idea of what the Navy is planning. [Source: Breaking Defense | Paul McLeary | January 04, 2019 ++]

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## **Transgender Troops Update 21 ► Circuit Court Backs DoD’s Policy**

A circuit court hearing one of the four federal cases challenging President Donald Trump’s policy to limit transgender military service sided with the administration 4 JAN, ruling that the process former Defense Secretary Jim Mattis took to implement the president’s directive was sufficient and did not result in a blanket ban. That federal case, “Doe v. Trump,” had challenged Mattis’ February 2018 policy, approved by the White House in March, that restricted persons who had “gender dysphoria,” discomfort arising from identifying as other than your biological sex, from serving.

Attorneys for clients challenging the ban had argued that all transgender personnel experience that discomfort, and using gender dysphoria as a standard would, in effect, create a blanket ban. However, the court disagreed, stating that not all transgender persons seek to transition to their preferred sex or experience discomfort. “We can find nothing in the record to support this definition of being transgender,” the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit found. The Mattis policy also requires transgender persons to serve according to their biological sex, and does not allow service members to serve in their preferred sex.

Pentagon spokeswoman Jessica Maxwell said that while DoD is pleased with the D.C. Circuit’s decision, “the department remains bound by three other court orders that require continued implementation” of the previous policy under the Obama administration that allows transgender personnel to serve openly. With this ruling however, DoD “is

consulting with the Department of Justice on next steps in the litigation. We look forward to continuing to press our case in the courts,” Maxwell said. In its opinion, the court cited previous case law where the need to trust the military’s judgement on an issue has been the guiding principle. "Courts must give great deference to the professional judgment of military authorities concerning the relative importance of a particular military interest,” circuit judges Thomas Griffith, Robert Wilkins and Stephen Williams wrote.

Three similar federal lawsuits are also underway, and a previous injunction to freeze the administration’s transgender policy remains in effect until those cases are decided, attorneys for transgender plaintiffs said 4 JAN. “Today’s decision is based on the absurd idea that forcing transgender people to suppress who they are in order to serve is not a ban,” said GLAD Transgender Rights Project Director Jennifer Levi. “It ignores the reality of transgender people’s lives.”

“We will keep fighting this cruel and irrational policy, which serves no purpose other than to weaken the military and punish transgender service members for their patriotism and service,” said Shannon Minter, legal director of the National Center for Lesbian Rights. Trump has also requested that the Supreme Court weigh in on the case, overstepping the lower court decisions. The Supreme Court would have to decide to hear the transgender case by the end of this month if it is going to take up the issue this term. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Tara Copp | January 4, 2019 ++]

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## **U.S.-Mexico Border ► DHS Requests Additional Support**

The Department of Homeland Security has submitted a new request for assistance to the Pentagon to further harden the U.S.-Mexico border, two defense officials told Military Times. The request, commonly referred to as an RFA, does not ask for specific troop numbers or equipment, but instead seeks capabilities, a defense official said, adding that the request is seeking “nothing new” from what has been provided in response to earlier requests. Last fall, in response to DHS’ request for support, the Pentagon provided equipment and forces to erect concrete barriers and concertina wire along the border, and provided the logistical, medical and aviation support needed to support border agents and the approximately 5,000 active duty and National Guard troops still deployed there.

President Donald Trump has suggested that if Congress does not give him the funding to build a wall, he will use the military to establish one. There are already hundreds of miles of wall or fencing along the U.S.-Mexico border, but there are hundreds of miles more where extreme geography or private property rights could make a wall difficult to implement. The lack of funding for a wall is the cause of the current government shutdown, now in its 25th day as of 15 JAN. The additional DoD capabilities will be added to an existing request for support, which expires 31 JAN. It was not clear whether the new request would seek to have forces remain on the border beyond 31 JAN. DoD will now “determine requirements based on that” RFA, the official said. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Tara Copp | January 4, 2019 ++]

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## **DoD Blended Retirement System Update 03 ► Use Overestimated by 66%**

With passage of the new Blended Retirement System (BRS) in 2016, the Defense Department's Office of Actuary, assisted by computer modeling from the think tank Rand Corp., made some assumptions critical to planning future military retirement cost obligations. More than 862,000 active-duty members and 202,000 drilling Reserve and National Guard personnel, actuaries forecast, would opt to leave their High-3 retirement plan for the BRS during a year-long "open season" that ended 31 DEC. Turns out those projections were far too high. Near-final tallies of opt-

in decisions for BRS (through Dec. 17) show only 280,000 active-duty members and just over 72,000 reserve component personnel chose to shift out of the High-3 plan.

High-3 is the more generous retirement plan for members who serve 20 years or more and earn its lifetime annuity. The BRS provides a 20 percent smaller annuity. But for the majority of service members who don't serve full-length careers, the BRS also provides a Thrift Savings Plan that is bolstered by government matching of member contributions. Assuming no extraordinary rush to switch plans in its final two weeks of the open season -- before and after Christmas -- the BRS opt-in results fell as much as two-thirds below projections for active-duty and reserve component forces.

In July 2016, the Department of Defense Board of Actuaries, which is responsible for ensuring the DoD Military Retirement Fund is properly valued and actuarially sound, accepted Rand's estimate that a total of 916,754 active and reserve component members would opt into the BRS when it became available. At the same time, the board concluded future military retirement obligations for the department could be lowered by 2.9 percent for the active force and .8 percent for reserve components, given the lower annuity formula for the BRS. DoD actuaries re-examined their estimates last year and raised the opt-in total by more than 100,000, to predict that 1.06 million active and reserve component members would choose to shift to the BRS during the open season.

The opportunity to switch plans was opened to more than half of all active-duty and reserve component members. Active-duty members could switch if they had fewer than 12 years in as of Dec. 31, 2017. Reserve component members could do so if they had fewer than 4,320 drill points for retirement by that date. Members who enter service on or after Jan. 1, 2018, have no choice; BRS became their plan. Active-duty members who had more than 12 years, and reservists with more than 4320 retirement points, by Dec. 31, 2017, stayed under High-3.

The BRS is called "blended" because it combines an immediate but smaller annuity after 20 or more years with a Thrift Savings Plan enhanced by government matching of member contributions. That 401(k)-like nest egg can be rolled into a civilian employer's 401(k) benefit upon leaving service. Only 49 percent of new officers and 17 percent of enlistees attain 20 years of active-duty service to be able to retire. Because enhanced Thrift Savings helps that majority who leave short of retirement eligibility, the BRS was expected to be a more popular option, particularly for enlisted members in their first or second enlistment and for officers completing initial service obligations.

DoD actuaries predicted in their Military Valuation Report that the vast majority of active-duty officers and enlisted with fewer than 12 years of service would opt into the BRS. Their opt-in assumption for active-duty members with one year of service, for example, was 85.5 percent for officers and 95 percent for enlisted. Only for enlisted members past their 9th year of service, and for officers past the 10th year, did assumed opt-in rates fall below 50 percent. The blended retirement has two more unique features. There's a one-time "continuation payment" payable by the 12th year of service, to be set at a minimum equal to two-and-half months of basic for active-duty members who agree to serve four more years. The minimum is one-half month of active-duty pay for reserve component personnel who make the same deal.

Also, the BRS allows those who reach retirement to receive in a lump sum of either 25 percent or 50 percent of the value of annuities payable until old age. The lump sum is designed to help a member buy a home, start a business or pay off debts in return for cutting his or her annuity by one-quarter or half until age 67. Actuarial groups have railed against the lump-sum offer as an unfair choice for members who retire under the BRS, given the amount they would forfeit in total future benefits for the enticement of many thousands of dollars in cash. Whatever the reasons, the BRS features didn't attract nearly the number of current force members that the actuaries and Rand computer modeling forecast. Through mid-December only 21.6 percent of active-duty soldiers eligible for the BRS switched from High-3, giving the Army the lowest opt-in rate of the four DoD military branches. The active-duty opt-in rate was 26.3 percent for the Air Force, 28.3 percent for the Navy, and a surprising 53.7 percent for the Marine Corps.

The BRS likely was far more attractive to Marines because the Corps keeps its career force proportionally smaller than do other service branches. A higher percentage of Marines can serve only a tour or two before returning to civilian

life. With the BRS, they will leave with heftier Thrift Savings Plan balances. The Marine Corps Reserve also had a higher opt-in rate to the BRS, at 37.6 percent compared to 8.4 percent for eligible Army National Guard members, 9.4 percent for the Army Reserve, 10.1 percent for the Navy Reserve, 10.3 percent for the Air Force Reserve, and 10.6 percent among eligible Air National Guard members.

The BRS opt-in rates for active-duty forces across the DoD was 29.2 percent through mid-December and 10.6 percent for reserve component forces. Those were far lower than anticipated. In fairness, the Defense Board of Actuaries, at the time it embraced Rand's modeling estimates, said it did so reluctantly, concluding that "we have no better basis for projecting opt-in behavior." In addition to those members who voluntarily opted into the BRS during the open season, more than 142,000 enlisted recruits and officers who first entered service in 2018 automatically became part of the BRS generation. [Source: Military.com | Tom Philpott | January 3, 2019 ++]

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## **Pentagon Facts Update 01 ► 10 Things You Probably Didn't Know About It**

**1. Why is the Pentagon, you know, a pentagon?** The land the Pentagon was first planned to go on was bordered on five sides by roads, so the architects designed a five-sided building. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt was worried putting the building at that location would interfere with the view of Washington from Arlington Cemetery, so he chose to move it to its present location, but he kept the five-sided design.

**2. Sept. 11 has a double significance for the Pentagon.** Builders broke ground for the Pentagon on Sept. 11, 1941, exactly 60 years before the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks.

**3. The Pentagon is big. Realllly big.** It's the world's largest low-rise office building. The entire U.S. Capitol building could fit inside any of the building's five wedges. It has 6,500,000 square feet of office space (three times the floor space in the Empire State Building!), 7,754 windows and 17 1/2 miles of corridors. Yet, its spoke-and-ring design means it takes only about 7 minutes to walk between the furthest two points in the building.

**4. The builders were frugal with their materials.** During construction, the builders were able to conserve enough steel to build a battleship. And the 689,000 tons of sand and gravel used to make the building's reinforced concrete – including 41,000 concrete pilings – came from the nearby Potomac River.

**5. Until 2011, there was only one passenger elevator in the Pentagon. And it was reserved for the defense secretary.** A 17-year-long renovation project that finished in 2011 saw 70 passenger elevators installed in the building. Until then, people who couldn't use stairs used long ramps to move between floors. The ramps are still there, but the rumors of office chair races are greatly exaggerated.

**6. That renovation project? It probably saved thousands of lives.** The Pentagon is divided into five wedges, and the renovation project was going wedge by wedge when terrorists flew American Airlines Flight 77 into the Pentagon, Sept. 11, 2001, killing 189 people. The plane hit in Wedge 3, where renovations had just completed, but only about 800 out of the 4,500 people who normally would have been working there had moved back into their offices. And the new sprinkler system, extra structural support and blast-resistant windows helped to keep the building damage to a minimum, likely saving additional lives.

**7. The Pentagon was the first desegregated building in Virginia.** The Pentagon was designed when segregation was the law in Virginia. But Roosevelt had signed an executive order the previous year, which forbade discrimination against government workers on the basis of race, creed, color or national origin. So the Pentagon became the only building in Virginia where segregation was not enforced. Because segregation was state law, the Pentagon was built with twice as many bathrooms as needed for a desegregated building of its size.

**8. It was constructed in record time.** More than 15,000 workers were on site around the clock, and wartime office space shortages meant that workers moved in before the Pentagon was fully finished. Construction finished on Jan. 15, 1943, just 16 months after it started. Speed costs money, though: Initially budgeted at \$35 million, the final cost was \$63 million, more than \$900 million in today's money.

**9. The same guy oversaw construction of the Pentagon and the atomic bomb.** Col. Leslie Groves, an Army Corps of Engineer officer, took charge of the Pentagon's construction in August 1941. He worked six days a week in his office in Washington. Then on Sundays, he would visit the project he felt most needed his personal attention. Groves later said of his time at the Pentagon that he was "hoping to get to a war theater so I could find a little peace." Instead, he was assigned to direct the Manhattan Project – America's effort to build an atomic bomb.

**10. For a while, there was a secret crash pad in the Pentagon.** Groves was widely known as a tough boss. One of his deputies, Army Maj. Robert Furman, had to be at the Pentagon at all hours of the day and night. Sometimes he'd go days without going home at all. In order to get some sleep, Furman had the Pentagon contractors build a secret apartment between the walls of what would become the Army's Ordnance Division. He and some of Groves's other deputies would use the apartment to grab a few z's, shower and get back to work. Furman continued to use the apartment on official trips back to Washington while he served as an intelligence officer on the Manhattan Project, but was forced to hand over the keys in 1943 when he was discovered by ordnance officers while leaving the apartment.

[Source: DoD | Claudette Roulo | January 3, 2019 ++]

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## **Commissary/Exchange Merger Update 01 ► Merger Task Force Has Finished Its Work**

This year could mean the beginning of more big changes to military exchanges and commissaries. By 1 JAN, a formal report was to have been submitted to Congress detailing why defense officials think it makes good business sense to consolidate exchanges and commissaries. A Defense Department task force has finished its work analyzing whether to merge the military exchanges into one entity, and, at this writing, various officials in DoD and the services are discussing whether to buy into their recommendations. The task force also reportedly lays the groundwork and a timeline for merging the exchange systems with the commissary systems.

It's not clear yet how the merger would benefit actual customers of exchanges and commissaries, as officials have reportedly been working on plans for "above-the-store" operational structures. But the merger business case analysis, prepared by Boston Consulting Group, reportedly claims about \$2 billion in savings over five years by merging all the systems. Some have expressed concern that the estimated cost to merge the systems could be around \$500 million, yet the savings are not guaranteed.

Acting Defense Secretary Patrick Shanahan signed a memo 29 MAY, when he was the deputy defense secretary, to form the task force to do a business case analysis and begin planning for the consolidation of the defense resale enterprise. Retired Army major general and former retail executive Keith Thurgood was named to lead the task force. He was the chief executive officer of the Army and Air Force Exchange Service from 2007 to 2010. Shanahan stated he had considered the views and responses of the military departments on consolidating the Defense Commissary Agency, the Army and Air Force Exchange Service, the Navy Exchange and the Marine Corps Exchange into one organization, as recommended by DoD's Reform Management Group.

He agrees that "a single consolidated organization offers the greatest potential to achieve the economies and efficiencies" that are necessary to ensure that the commissary and exchange benefits survive, the memo stated. Laws would have to be changed in order to consolidate the commissary and exchange systems. Defense officials got pushback from members of Congress on their plans to go forward with consolidation, which is why DoD is required



to submit the report on the business case analysis. Congress will weigh in, and one possibility is that they will ask for an independent validation of DoD's conclusions. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Karen Jowers | January 3, 2019 ++]

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## DoD Fraud, Waste, & Abuse ► Reported 01 thru 15 JAN 2019

**Romina** -- Nobody at the Pentagon can quite figure out why U.S. taxpayers bought a Dacia Sandero Stepway 2 for the Romanian defense ministry, but it's apparently one of those things allies do to smooth relations. It's a mystery because the Dacia isn't a fighter jet, a missile system or a tank. It's a small hatchback, described by one auto reviewer as "cheap and cheerful."



Former Defense Secretary Jim Mattis, who departed his job with the arrival of the new year, approved the U.S. Navy spending \$2.9 million from a fund for "extraordinary expenses" to pay local contractors for construction of a perimeter road around a base in Romania that houses the U.S.'s top ground-based missile defense site in Europe -- and to foot the bill for the car along the way. "I believe that the payment will avoid harm to international relations between the U.S. and Romania as well as adverse public opinion," Mattis wrote defense lawmakers in October to inform them that the previously undisclosed expenditure would be made on 19 NOV.

Former Pentagon Comptroller Mike McCord said in an email that it's "unusual, regardless of funding source, I believe, to use U.S. funds to buy a vehicle for a host nation on host nation soil, as opposed to the more understandable case where we might buy a vehicle to support a coalition partner in a theater of operations like Afghanistan." The payment to Romania's Ministry of National Defense covered funds that Navy personnel with U.S. Naval Forces-Europe-Africa headquarters in Naples, Italy, erroneously obligated in 2016 and 2017 without proper authority. Payment was stopped before those funds were transferred.

The Romanian payment is little more than a rounding error for a department responsible for the lion's share of the \$716 billion national security budget that Congress approved for this fiscal year. Yet it demonstrates the sometimes small and mundane steps that Mattis has taken to strengthen bonds with allies, in this case a NATO member that hosts a key U.S. weapons system. In his resignation letter to President Donald Trump, Mattis indicated the president has slighted those relations, writing that "our strength as a nation is inextricably linked to the strength of our unique and comprehensive system of alliances and partnerships."

Perimeter Road

The \$2.9 million went primarily for work to design and construct a 12.4-kilometer (7.7-mile) perimeter road at the Deveselu military base in southern Romania. It's occupied jointly by Navy support personnel and Romanian forces and is the site of the U.S. Aegis Ashore Missile Defense installation intended to intercept Iranian missiles fired at Europe. Pentagon spokesman Eric Pahon referred comment to the Navy. Captain John Perkins, a spokesman for the command in Naples, said in an email that officials last year asked the navy secretary to approve the funds using the service's "emergency and extraordinary expense authority as the appropriate means to make this payment" because "the perimeter road will help Romanian forces provide better external security" for the base. Mattis said in his letter

that contractors in Romania “who are executing the project have pursued legal action for payment against the Romanian Ministry of Defense.” [Source: Bloomberg | Anthony Capaccio | January 1, 2019 ++]

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**Anham FZCO** -- The company responsible for providing food and water for deployed U.S. troops in Iraq and Afghanistan has been formally suspended after its former chief executive was charged with fraud in relation to an \$8 billion troop supply contract, a U.S. official confirmed 3 JAN. Defense Logistics Agency spokesman Patrick Mackin said in a phone interview that the company, a Dubai-based conglomerate called Anham FZCO, is barred from applying for future opportunities with the U.S. government. An Anham spokesman noted that the suspension does not affect the company's current ability to service its existing contracts in Iraq and Afghanistan, and noted that the company would seek an unspecified resolution with the Defense Logistics Agency. The suspension can still be overturned.

"We are disappointed by this action, which is based on years-old alleged conduct by individuals who no longer work for Anham or any of its subcontractors," the spokesman said. "As we said when these individuals were charged by the Justice Department, we are puzzled why the department decided to pursue criminal prosecution for matters that are usually handled through civil resolution, but we understand that all of the individuals involved are vigorously contesting the charges against them."

In late November the Justice Department charged former Anham chief executive Abul Huda Farouki and two of his associates with fraud, alleging they had laundered money, violated U.S. sanctions while shipping products through Iran, and constructed a fake construction scene to overstate their progress while bidding on lucrative government work. The indictment followed a lengthy investigation by the Department of Homeland Security and the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction. The three individuals pleaded not guilty. For years, Anham has held multibillion-dollar contracts to supply U.S. troops with food and water across five Middle Eastern countries. Its contract for Iraq, Kuwait, Syria and Jordan was awarded to a different company in 2015, but Anham was able to extend that work by protesting the award. The Defense Logistics Agency is also moving to reopen the \$8 billion Afghanistan troop supply contract to new competitive bidders. Anham's suspension is likely to speed up the process of transferring that work to a new set of suppliers. [Source: The Washington Post | Aaron Gregg | January 3, 2019 ++]

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**EODTEU-2** -- “Money won is twice as sweet as money earned,” Paul Newman says in “The Color of Money.” Unfortunately for one Navy officer based in Virginia Beach, he neither won nor earned the \$2.7 million he stole from the government to fund a lavish life of high-stakes poker, flashy cars and a second home — and Fat Leonard wasn’t even involved. Lt. **Randolph Prince**, 45, was sentenced to more than four years behind bars for swindling the exorbitant sum by directing his unit’s supply contracts for “inert training aides” to fictitious companies run by his accomplices, according to the U.S. Department of Justice.



“It’s a shame that he squandered an otherwise outstanding 27-year Naval career,” Prince’s defense attorney Shawn Cline told the Virginian-Pilot. “He suffered from a terrible gambling addiction and abused a position of trust to fuel that addiction.” Lt. j.g. **Courtney Cloman**, a flight officer, and **Clayton Pressley III**, a former sailor and Bronze Star recipient, assisted Prince in the scheme. A member of Explosive Ordnance Disposal Training and Evaluation Unit 2, Prince would make purchase requests for military equipment on behalf of his command, the DoJ release said, and would sign off on receiving the products once they were delivered.

When the Navy's requests would land on the desks of the spurious companies run by Prince and his associates, they would produce fraudulent documentation to show the contract had been accepted. The Navy, however, would never receive any of the agreed upon products, and the money was instead divvied up between Cloman, Pressley and Prince, who pleaded guilty in August to charges of wire fraud and falsifying a 2014 tax statement. Pressley was already serving time behind bars for identity theft as part of a separate case when he was doled out a two-year sentence for his role in Prince's money-grabbing plot, one that netted him nearly \$650,000. Cloman, meanwhile, will be sentenced 7 FEB.

Prince's Navy career dates back to 1991, when he enlisted as an 18-year-old. He spent the next 17 years on the Navy's enlisted side before receiving a commission in 2008. He was promoted to the rank of lieutenant in 2012. "When his time in service is remembered, it won't be for the fact that he rose from the lowest enlisted ranks to the grade of lieutenant, or that he served in a dangerous war zone in direct combat when his nation needed him most," Cline told the Pilot. "It will be the events of this sentencing hearing that are his legacy. Rather than being something with which he can look back on with pride, he will spend the rest of his life hoping that the people with whom he interacts are not aware of the time he spent serving in the Navy." [Source: NavyTimes | J.D. Simkins | January 10, 2019 ++]

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**USS Ronald Reagan** -- Two sailors stationed on the aircraft carrier Ronald Reagan pleaded guilty last month to their role in a drug ring that has ensnared more than a dozen sailors from the flattop's nuclear reactor department. Machinist's Mate Nuclear 2nd Class **Andrew W. Miller** pleaded guilty on 13 DEC to distributing the hallucinogenic drug LSD at the warship's homeport of Yokosuka, Japan, during the previous year, according to a copy of his pre-trial agreement. As part of his plea deal, Miller will be confined for 30 days, receive a suspended bad conduct discharge and get an administrative separation board waiver, according to U.S. Naval Forces Japan spokeswoman Cmdr. Reann Mommsen. In return, Miller agreed to testify against any other individuals caught up in the drug ring as part of the Naval Criminal Investigative Service's probe. He'll also get immunity from future charges for his testimony, according to the plea agreement.

On 7 DEC, Machinist's Mate Nuclear 2nd Class **Ethan D. Strandberg** pleaded guilty to possessing and distributing the drug ecstasy and exchanging "electronic messages discussing the distribution of said substances," according to his plea deal. Strandberg will be confined for 60 days and receive a suspended bad conduct discharge and an administrative board separation waiver, according to Mommsen. In exchange, Strandberg agreed to testify against others in the investigation. He initially faced charges for distributing LSD as well. Neither sailor responded to requests for comment sent through a Navy spokesperson.

Electrician's Mate Nuclear 2nd Class **Sean M. Gevero** faces a special court-martial trial for use, possession and distribution of controlled substances, Mommsen said. Two other cases are still making their way through the military criminal justice system A preliminary hearing where an officer will recommend whether the accused should go to court-martial has been completed, while another is pending, Mommsen said. Ten other sailors from the carrier's reactor department were administratively disciplined late last year for their alleged ties to the drug ring, 7th Fleet officials said at the time. The Navy generally does not release the names of suspects or describe the crimes committed by those punished with non-judicial sanctions. [Source: NavyTimes | Geoff Ziezulewicz | January 10, 2019 ++]

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## **POW/MIA Recoveries & Burials** ► **Reported 01 thru 15 JAN 2018 | Nine**

"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

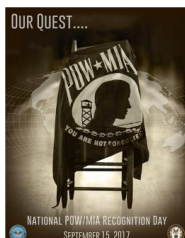
Americans who remain missing from conflicts in this century are: World War II 73,025, Korean War 7730, Vietnam War 1604, Cold War (126), Iraq and other conflicts (5). Over 600 Defense Department men and women -- both military and civilian -- work in organizations around the world as part of DoD's personnel 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 missing or unaccounted for personnel to date refer to <http://www.dpaa.mil> and click on 'Our Missing'. Refer to <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Year/2018> for a listing and details of those accounted for in 2018. 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 names, photos, and details of the below listed MIA/POW's which have been recovered, identified, and/or scheduled for burial since the publication of the last RAO Bulletin are listed on the following sites:

- <https://www.vfw.org/actioncorpsweekly>
- <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases>
- <http://www.thepatriotspage.com/Recovered.htm>
- <http://www.pow-miafamilies.org>
- <https://www.pownetwork.org/bios/b/b012.htm>
- <http://www.vvmf.org/Wall-of-Faces>

### **LOOK FOR**

-- **Army Air Forces 1st Lt. Burleigh E. Curtis** was a member of the 377th Fighter Squadron, 362nd Fighter Group. On June 13, 1944, the P-47D that Curtis was piloting crashed during a dive-bomb attack near Briouze, France. Interment services are pending. [Read about Curtis.](#)

-- **Army Cpl. John G. Krebs** was a member of Company L, 3rd Battalion, 21st Infantry Regiment, 24th Infantry Division, and engaged in combat operations against the North Korean People's Army south of Chonui, South Korea, when he was declared missing in action. Interment services are pending. [Read about Krebs.](#)

-- **Army Pfc. James C. Williams** was a member of Medical Company, 34th Infantry Regiment, 24th Infantry Division, when he was killed in action near Taejon, South Korea. Fellow soldiers returned Williams' remains to the collection point. After his death, the 34th Infantry Regiment's Medical Company was ordered to withdraw, and his remains were left behind. Interment services are pending. [Read about Williams.](#)

-- **Army Pfc. William F. Delaney** was a member of Company A, 1st Battalion, 22nd Infantry Regiment, 4th Infantry Division, when his battalion launched a massive firing demonstration against a large pocket of German defenders near the town of Grosshau, in the Hürtgen Forest in Germany. During the battle, an enemy artillery shell struck Delaney's foxhole, and he died before he could be medically evacuated. Due to ongoing combat operations, his remains were not recovered at that time. Interment services are pending. [Read about Delaney.](#)

-- **Navy Buglemaster 2nd Class Lionel W. Lescault** was stationed aboard the USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft on Dec. 7, 1941. The battleship sustained multiple torpedo hits, which caused it to quickly capsize. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 429 crewmen, including Lescault. Interment services are pending. [Read about Lescault.](#)

-- **Navy Chief Pharmacist's Mate James T. Cheshire** was stationed aboard the USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft on Dec. 7, 1941. The battleship sustained multiple torpedo hits, which caused it to quickly capsize. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 429 crewmen, including Cheshire. Interment services are pending. [Read about Cheshire.](#)

-- **Navy Chief Warrant Officer John A. Austin** was stationed aboard the USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft on Dec. 7, 1941. The battleship sustained multiple torpedo hits, which caused it to quickly capsize. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 429 crewmen, including Austin. Interment services are pending. [Read about Austin.](#)

-- **Navy Machinist's Mate 1st Class George Hanson** was stationed aboard the USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft on Dec. 7, 1941. The battleship sustained multiple torpedo hits, which caused it to quickly capsize. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 429 crewmen, including Hanson. Interment services are pending. [Read about Hanson.](#)

-- **Navy Steward 2nd Class Felicismo Florese** was stationed aboard the USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft on Dec. 7, 1941. The battleship sustained multiple torpedo hits, which caused it to quickly capsize. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 429 crewmen, including Florese. Interment services are pending. [Read about Florese.](#)

[Source: <http://www.dpaa.mil> | January 15, 2019 ++]

\* VA \*



## **HVAC Update 26 ► New Chairman' Goal - Building Up VA, Not Outside Care Programs**

Rep. Mark Takano doesn't see President Donald Trump as an enemy to veterans. But he isn't sure if the administration is a reliable friend to them, either. "Democrats aren't out to come out with a pelt, say we've driven a secretary out of office. Our intention is to mend, not end, VA," the incoming chairman of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee told Military Times in a recent interview. "But I don't know if VA is in a better place today than a year ago. The secretary has only been in place for five months. We're parsing his words ... I'm looking to see if he really wants to work together, or if he is going to pursue an ideologically driven agenda."

Takano, 58, takes over the committee next month amid a tumultuous time for the House of Representatives and the Department of Veterans Affairs. Control of the former is switching parties for the first time in eight years. The latter is on its fourth secretary since the start of 2014, and been embroiled in multiple leadership scandals over the last year. That makes Takano, the former British literature teacher turned four-term California congressman, a key figure in coming months as Democrats look to deliver on their promise of more oversight for Trump's policies and administration.

For his part, Takano is promising to continue the committee's tradition of bipartisanship, saying he won't be issuing subpoenas or demanding witnesses without the backing of his Republican counterparts on the committee. He expects continued harsh questions for VA from the new minority members on recent technology and GI Bill payment errors. But he is also promising "more vigorous oversight" in the months ahead as the new chairman, saying the committee must press harder on the department to ensure veterans are being given the best opportunities to succeed in post-

military life. “Democrats, we’re mindful of making government work,” he said. “Republicans in recent years, ideologically, have been wired to discredit government, to highlight failures and use that as an excuse to outsource everything. That’s an extreme position. “If there is an agenda on (VA Secretary Robert Wilkie’s) part to put us on a path to privatization, he’s the one who is going to be an adversary, not just to me but to veterans.”

Takano’s vision for the department includes more staffing at VA hospitals and more funding for upgrades to existing department facilities. During a recent hearing with Wilkie on Capitol Hill, he chastised the department for “slow-walking” efforts to fill more than 41,000 vacant department posts, an area where Wilkie and other top officials have insisted they are making progress. “This is a case by doing right by veterans will also do right by the country,” he said. “Solving staffing problems at VA is also going to mean solving the medical workforce development issues for the country.”

But some of those efforts appear to be in opposition to administration plans for expanding VA community care plans, shifting resources to private-sector doctors. Wilkie has repeatedly insisted the moves do not amount to privatizing VA health care. Takano has his doubts. “VA has always been referring people to the private sector,” he said. “It is a question of balance. Are we going to see administrative gamesmanship to emphasize private sector care and neglect the vacancies inside VA? Are we going to neglect updating physical infrastructure of VA facilities?” “I still don’t know what direction the secretary is taking.” At that December hearing, Wilkie outlined broad parameters for upcoming rule changes for community care programs mandated under the VA Mission Act, signed into law last summer and repeatedly lauded by Trump.

Takano has promised a close watch on those rules. While Republicans have pushed for looser policies to ensure easier access to outside doctors, Takano and his Democratic colleagues have warned that too open guidelines could erase VA’s role as the central care coordinator for veterans, a goal spelled out in the legislation. “What we do know (from recent studies) is that VA health care is on par with, if not better than, private sector care,” he said. “The problem is access to that care. So let’s work on access to that care, enhanced internal capacity. “I don’t mind working in tandem with greater efficiencies with the Choice program. But I want to remind Secretary Wilkie that the veterans’ first choice is VA health care, and that has to be strengthened and enhanced. Access to that care needs to be greatly improved.”

That fight should start becoming clearer in coming weeks. Wilkie has promised the new system will be in place by the June deadline outlined in the law, and that details of the new community care rules will be presented to lawmakers early in 2019. Meanwhile, Takano also has his eye on hearings to monitor progress with improvements to GI Bill payouts, the department’s promised new electronic medical records system, suicide prevention programs and efforts to end veterans homelessness. He expects most of that work to be driven by bipartisan interest in improving the department. “I want to preserve the sacred bipartisan space we have on this committee,” he said. “I’m not on a trajectory to oppose this administration as a mission. But my mission is to do right by veterans.” [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | December 31, 2018 ++]

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## **VA Secretary Update 86 ► Sec. Wilkie to Govt. Union: Stop Exploiting Veteran Suicide**

On 14 JAN the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) released the following letter from Secretary Robert Wilkie to American Federation of Government Employees President J. David Cox:

*Mr. J. David Cox  
National President  
American Federation of Government Employees  
80 F Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20001*

Dear President Cox:

One of the most insulting and misleading stereotypes about Veterans today is that of the “Veteran as victim.”

While VA is dedicated to helping all Veterans, particularly those who are truly at risk, the notion that most Veterans are so fragile from their service that the slightest hint of hardship can push them to the brink of mental breakdown or even self-harm is preposterous, which is why Veterans and Veteran advocates are continuously fighting (1) this shopworn canard.

As leader of the largest union representing VA employees, many of whom are Veterans, you should know how harmful this stereotype is to Veterans, especially those attempting to enter the civilian workforce following their service. That is why I was surprised and disappointed to see one of the American Federation of Government Employees’ (AFGE) presidents pushing the “Veteran as victim” myth, and going so far as to exploit the real tragedy of Veteran suicide to make political arguments about the partial government shutdown.

“If this shutdown does not stop, we are going to have fatalities. We’re going to have suicides,” AFGE Local President Edward M. Canales said earlier this week, according to ABC News. (2)

While it is apparent some AFGE leaders consider Veterans as victims, allow me to inform you of the true character traits of those who have worn the uniform:

Veterans are models of civic engagement (3), holding stronger ties to their communities and volunteering and voting at higher rates than their non-Veteran counterparts. The Veterans’ unemployment rate is lower (4) than the national average, in part because companies5 often look to hire Veterans for complex and demanding jobs, citing their leadership and work ethic.

In short, America’s Veterans are model citizens and leaders, and almost every American recognizes that. AFGE Local President Canales’ attempt to use Veterans as pawns in a political debate while exploiting the serious issue of Veteran suicide is nothing short of disgraceful.

I ask you to apologize publicly for your AFGE colleague’s reckless comments and to outline the steps you plan to take to ensure AFGE leaders demonstrate proper respect for our nation’s heroes.

I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,  
Robert L. Wilkie

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(1) <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/02/06/us/a-veteran-works-to-break-the-broken-hero-stereotype.html>

(2) <https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/americas-veterans-disproportionately-affected-government-shutdown/story?id=60260832>

(3) <https://gotyour6.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/2017-Veterans-Civic-Health-Index.pdf>

(4) <https://www.dol.gov/vets/latest-numbers> (accessed 1/11/2019)

(5) <https://www.metlife.com/blog/business-insights/veterans-at-work>

[Source: VA News Releases | January 14, 2019 ++]

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## **VA Private Sector Care ► \$55B In Contracts Awarded for First 3 Regions**

The Department of Veterans Affairs has awarded the first of several regional contracts for its new Community Care Network that will replace various private-sector health care programs for veterans with VA health benefits. The VA announced 28 DEC that it awarded management contracts for three regions covering 36 states, plus Washington, D.C.; Puerto Rico; and the U.S. Virgin Islands, to Optum Public Sector Solutions Inc., a government-services arm of Optum, the health services arm of UnitedHealthcare. The contracts, for Regions 1, 2 and 3, are for a base period of one year,

starting 18 JAN, and seven renewable one-year options through 2026, worth a total of \$55.2 billion, if all options are exercised.

The VA Mission Act, signed into law last June, stipulated that the VA consolidate its multiple private-sector care programs, including the VA Choice and Patient Centered Community Care programs, into a single, comprehensive community care system that will supplement the VA's own system of medical centers and clinics. By law, the VA must have the framework for the new Community Care Network in place by June. The VA currently is ironing out rules regarding how and when veterans can get medical care in the private sector, paid for by the VA, rather than receive medical care at VA facilities.

According to the VA, the new private care management companies will be responsible for project management, establishing medical networks and overseeing them, handling referrals from the VA and managing claims, providing quality control and administering pharmacy benefits networks, as well as dental networks and other services. VA spokesman Terrence Hayes said that, while current contracts provide primary care, inpatient and outpatient specialty care, third-party administration and other services, the new contractors will cover these areas and more, providing expanded health care services as well as medical management services, claims processing and audits, data analytics and exchange of health care information. About 30 percent of VA medical appointments occur in the private sector.

At a hearing on implementation of the VA Mission Act on 19 DEC, VA Secretary Robert Wilkie told lawmakers that the department is in the process of crafting eligibility and access standards to determine who can receive care in the private sector under the new program. Lawmakers at that hearing, a joint meeting of the Senate and House Veterans Affairs Committees, expressed concern that the VA would go too far in allowing access to private care -- a move Democrats say would undermine VA health care and be a step toward privatizing the VA. Republicans also said the VA's lack of transparency regarding rules and costs is a cause for concern.

VA officials said a contract award for Region 4, which covers most of the western states, is expected in April. Awards for Regions 5 and 6, which include Alaska and the Pacific territories, will be given by the end of the year. Contractors are expected to have their networks up and running at two sites within 180 days of a contract award and be fully operational within a year of the award. "These contract awards reflect our ongoing commitment to increasing veterans' access to care," Wilkie said in the release on Optum on 28 DEC. "As part of VA's modernization efforts, we designed the new network based on feedback from veterans and other stakeholders, along with lessons learned from the Veterans Choice Program. We are confident this new network will greatly improve customer service for veterans and timeliness of payments to community providers." [Source: Military.com | Patricia Kime | January 9, 2019 ++]

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## **VA Private Sector Care Update 01 ► Veterans' Medical System Transformation Preps**

The Department of Veterans Affairs is preparing to shift billions of dollars from government-run veterans' hospitals to private health care providers, setting the stage for the biggest transformation of the veterans' medical system in a generation. Under proposed guidelines, it would be easier for veterans to receive care in privately run hospitals and have the government pay for it. Veterans would also be allowed access to a system of proposed walk-in clinics which would serve as a bridge between V.A. emergency rooms and private providers, and would require co-pays for treatment.

Veterans' hospitals, which treat seven million patients annually, have struggled to see patients on time in recent years, hit by a double crush of returning Iraq and Afghanistan veterans and aging Vietnam veterans. A scandal over hidden waiting lists in 2014 sent Congress searching for fixes, and in the years since, Republicans have pushed to send veterans to the private sector, while Democrats have favored increasing the number of doctors in the V.A. If put into effect, the proposed rules — many of whose details remain unclear as they are negotiated within the Trump administration — would be a win for the once-obscure Concerned Veterans for America, an advocacy group funded



by the network founded by the billionaire industrialists Charles G. and David H. Koch, which has long championed increasing the use of private sector health care for veterans.

For individual veterans, private care could mean shorter waits, more choices and fewer requirements for co-pays — and could prove popular. But some health care experts and veterans' groups say the change, which has no separate source of funding, would redirect money that the current veterans' health care system — the largest in the nation — uses to provide specialty care. Critics have also warned that switching vast numbers of veterans to private hospitals would strain care in the private sector and that costs for taxpayers could skyrocket. In addition, they say it **could threaten the future of traditional veterans' hospitals**, some of which are already under review for consolidation or closing. President Trump, who made reforming veterans' health care a major point of his campaign, may reveal details of the plan in his State of the Union address later this month, according to several people in the administration and others outside it who have been briefed on the plan.

The proposed changes have grown out of health care legislation, known as the Mission Act, passed by the last Congress. Supporters, who have been influential in administration policy, argue that the new rules would streamline care available to veterans, whose health problems are many but whose numbers are shrinking, and also prod the veterans' hospital system to compete for patients, making it more efficient. "Most veterans chose to serve their country, so they should have the choice to access care in the community with their V.A. benefits — especially if the V.A. can't serve them in a timely and convenient manner," said Dan Caldwell, executive director of Concerned Veterans for America.

One of the group's former senior advisers, Darin Selnick, played a key role in drafting the Mission Act as a veterans' affairs adviser at the White House's Domestic Policy Council, and is now a senior adviser to the secretary of Veterans Affairs in charge of drafting the new rules. Mr. Selnick clashed with David J. Shulkin, who was the head of the V.A. for a year under Mr. Trump, and is widely viewed as being instrumental in ending Mr. Shulkin's tenure. Mr. Selnick declined to comment.

Critics, which include nearly all of the major veterans' organizations, say that paying for care in the private sector would starve the 153-year-old veterans' health care system, causing many hospitals to close. "We don't like it," said Rick Weidman, executive director of Vietnam Veterans of America. "This thing was initially sold as to supplement the V.A., and some people want to try and use it to supplant." Members of Congress from both parties have been critical of the administration's inconsistency and lack of details in briefings. At a hearing last month, Senator John Boozman, Republican of Arkansas, told Robert L. Wilkie, the current secretary of Veterans Affairs, that his staff had sometimes come to Capitol Hill "without their act together."

Although the Trump administration has kept details quiet, officials inside and outside the department say the plan closely resembles the military's insurance plan, Tricare Prime, which sets a lower bar than the Department of Veterans Affairs when it comes to getting private care. Tricare automatically allows patients to see a private doctor if they have to travel more than 30 minutes for an appointment with a military doctor, or if they have to wait more than seven days for a routine visit or 24 hours for urgent care. Under current law, veterans qualify for private care only if they have waited 30 days, and sometimes they have to travel hundreds of miles. The administration may propose for veterans a time frame somewhere between the seven- and 30-day periods. Mr. Wilkie has repeatedly said his goal is not to privatize veterans' health care, but would not provide details of his proposal when asked at a hearing before Congress in December.

In remarks at a joint hearing with members of the House and Senate veterans' committees in December, Mr. Wilkie said veterans largely liked using the department's hospitals. "My experience is veterans are happy with the service they get at the Department of Veterans Affairs," he said. Veterans are not "chomping at the bit" to get services elsewhere, he said, adding, "They want to go places where people speak the language and understand the culture." Health care experts say that, whatever the larger effects, allowing more access to private care will prove costly. A 2016 report ordered by Congress, from a panel called the Commission on Care, analyzed the cost of sending more

veterans into the community for treatment and warned that unfettered access could cost well over \$100 billion each year.

Tricare costs have climbed steadily, and the Tricare population is younger and healthier than the general population, while Veterans Affairs patients are generally older and sicker. Though the rules would place some restrictions on veterans, early estimates by the Office of Management and Budget found that a Tricare-style system would cost about \$60 billion each year, according to a former Veterans Affairs official who worked on the project. Congress is unlikely to approve more funding, so the costs are likely to be carved out of existing funds for veterans' hospitals. At the same time, Tricare has been popular among recipients — so popular that the percentage of military families using it has nearly doubled since 2001, as private insurance became more expensive, according to the Harvard lecturer Linda Bilmes. "People will naturally gravitate toward the better deal, that's economics," she said. "It has meant a tremendous increase in costs for the government."

A spokesman for the Department of Veterans Affairs, Curt Cashour, declined to comment on the specifics of the new rules. "The Mission Act, which sailed through Congress with overwhelming bipartisan support and the strong backing of veterans service organizations, gives the V.A. secretary the authority to set access standards that provide veterans the best and most timely care possible, whether at V.A. or with community providers, and the department is committed to doing just that," he said in an email. Veterans' services organizations have largely opposed large-scale changes to the health program, concerned that the growing costs of outside doctors' bills would cannibalize the veterans' hospital system.

Dr. Shulkin, the former secretary, shared that concern. Though he said he supported increasing the use of private health care, he favored a system that would let department doctors decide when patients were sent outside for private care. The cost of the new rules, he said, could be higher than expected, because most veterans use a mix of private insurance, Medicare and veterans' benefits, choosing to use the benefits that offer the best deal. Many may choose to forgo Medicare, which requires a substantial co-pay, if Veterans Affairs offers private care at no charge. And if enough veterans leave the veterans' system, he said, it could collapse. "The belief is as costs grow, resources are going to shift from V.A. to the private sector," he said. "If that happens on a large scale, it will be extremely difficult to maintain a V.A. system." [Source: New York Times | Jennifer Steinhauer & Dave Philipps | January 12, 2019 ++]

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## **VA Blue Water Claims Update 59 ► Lawmakers Hope For Swift Action This Year**

Just days into the new session of Congress, leaders of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee have reintroduced legislation to give benefits to tens of thousands of "blue water" Vietnam veterans who saw their lobbying efforts last year fall just short of success. Both committee Chairman Mark Takano (D-CA) and ranking member Phil Roe (R-TN) are pushing congressional leadership for quick action on bills that would award presumptive benefits to sailors who served in the coastal waters off the shores of Vietnam during the 1960s and 1970s. "Thousands of veterans are still waiting for their government to deliver on its promise and grant them the benefits they have earned," Takano said in a statement. "The fact that politics got in the way of our duty to care for veterans affected by toxic exposure (last session) ... is an insult to all veterans who served with the expectation that their country would care for them."

Many of those blue water Vietnam veterans today — estimated at around 90,000 individuals — are experiencing rare heart conditions and cancers that have been linked with exposure to cancer-causing chemicals in defoliants like Agent Orange. Under Department of Veterans Affairs rules, troops that served on the ground and inland waterways during the Vietnam War are presumed to have been exposed to the dangerous chemicals, and given a quicker path to receiving disability benefits. Veterans who served on ships are eligible for VA medical care related to their illnesses but have to prove direct chemical exposure. Advocates have said in most cases, evidence of Agent Orange residue on those ships was not properly collected, making a scientific argument justifying the presumptive status impossible.

Last session, House members unanimously approved legislation mirroring the new Takano and Roe plans that would mandate VA award benefits to the blue water veterans, and use a new fee on VA home loans to offset the costs. But that plan was blocked by a small group of senators in the waning days of the last session, largely over concerns about the cost. The legislation carries a price tag of about \$1.1 billion over 10 years, but VA officials have insisted the total is closer to \$5.5 billion. The department has opposed extending presumptive status to the group, saying the available science doesn't back up their claims. Advocates have called that response a cold, penny-pinching response to veterans in need.

In a press conference late last month, multiple veterans groups rallied to call for immediate action on the issue, saying any delay would likely mean allowing thousands more veterans to die without seeing proper compensation. "Giving blue water Navy veterans the benefits they earned is simply a cost of war," said Matthew Schuman, national legislative director for the American Legion. "These veterans are dying because of exposure to Agent Orange. Sadly, the fight to ensure they get the benefits they deserve just gets harder." John Wells, executive director of the group Military-Veterans Advocacy, which has been at the forefront of the blue water dispute for years, said he wants quick action on the issue too but warned that lawmakers need to make sure they don't repeat the same legislative failure as last session. He also said that if lawmakers don't act by this spring, the issue may be moot. He anticipates a decision on a pending court case brought by his group against VA by this spring. A favorable ruling there could force VA to award the benefits, regardless what Congress decides. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | January 8, 2019 ++]

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## **VA Medical Marijuana Update 56 ► Can It move forward in 2019?**

Rep. Lou Correa thinks 2019 could finally be the year that medical cannabis becomes legal for veterans nationwide. "What do you tell a veteran who has brought back invisible scars and those opioids aren't doing a darn thing for them?" the California Democrat said in a recent interview with Military Times. "They say cannabis works for them. How do you argue against that? I don't think there is a legitimate argument to oppose it." Correa, who sits on the House Veterans' Affairs Committee, has been pushing legislation since last spring that would require the Department of Veterans Affairs to research whether medical marijuana may be a safe and effective treatment for post-traumatic stress, chronic pain and other war wounds. He plans on re-introducing the measure early in the next Congress.

The measure received strong Republican support in committee last year but stalled in the full House. Now, with Democrats taking control of the chamber, he sees an opportunity not just for an incremental legislative step forward, but passage into law. "I don't see it as a partisan issue," he said. "The bill last year had [committee] Chairman Phil Roe as a co-sponsor ... Cannabis is one of those issues that more and more has taken a more bipartisan approach in recent years." In fact, multiple Republican House members have pushed for broader authorities for VA to study and veterans to use the drug for medicinal purposes.

But Trump administration officials — in particular, former Attorney General Jeff Sessions — have staunchly opposed the idea. VA officials have said as long as the substance remains classified as illegal under federal law, they won't move to broaden research or acceptance of it. Currently, 31 states allow some use of marijuana for therapeutic purposes. But under federal law, it remains classified as a Schedule 1 controlled substance, which places strict use and procurement guidelines on any medical testing.

Correa said he understands the stigma that use of the drug carries. But he also understands its potential benefits. "More than half of the population in this country lives in jurisdictions that has legalized cannabis. Canada has fully legalized it," he said. "If Alabama decides they don't want to legalize it, OK. But if the state of California and 40 others do, it should be a state's rights issue."

Sessions' departure could soften the administration's stance on the issue, Correa noted. And President Donald Trump's own stated comments about opioid addiction in America could lend support to the idea of developing more

alternatives, including cannabis use. He said he'll be pushing Democratic leadership to move on the issue quickly next session, and reaching out to the Senate for similar support in that still Republican-controlled chamber. "Every day they find new medical uses for cannabis," he said. "It'd be sad if we continued to keep putting our heads in the sand." [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | December 28, 2018 ++]

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## **VA Suicide Prevention Update 53 ► What Really Happened With Their Budget**

Of the \$6.2 million budget earmarked for suicide prevention media outreach in 2018, the VA used only \$57,000 — less than one percent, that's according to a recent GAO report. When the report was released many had questions about how the money was — or was not — being spent by the VA to fight the veteran battle against suicide. Many found it particularly alarming since VA Secretary Robert Wilkie had touted veteran suicide as one of his top priorities. Now VA National Director of Suicide Prevention Dr. Keita Franklin is speaking out.

According to Franklin, early in the fiscal year, the program set aside a certain amount for paid media. They then took a step back to reassess the emphasis and focus of the office's efforts — and discovered they might not be where they should be. "Early on in the programming we set aside a certain amount for something called paid media which allows us to do advertising and marketing and push out information through commercials and websites — even Facebook," Franklin said. "And after setting that aside we took a pause in our programming, and in part one of the things we realized was that our program was largely focused on reaching veterans when they were at high risk."

While the veterans crisis line is responsible for saving up to 60 lives a day Franklin and the VA realized they may be neglecting a significant need within the veteran community by focusing so heavily on high-risk situations. "Our paid advertising efforts, I would offer, were a little bit off the mark by focusing too much on just the very highest risk — which is necessary and we still need to do this and I'm not trying to pull back the throttle — but to make it more encompassing to reach people," Franklin said. "We're calling it left of boom — left of the crisis so our marketing is focusing on how to be there for one another during rough times every day. Not just when people are at their highest level of need."

This, Franklin explained, is what the VA was doing instead of spending the entire budget on the existing programming structure. "It caused us to take a pause, restructure the programming, and go forward with a broader approach. In the eyes of the GAO and what came out in the media, it was as though we left money on the table. I think we used the money in a different way," Franklin said. Franklin stepped into the director role in April 2018 — after the position sat vacant for nine months. Since then, the entire office structure has changed, the emphasis of the programming was developed, and a new national strategy was executed. All of this work beyond media advertising was not taken into consideration in the GAO report.

The VA had access to more than 60 partners for free marketing and advertising, explains Franklin. Organizations like the Independence Fund, the VFW and the American Legion pushed out information often times at no cost and reached veterans that the VA alone could not. Sarah Verardo, CEO of the Independence Fund who works closely with the VA, commented that Franklin's commitment to the battle against veteran suicide was left out as well. "She's a very modest person, but she meets with suicide survivor families, she meets with parents, she takes every phone call that comes to her office, and I really think it's an issue that she attacks personally," said Verardo. "All of that should be noted, and none of it was covered in this media firestorm about the budget." "There were multiple reasons behind it all, but know that going forward our campaign will continue to focus on high-risk veterans — but will also be broad and certainly the full budget will be fully executed," Franklin said. [Source: Connectingvets.com | Elizabeth Howe | January 07, 2019 ++]

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## VA Gambling Findings ► Addiction | Path To Recovery

Popular culture often associates gambling with flashy casinos, bright lights, and glamour, but there is more to gambling than playing blackjack at a local casino. The popular media rarely shows the downside of problem gambling. Much like other addictions, excessive or problem gambling can lead to negative consequences such as relationship issues, debt, loss of employment, bankruptcy, foreclosures, and repossessions. The National Council on Problem Gambling estimates that in the United States, about 2 million (or 1 percent) of adults meet criteria for pathological gambling in a given year, and another 4–6 million (up to 3 percent) of adults would be considered problem gamblers.

Problem gambling comes at a cost, and VA is committed to helping Veterans recognize that they are not alone in confronting it. One way that VA is addressing gambling problems among Veterans is by asking the right questions in a health care setting. A pilot study conducted by the VISN 1 New England MIRECC and funded by the Massachusetts Gaming Commission assessed the utility and feasibility of using the Brief Biosocial Gambling Screen (BBGS) for detecting gambling disorder among Veterans seeking mental health treatment services at the Edith Nourse Rogers Memorial Veterans Hospital in Bedford, Massachusetts. The study screened 260 Veterans from November 2017 through September 2018 in the hospital’s Primary Care Behavioral Health clinic, and 32.7 percent of respondents reported gambling within the past 12 months. Most of the Veterans who participated were seen for depression and anxiety-related problems. Researchers found no significant differences in the demographics, medical conditions, or mental health co-morbidities of the Veterans who gambled recreationally and those who had gambling disorder.

The most frequent forms of gambling were the traditional lottery (played by 25 percent of the Veterans), instant lottery scratch-off tickets (used by 31 percent), and card games (played by 10 percent). Of the 85 Veterans in the study who had gambled in the past year, five (5.9 percent) screened positive for gambling disorder on the BBGS and said they had problems with gambling. All five of these Veterans were white men with reported histories of anxiety, depression, or posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Additionally, three of these Veterans also met the American Psychiatric Association’s full DSM-5 criteria for gambling disorder, and strikingly, all three Veterans were also having suicidal thoughts at the time of the screening.

Veterans may also engage in gambling-related activities as an escape or a way to avoid seeking treatment for mental health challenges. This type of gambling-related escapism has been studied in the general population, such as in this study from Rory C. Reid, Ph.D., and colleagues; however, further research is needed to better understand the apparent association between gambling disorder and mental health challenges, including suicidal thoughts, and to develop improved strategies for encouraging Veterans to seek help. Results from the Massachusetts study suggest that self-disclosure of problem gambling and outreach efforts by VA health care providers could increase Veterans’ participation in treatment services. By sharing information about gambling with their primary care provider, Veterans can start the journey toward a healthier lifestyle and limit the potential negative impacts.

The path to recovery for problem gambling starts with disclosing information about gambling to a health care provider. This open communication encourages early intervention and treatment and increases the likelihood of recovery and stability for Veterans and their loved ones. Veterans and their family members and friends can start by exploring the following resources:

- [The VA resource locator](#) can identify recovery programs and other resources near you. Simply fill in your ZIP code or state and check the boxes to indicate the programs or topics you are interested in learning more about.
- Coaching Into Care is a service to help you and your family members and other loved ones find the appropriate services at your local VA facilities and/or in your community. Call 888-823-7458 to get started.
- The National Center for Responsible Gaming ([NCRG](#)) (NCRG) is an educational resource, which can help you understand gambling disorders and learn about effective methods of treatment.

- The National Council on Problem Gambling operates the National Problem Gambling Helpline Network (1-800-522-4700) where you can call and get support for a gambling problem. Help is available 24/7 and is 100 percent confidential.
- Make the Connection is an online resource designed to connect you, your family members and friends, and other supporters with information and resources about issues affecting your life. Learn more about [overcoming gambling problems](#) and hear stories from other Veterans.

[Source: Vantage Point | January 7, 2019 ++]

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## VA Health Care Update 01 ► How Medicare Can Work with VA Health Care

If you get health care through the Veterans Health Administration and are nearing your 65th birthday, don't overlook whether Medicare would make sense for you. While not all military veterans rely on VA health care, those who do might not realize they can use Medicare alongside their existing benefits. "Many are in the dark about using both," said certified financial planner Hans "John" Scheil, CEO and owner of Cardinal Retirement Planning in Cary, North Carolina. "But there are a lot of options for veterans when it comes to Medicare." Allocating expenses into needs, goals and aspirations can help provide a better framework for managing your cash flow and living comfortably.

The VA health system provides care for 9 million veterans each year at its 1,250 facilities, including 172 medical centers and more than 1,000 outpatient sites across the country. However, it generally doesn't cover care outside of those locations. "With Medicare, you have much broader options," said Elizabeth Gavino, founder of Lewin & Gavino in New York and an independent broker and general agent for Medicare plans. "You can have access to doctors and hospitals not near a VA facility, or you might want a second opinion from a doctor outside the system." The program encourages those using VA health care to sign up for Medicare when first eligible. Doing so has no impact on your VA coverage.

You get seven months to sign up; the enrollment period starts three months before the month in which you turn 65 and ends three months after your birthday month. For example, if the big day is 15 JUN, your signup window begins 1 MAR and ends 30 SEP. And remember, signing up for Medicare does not affect your VA health-care benefits. Medicare Part A, which provides hospital coverage, costs nothing. The standard premium for Part B, which is for outpatient care and medical equipment, is \$135.50 for 2019. (Those with higher incomes pay more. See chart below.)

What your Medicare Part B premium will be in 2019 based on your 2017 yearly income

File individual tax return †	File joint tax return †	File married & separate tax return †	You pay each month (in 2019) †
\$85,000 or less	\$170,000 or less	\$85,000 or less	\$135.50
Above \$85,000 up to \$107,000	Above \$170,000 up to \$214,000	Not applicable	\$189.60
Above \$107,000 up to \$133,500	Above \$214,000 up to \$267,000	Not applicable	\$270.90
Above \$133,500 up to \$160,000	Above \$267,000 up to \$320,000	Not applicable	\$352.20
\$160,000 and less than \$500,000	Above \$320,000 and less than \$750,000	Above \$85,000 and less than \$415,000	\$433.40
\$500,000 or above	\$750,000 and above	\$415,000 and above	\$460.50

Like the rest of the population, if you don't sign up for Part B when you're first eligible, you could face a life-lasting penalty if you change your mind later. And the longer you delay, the higher the amount that gets tacked on to your

premium. It's worth noting that for veterans who plan to use TriCare for Life — an insurance program administered by the Department of Defense — you must enroll in Medicare Parts A and B. Part D, which is for prescription drug coverage, is optional. Some people using VA health care sign up for it so they can get their medicine from non-VA doctors and have their prescriptions filled at their local pharmacy instead of through the VA mail-order service. However, VA prescription drug coverage generally comes with lower costs than a Part D plan. And, there's no harm in not signing up: If you don't do it when you're first eligible for Medicare and then change your mind later, you won't pay a penalty because it is considered "creditable" by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services.

Gavino said that some people with VA health care decide to go with a Medicare Advantage Plan, which includes Parts A and B, and typically D. These plans often come with extras such as dental and vision coverage, or gym memberships. "Some of those plans have a low or no premium," Gavino said. "If you never want to use the plan, you don't have to." This would mean that it costs nothing unless you use it and face a deductible or copay (or both), depending on the particulars of the plan. You'd also have an out-of-pocket maximum.

Meanwhile, some people with VA health care who sign up for Medicare Parts A and B decide to get a Medigap policy instead of an Advantage Plan (you cannot have both). This type of supplemental insurance helps cover the cost of deductibles, copays and coinsurance associated with Medicare. However, you only get six months to purchase a Medigap policy without an insurance company nosing through your health history and deciding whether to insure you. This "guaranteed-issue" period starts when you first sign up for Medicare. After that window, unless your state allows special exceptions, you have to go through medical underwriting. And depending on your health, that process could cause the Medigap insurer to charge you more or deny coverage altogether. [Source: CNBC | Sarah O'Brien | January 3, 2019 ++]

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## **VA Blood Drive ► January is National Blood Donor Month**

Every day, blood donors help patients of all ages: accident and burn victims, heart surgery and organ transplant patients, and those battling cancer. Every two seconds, someone in the U.S. needs blood National Blood Donor Month has been observed in January since 1970 with the goal of increasing blood and platelet donations during winter – one of the most difficult times of year to collect enough blood products to meet patient needs. During the winter months, inclement weather often results in canceled blood drives, and seasonal illnesses like the flu may cause some donors to become temporarily unable to donate.

Stephen Sears, [Togus VA](#) Chief of Staff: "A blood donation truly is a 'gift of life' that a healthy individual can give to others in their community who are sick or injured. In one hour's time, a person can donate one unit of blood that can be separated into four individual components that could help save multiple lives. During this holiday season give the gift of blood—it can be truly life-saving for those in need." It's time to recognize the lifesaving contribution of blood and platelet donors. As we begin the New Year, VA encourages all of us to resolve to roll up a sleeve to give this month and throughout 2019. Many VA medical centers will be holding blood drives throughout the year. [Contact your local VA facility](#) for information on their event. Here's just a few (on some of these links, you can make an appointment):

- [Wilmington NC – January 2](#)
- [Providence, Rhode Island – January 2](#)
- [Des Moines, Iowa – January 4](#)
- [John D. Dingell VA Medical Center, Detroit – January 9 8-2](#)
- [Cleveland VA Medical Center – Friday, February 1 from 7 a.m. to 5 p.m.](#)
- [Sioux Falls January 22 6:30 – 10:30](#)
- [Walla Walla – January 23](#)
- [Loma Linda, California – January 18](#)

- [North Las Vegas – January 18](#)
- [Northport NY – February 4 – 10-4](#)
- [Jesse Brown VA Chicago, Illinois – February 5](#)
- [West Palm Beach, Florida Feb. 7](#)
- [Tomah, Wisconsin – January 17](#)
- [Fargo, North Dakota – February 20](#)
- [Philadelphia February 22](#)
- [Spokane, Washington – January 8](#)
- [White River Junction, Vermont – March 25](#)
- [Battle Creek, Michigan – January 8](#)
- [Milwaukee, Wisconsin – January 9](#)
- [Charleston, South Carolina – February 20](#)
- [Augusta, Maine – February 12](#)

[Source: Vantage Point | January 1, 2019 ++]

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## VA Loan Limits ► 2019

The VA loan limits will be increasing for 2019, letting veterans who plan to use the benefit keep pace with the cost of housing. If you are familiar with the VA Loan Guaranty Program, you know that the Department of Veterans Affairs doesn't loan you money when you buy a home. Rather, they guarantee to the lender that you are good for the money. That allows you to get a loan without a down payment, and does away with many of the credit requirements that lenders look for before they loan people money for a home. As a veteran you have access to this benefit, something civilians don't have -- and wish they did.

### VA Limits for Conventional Loans Increased

The VA doesn't set a limit on how much you can borrow, but they are limited by law on the amount of liability they can assume, which, in turn, usually affects the amount of money an institution will lend you. Those loan limits vary by county, since the value of a house depends in part on its location. Each year the VA changes the amount of money it will guarantee, a shift designed to keep up with housing costs. For 2019, the maximum amount the VA will guarantee, or "underwrite," to a lender will be \$484,350, an increase from \$453,100 in 2018.

Any loan above that amount is known as a "jumbo loan" instead of a "conventional loan," and usually requires a down payment, or comes with a different interest rate. Of course, as much money as that is, in many parts of the U.S. it won't buy you much of a house. These high-cost areas have special, higher loan limits that are set by law. If you are in one of those areas, your limits for a conventional loan are higher than the national rate.

### High-Cost Ceiling Increased To \$726,650

By definition, a high-cost area is one where the median home value is 115 percent over the conventional loan limit. Limits in these areas are set at the median home value up to a maximum amount of \$726,650, although many are less than that. These areas are broken down by county, so all home loans underwritten by the VA in those counties have the same limit. All home loans that are within the county maximums in high-cost counties will be considered conventional rather than jumbo loans. That means you can still buy a home with no down payment, possibly pay a lower interest rate and may be able to find financing more easily. Remember, the lender still has to verify your credit and ability to repay a loan before they will lend you any money. See a full list of the high-cost counties [here](#).

[Source: MOAA Newsletter | Jim Absher | December 14, 2018 ++]



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## **VA Health Care Access Update 62 ► Choice Rules May be Completely Rewritten in 2019**

President Donald Trump has been promising expanded health care choices for veterans dating back to his election campaign in 2015. But 2019 could be the year his administration actually makes that happen. Veterans Affairs has been working on expanded community care rules for veterans' medical appointments since last summer, when Congress approved the VA Mission Act. Details of that work are expected to be released in early 2019, and a full set of new regulations is scheduled to be released in early spring. Among other priorities, the legislation mandated a retooling of the department's policies for veterans seeking private-sector care, a massive undertaking that supporters have hailed as giving more flexibility and freedom to veterans who face long lines at VA hospitals and clinics.

VA Secretary Robert Wilkie in December hailed the work as part of “a real transformational period at the department.” But critics have attacked the work as the first step toward privatizing key parts of the VA mission. Democrats, including House members who will be taking control of the chamber this year, have promised intense oversight into the new outside care rules, to ensure they aren't written to siphon off needed federal resources to private businesses. As written, the legislation requires VA to remain a core coordinator of veterans health care plans but also to ensure “the scheduling of medical appointments in a timely manner,” “continuity of care and services,” and “no lapse in health care services.” That leaves a significant amount of work to be settled in the details of VA's implementation plan.

Currently, the VA's Choice program — the best known and most used of the community care programs — is restricted to veterans who live more than 40 miles from a VA facility or face a wait of more than 30 days for VA services. The new programs will likely jettison those rules in favor of a looser set of guidelines, including language for veterans who face “an unusual or excessive burden” getting their care at VA facilities. Veterans groups have advocated for more flexibility for care options but also warned against abandoning the current Veterans Health Administration, a key safety net for millions of veterans across the country. A congressional hearing previewing the Mission Act implementation work was scheduled for early December but was postponed due to the death of former President George H.W. Bush. That has only added more mystery and urgency to the drafts under consideration by top VA officials. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | January 2, 2019 ++]

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## **VA Prostate Cancer Program Update 16 ► Survivor Care**



Dr. Ted Skolarus is a urologic oncologist—a physician who treats cancer of the urinary tract and male reproductive system. He serves as section chief of urology at the VA Ann Arbor Health Care System in Michigan, and is an associate professor of urology at the University of Michigan. He is also a research scientist at the VA Health Services Research

& Development Center for Clinical Management Research in Ann Arbor. His research is focused on survivorship care for men who have undergone treatment for prostate cancer.

While survivors need to be monitored by their providers for cancer recurrence, there are also a number of quality-of-life issues, like urinary incontinence and sexual health, which should be assessed by the medical team. In many cases, there are things that can be done to help survivors enjoy a better quality of life. VA Research Quarterly Update (VARQU) staff held an interview with Skolarus about his VA Career Development Award to help improve the quality of survivorship care for Veterans who have been treated for prostate cancer. Following are his responses:

**How prevalent is prostate cancer in the U.S.?**

The classic incidence is about 1 in 6 men will be diagnosed with prostate cancer at some point in their lifetime. Given that the VA health care system is over 80 percent male, there is a substantial number of Veterans who are diagnosed with prostate cancer. The annual incidence of prostate cancer impacts approximately 12,000 Veterans in the VA each year. There have been changes in the screening recommendations from various organizations, as to the value and effectiveness of early detection of prostate cancer through prostate-specific antigen [PSA] screening. But in general, most approaches rely on shared decision making—between providers and patients—regarding whether men wish to be screened for prostate cancer. There are some high-risk groups—including men who were exposed to Agent Orange, African American men, men with a strong family history of prostate cancer, or early onset prostate cancer in a relative—that may be at greater risk of aggressive prostate cancer, that should more strongly consider screening.

**What is the survival rate for prostate cancer?**

The five-year survival rate for localized prostate cancer is nearly 100 percent. On the other hand, prostate cancer is one of the leading causes of male cancer-related deaths—there are nearly 30,000 deaths expected in 2018. There are over 3 million men alive with a diagnosis of prostate cancer in the United States. Given the patient population and access to health care and screening in the VHA, thousands of these prostate cancer survivors are cared for in the system.

**What types of follow-up care are important for prostate cancer survivors?**

We recommend—as part of the American Cancer Society prostate cancer survivorship guidelines—measuring and addressing men’s quality of life, with respect to urinary, sexual, bowel, and overall health. That is important to do given the side effects of treatment, yet there remains a lack of systematic organizational approaches for assessment. Following PSA as a cancer surveillance approach is also important. I think engaging and using clear communication about survivorship care plans with primary care providers who end up caring for prostate cancer survivors can really make a difference. Good communication is especially helpful in getting men back to their specialists if there is concern for a recurrence of their prostate cancer or unmet needs with respect to side effects.

**Can you explain what your VA Career Development Award involved?**

The first aspect of the award was to look at things that would be consistent with high-quality prostate cancer survivorship care. There’s a paucity of quality measures, so that was, in some respect, the reason for this work—to define what quality prostate cancer survivorship care might look like. As we looked at a couple different markers of survivorship care quality, we found a lot of variation within the VA health care system. One of the first things that we did was look at men who were getting androgen deprivation therapy [ADT], and if they were getting a recommended bone density testing to screen for baseline osteoporosis. We know that this is recommended for most men who will be starting hormone therapy.

We found that up to 1 in 5 men were getting this screening study. This was fairly consistent with findings from Medicare studies. But we also found that the more likely you were to get a bone density test, the more likely you were to be diagnosed with osteoporosis. And, if you were diagnosed with osteoporosis, you were more likely to get vitamin D, calcium, and treatment for osteoporosis, in an attempt to prevent fracture given increased risks with ADT. So, this part of the study pointed out areas for improvement in bone health for men who were getting hormone therapy.

**You also developed an intervention for prostate cancer survivors that used automated telephone calls with advice on symptom management. Can you explain?**

As part of the Career Development Award, I was able to have multiple survivorship-related projects dovetail with each other. One of those was a randomized trial of over 500 men with prostate cancer across four sites in the VA: St. Louis, Cleveland, Ann Arbor, and Pittsburgh. We wanted to understand if we could use an automated telephone system to not only assess men’s side effects, but also to give tailored newsletters and feedback on how they can help themselves self-manage those side effects. We also wanted to teach men when to reach out to their doctors to help them with side effects that might be overlooked during routine care.

That work was presented at the American Society of Clinical Oncology’s annual meeting, and highlighted during one of its poster discussion sessions, this year. What we found was while there were small effects on men’s overall quality of life, when they did want to focus on a given area like urinary or sexual health, we saw improvements in that area. That demonstrates the potential impact of not only measuring patient-reported outcomes for prostate cancer across the entire VA system, but also giving Veteran prostate cancer survivors tailored self-management strategies to improve those areas that are affecting their health. This degree of support is not available in any other system. We are excited about its potential for national impact, as Veteran engagement was excellent throughout the study.

[Source: Vantage Point | Erica Sprey | December 19, 2018 ++]



**Homeless Vets Update 91 ► Salt Lake City Valor House Vacancies**

The Housing Authority of Salt Lake City issued a demand letter to the local Veteran Affairs office 31 DEC, stating that the department needed to change policies that left beds at a property built for homeless veterans vacant for years. The housing authority said in their letter that the VA should replace their staff with the non-profit First Step House, an organization based in Salt Lake City that specializes in addiction recovery. In the letter, the housing authority said the high vacancy at Valor House caused extreme cuts in funding for the facility:

*“The mix of regulatory barriers to tenancy put in place by the local VA caused this property to average over 30% vacancy for the past several years—a total of approximately 11,000 empty bed nights at a time when many veterans are struggling on the street or in substandard living conditions. This high vacancy rate led to extreme cuts in HASLC’s federal grant funding for the facility, causing a deficit of over \$100,000 per year and almost \$1 million to date. Until now, this loss has been covered by HASLC using funds taken from other housing programs in order to prevent the veterans who did manage to get placed at Valor House from becoming homeless again.”*

The housing authority said local VA staff controlled all tenant screenings and selection decisions, and routinely screened out applicants. “For the applicants that did get housed, the local VA staff were rewarded with bonuses in pay for each veteran quickly relocated out from the property to other types of housing, a policy that incentivized rejection of veteran applicants stigmatized from past drug or alcohol addiction, and other conditions that could make rapid placement in other housing more difficult,” the letter said.

The housing authority said that because of the changes it was making in the guiding documents for Valor House, it is anticipated that the property will be filled close to capacity by February 15, 2019. The VA Salt Lake City Health Care System sent the following statement to Fox 13:

*“VA Salt Lake City Health Care System is committed to housing homeless Veterans seeking personal growth and treatment.*

*“We are currently working very closely with the Housing Authority on a resolution while always keeping our Veterans’ best interest in mind. VA Salt Lake City never turns away or denies services to homeless Veterans. However, we do make certain that Veterans are placed in the appropriate housing situation for their recovery needs.*

*“Federal employees do not receive bonuses for relocating Veterans to non-supportive housing. Futhermore, they have never received bonuses for placement of Veterans, nor is there any encouragement to relocate Veterans.*

*“VASLCHCS staff will continue to be actively involved with Valor House and the care provided for Veterans as we work through this complex issue.”*

[Source: FOX 13 Salt Lake City | Taylor Hartman | January 1, 2019 ++]

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## **Vet Congressional Staffers ▶ Shortage | Needed for Their Perspective In Policy Work**

Fewer than 2 percent of congressional staffers have served in the military, despite years of warning from advocates about the need to include veterans’ perspective in policy work and pledges from lawmakers to help separating service members find work. According to figures released this week by [HillVets](#) — a bipartisan networking group of Capitol Hill staffers with military experience — only about 200 of the 13,000-plus congressional staff have military backgrounds. That equates to about 1.6 percent of the Capitol Hill workforce, not including elected officials. “There’s a fundamental lack of knowledge in Congress in regards to what these benefits mean and what it’s like to serve in the military,” said Justin Brown, founder of the group. “We don’t have that brain trust available.”

The number of veterans elected to Congress this session dropped to under 100, the lowest level since before World War II. But that still equates to about 18 percent of legislators being veterans, far above the staffer levels. In the executive branch, about 31 percent of federal employees are veterans. The Defense Department (48 percent) and Department of Veterans Affairs (33 percent) have among the highest veteran employment rates of any agency, while Health and Human Services (8 percent) and the Environmental Protection Agency (9 percent) are among the lowest. Even those rates far outpace the congressional representation. House and Senate Republicans did slightly better than their Democratic counterparts in hiring staffers with military experience, but still did not break the 2 percent employment mark.

The latest HillVets figure is actually lower than past estimates of veterans employed on Capitol Hill, but Brown said the total number of veterans staffers has basically stayed flat for the last five years. “As it is now, we have staff writing policy for veterans who have never set foot in a VA hospital,” said Brown, a Navy veteran who previously worked on the House Veterans’ Affairs Committee. “We’re not suggesting that Capitol Hill should have upwards of 50 percent like the Defense Department. But the numbers should be higher than this.” While many Hill offices don’t employ even one veteran, Brown said his group has seen success stories with individual offices.

For example, Sen. Mike Rounds (R-SD) has five working on his staff. He said their perspective is invaluable. “As a member of both the Senate Armed Services Committee and the Veterans’ Affairs Committee, being able to consult with them about their experiences and seek their advice helps me to make well-informed decisions,” he said in a statement. “The veterans in my office have served the country in our armed forces, and working in a Senate office is

an extension of that service.” HillVets has been pushing for more veterans hiring for the past five years, especially in congressional policy posts. The group has been sharing a list of more than 40 prospective staffers from its network of veterans along with the latest research findings, in an effort to help fix the problem. “There are veterans out there and they want to serve,” Brown said. “But we’ve never seen a collective effort to really take on the issue. It’s going to take work to fix it.” [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | January 10, 2019 ++]

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## **Government Shutdown Update 23 ► Vets Said To Be Disproportionately Affected**

As the partial government shutdown continues for a third week, veterans groups are sounding the alarm because of what they say is the disproportionate impact on America's veterans and a growing fear that financial uncertainty could lead to self-harm. An estimated one-third of the federal workforce is made up of veterans, according to the Office of Personnel Management, meaning that more than 250,000 veterans are not currently receiving paychecks. "This shutdown has consequences that go beyond loss of pay," the Union Veterans Council said in a statement this week. "Financial instability is one of the main cause of suicides among the veterans' community. These hard-working men and women who sacrificed so much for their country should not have their families held hostage by lawmakers that cannot relate to living paycheck to paycheck."

Edward M. Canales, a U.S. Army veteran himself who deployed to Iraq during Operation Desert Storm, is a local union president with the American Federation of Government Employees and a veteran liaison officer who serves as a resource to veterans working in the U.S. Bureau of Prisons west of the Mississippi River. He is said he is referring calls to the Department of Veterans Affairs hotline out of concern that a veteran will self-harm. He told ABC News that he's received numerous calls from veterans who aren't able to support their families during the shutdown and express "no positive outlook on the future." "If this shutdown does not stop, we are going to have fatalities. We're going to have suicides," he said. He called the shutdown "shameful," saying its "slapping every veteran in the face who has served their country." As a special investigative service technician who worked in the federal prison system for 26 years, Canales is currently not receiving his retirement pay.

Toby Hauck, a six-year Air Force veteran, is an air traffic controller in Aurora, Illinois, who has gone without a paycheck since 31 DEC. He told ABC News that his father and grandfather served in the U.S. military and now his son and daughter-in-law are deploying overseas at the end of the month. Hauck and his wife, a neonatal intensive care unit nurse, will be looking after their two-and-a-half-year-old granddaughter during the ten-month deployment, and the continued lack of pay causes added stress to their already hectic jobs, he said.

"We are hardworking, proud American employees doing a job for the American public that is essential as an air traffic controller," said Hauck, who is also a representative for the National Air Traffic Controllers Association. "It's not acceptable as a veteran, as a federal employee, as an air traffic controller to use my profession and my livelihood as a political football." "[Veterans] are very proud of our heritage and what we've done for the country. And those of us who continue to serve the federal government as a federal employee continue that pride throughout their careers," he added.

"Stress levels are going up. The mental fatigue is going up," said William Attig, the council's executive director. "This is, in my opinion, a recipe for disaster for some of these veterans." The impacted federal agencies employing the largest proportions of veterans include the Homeland Security, Transportation and Justice departments, where veterans make up 25 percent or more of the workforce, according to the latest figures from the Office of Personnel Management. These include border patrol officers, federal prison guards, Transportation Security Administration agents and air traffic controllers, among others. "They believe that this is a continuation of service to their nation," Attig said. "It is shameful that their lives are being played with as pawns from either side."

In a tweet recognizing National Law Enforcement Day 9 JAN, President Trump included a shout-out to federal law enforcement officers, writing, “We love you and will always support you.” After initially saying he would accept responsibility for a shutdown, Trump has since blamed the shutdown on Democrats, who will not approve Trump’s push for \$5.7 billion in funding for a wall at the U.S.-Mexico border — a plan also rejected by some members of his own party. “This barrier is absolutely critical to border security. It’s also what our professionals at the border want and need,” he said in a televised address to the nation Tuesday.

In her response on Capitol Hill Wednesday, Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) highlighted the fact that the shutdown is hurting veterans, whom Trump has vowed to protect and support since the campaign trail. “Our veterans are very adversely affected by this. If we want to support our veterans, we will not hurt their credit rating. And that’s what missing a mortgage, a rental payment, a car payment and the rest does to everyone’s credit rating,” she said.

Build a wall or don’t — Shanley-Dillman doesn’t care. He just wants to see elected officials come to some sort of compromise so that he and his other veteran colleagues can get back to work. “I know some of them, like myself, have issues with PTSD,” he said. “Veterans just do better with a full-time job, a regular job. That’s one of the most impactful things that can help a veteran manage life. The shutdown on top of PTSD — it’s difficult to navigate.” Attig said the Union Veterans Council isn’t pointing fingers or taking a stance on the wall funding, but the organization is strongly advocating for veterans and other federal workers to get paid. [Source: ABC News & MilitaryTimes | Elizabeth McLaughlin & Natalie Gross | January 9, 2019 ++]

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## **GI Bill Update 275 ► Edith Nourse Rogers STEM Scholarship**

Some college degrees in science, technology, engineering and math fields take longer than four years to complete, which is why the new Forever GI Bill authorizes an additional school year of GI Bill funds on a first-come, first-serve basis. Scholarships of up to \$30,000 will be available for eligible GI Bill users starting in August 2019. Only veterans or surviving family members of deceased service members are eligible for this scholarship — not dependents using transferred benefits. “As technology continues to change the landscape of work and education we must keep our policies up to date to provide our veterans the opportunity to obtain necessary skills for the 21st century,” said House Majority Leader Rep. Kevin McCarthy (R-CA), before the law was passed last year. He said veterans are prime candidates for positions in the technology industry because they have been trained to work under pressure and in a team.

In fiscal 2019, the Edith Nourse Rogers STEM Scholarship, named for one of the first women to serve in Congress, will have \$25 million in funds available for students in STEM programs, including those who need a teaching certification after completing a degree in one of these fields. That total allotment will increase to \$100 million by 2023. To qualify, students must have completed at least 60 semester hours toward a degree that requires more than 128 semester hours, or 90 and 192 quarter hours, respectively. For more information on STEM education refer to <http://ht.ly/Vcy230isULc>. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Natalie Gross | December 30, 2018 ++]

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## **Vet Myths ► Five | Ways The Public Views Vets Isn’t Always Accurate.**

Here’s something everyone can agree on: The way the public views veterans isn’t always accurate. Take the assumption that all veterans have served in combat and have post-traumatic stress disorder, for example. Or that people only go into the military because they can’t get into college. Those are just a couple of the “persistent, recycled myths” about veterans that Syracuse University researchers addressed during a session at the Student Veterans of America

National Conference 4 JAN, using both federal data and an 8,600-person survey of the military community to debunk some of the most common misconceptions about the nation's youngest generation of veterans.

On one hand, studies by Gallup, Pew Research and others have shown there is “enormous public support (for the military) but at the same time a tremendous gap in knowledge about who we’re supporting,” said Corri Zoli, director of research at Syracuse’s Institute for National Security and Counterterrorism. “They don’t have a lot of granular detail about who they’re supporting and why.”

**Myth 1: Veterans are a small subset of the population.**

The number that’s often thrown out is 1 percent, but that applies to active duty troops, researchers said. As of 2017, federal data show veterans make up 8 percent of the U.S. population, with post-9/11 veterans the fastest growing group among them.

**Myth 2: Veterans join the military because they could not get into college and are uneducated.**

According to federal data collected in the 2017 Current Population Survey, 35 percent of post-9/11 veterans have a bachelor’s degree or higher, compared to 31 percent of all veterans and 32 percent of the general U.S. population. Rosalinda Maury, a researcher with the Syracuse Institute for Veterans and Military Families, said education benefits tend to be a top recruiting incentive, and the military promotes and prepares service members for post-secondary education. Other research has found this to be true as well. A 2017 RAND Corporation study found education to be one of the most commonly cited reasons new recruits gave for joining the military.

**Myth 3: The military is a homogeneous population.**

“The fact of the matter is the military is the most diverse, ethnically and racially diverse, public institution,” Zoli said. “That’s a fact.” Not everyone is male, white and has the so-called “Ra Ra USA” attitude so often attributed to veterans, she said. While, yes, veterans are predominantly male, and the majority are white, women are the fastest growing group of veterans, Zoli said, and racial minorities make up a higher proportion of the post-9/11 veteran population than older veterans. They also come from a variety of states, family backgrounds and life experiences that add to their diversity.

**Myth 4: Veterans have a limited skill set and pursue careers similar to their military specialization.**

“There’s this common misconception that what you did in the military is what you’re going to do post military life,” Maury said. “What we found is that the majority actually wanted to pursue something completely different.” In the researchers’ survey of more than 8,500 service members, veterans, reservists and military dependents, 55 percent said they wanted to pursue a different career not related to their MOS. Maury said there was a similar split among entrepreneurs, about half of whom started a business related to their military skills.

**Myth 5: Veterans are broken heroes.**

This myth has made its way even to college campuses, where veteran advocates like Sarah Skelton, a psychologist at Texas A&M University Corpus Christi, are working hard to change the narrative. In an interview following her session at the conference, “Destigmatizing Veterans on Campus,” Skelton said when she first arrived at her university a few years ago, the tab for veterans on the school’s website was essentially just a list of PTSD symptoms. And although well-intentioned, that carried with it a lot of assumptions about student veterans. “One of the things that I educate people on is: We are less likely to see somebody (in counseling) for service-connected disability ... than we are for stress related to being a nontraditional student,” she said.

In other words, the normal stressors of being a first-generation college student or balancing a full-time job and family life with school, as many veterans do, can have more of an impact on their education than PTSD, a diagnosis that also has varying degrees of impact, she said. Through staff training, peer-to-peer networks and various other engagements with stakeholders, Skelton said she has worked to reframe the conversation on veterans from a starting point of “They’re broken and disabled” to “This is what they bring to campus.” “They bring the leadership skills that we really want to see for our students,” she said.

In the Syracuse study, researchers found that while more than 3.9 million veterans have a recorded service-connected disability that takes a toll on their personal and professional lives, they're not living as though they're broken. In spite of these challenges, 88 percent of veterans surveyed said joining the military was a good decision, and 79 percent gave credit to the military for their success. Many are civic-minded, pursuing careers in social work, law enforcement and other fields in which they can continue to serve others. They support existing veteran service organizations and create new ones, including Student Veterans of America, which will celebrate its 11th year later this month. "All across the board you're seeing it, in all of their decisions," Zoli said. "This idea that folks want to contribute to public life and are engaged and participating in a public way debunks this idea of the broken hero."

[Source: MilitaryTimes | Natalie Gross | January 4, 2019 ++]

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## Space Available Flight Eligibility Update 01 ► 100% Disabled Vets Now Category 6

Recent legislation makes it possible for many disabled veterans to fly Space-A on military aircraft. The 2019 National Defense Authorization Act allows veterans with a permanent and total service-connected Department of Veterans Affairs disability rating to travel space available on military aircraft. Veterans will be assigned a travel priority of Category 6, the lowest priority available, along with retirees and their dependents. Dependents of disabled veterans are not eligible for Space-A travel. Authorized disabled veterans can travel in the continental United States (CONUS) or directly between CONUS and Alaska, Hawaii, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, Guam and American Samoa. Disabled veterans must have a DD Form 2765, Defense Department ID Card (Tan), in order to fly Space-A.

Space available flights, better known as Space-A or military hops, allow eligible passengers to fill unused seats on DoD-owned or -controlled aircraft. Space-A passengers can fly only after all the space-required passengers and cargo have been accommodated. Space-A passengers are then loaded in priority groups, with emergency leave being the top priority and retirees and disabled veterans rating the lowest priority. For a full breakdown of all the categories refer to <https://www.military.com/travel/space-available-flight-eligibility.html>. Space-A passengers can take up to two pieces of luggage at 70 pounds each; pets are not allowed.



<https://www.amc.af.mil/Home/AMC-Travel-Site> (left) and aboard a C-17 at Hickam Air Force Base, Hawaii, bound for Andersen AFB, Guam (right)

Not all Space-A flights originate from military bases. Commercial airports such as Baltimore-Washington Marshall International and Seattle-Tacoma International also offer Space-A flights. Long gone are the days of having to show up in person at the passenger terminal to register for a flight. Now, Air Mobility Command, which runs the Space-A program, lets you register for flights via email, and all Space-A terminals have Facebook pages where you can see what flights are coming up and how many seats are available. Check out AMC's page for details on how to find your local Space-A terminal and instructions on how to register for a flight at <https://www.amc.af.mil/Home/AMC-Travel-Site>. [Source: Military.com | Jim Absher | January 7, 2019 ++]

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## **Vet Employment Update 10 ► Unemployment Rate Rises to 3.6% for DEC 2018**

The unemployment rate for post-9/11 veterans may have gone up slightly in December, but 2018 is still the best year on record, according to the latest government data released Friday. Last month, 3.6 percent of post-9/11 veterans and 3.2 percent of all veterans were unemployed — up slightly from 3.4 and 3.1 percent, respectively, in November. Experts warn against putting too much stock in the monthly figures and recommend instead tracking larger trends. Bureau of Labor Statistics figures show an annual average unemployment rate of 3.8 percent for the youngest generation of veterans, on par with nonveterans. For veterans overall, the 2018 rate also dropped to 3.5 percent from 3.7 the previous year. The U.S. unemployment rate rose to 3.9 percent in December while the nation added about 312,000 jobs, primarily in the health care, food services and drinking places, construction, manufacturing and retail trade fields. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Natalie Gross | January 4, 2019 ++]

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## **Vet Groups Update 03 ► Effectiveness and Impact on the Younger Vet Community**

For generations, Veterans of Foreign Wars and American Legion posts have been as integral to American political culture as pancake breakfasts, town squares and state fairs. In advocating for veterans — among the country’s most revered and coveted voters — the groups have wielded unquestioned power on Capitol Hill and inside the White House. Now, nearly a generation after the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks, the oldest and largest veterans’ service organizations — known colloquially as “the Big Six” — are seeing their influence diluted, as newer, smaller organizations focused on post-9/11 veterans compete for money, political influence and relevance.

The newer organizations reflect cultural shifts in a smaller community of younger and increasingly diverse veterans who are replacing the older, predominantly male veterans — many of them having served because of a draft for now long-ago wars. The scores of upstarts include Student Veterans of America, which advocates on education and job issues; Team Red, White and Blue, which promotes service and “camaraderie” events; and Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, which focuses on the specific health and employment challenges those who served in those two wars face.

Leaner and more financially efficient than their predecessors, these newer veterans’ organizations focus on issues such as education and job training rather than on brick-and-mortar meeting spaces for veterans to gather or on resources spent lobbying in Washington. In addition, many officials of the newer organizations say, their goals are to integrate veterans back into civilian communities where they feel misunderstood and have lost ties, while helping civilians who have had little contact with veterans — active-duty troops make up less than 1 percent of the United States population — understand their experiences.

As older veterans die, so, too, do the V.F.W. halls, scores of which have shuttered in recent years. While accurate membership numbers are hard to ascertain because many veterans pay dues to several organizations, a shrinking veteran population over all has caused memberships to fall and some groups to restructure. “The young vets are saying we need to do things differently with a different emphasis,” said Chuck Hagel, a former defense secretary and Vietnam veteran who is associated with a small organization, [HillVets](#), that helps veterans find staff jobs on Capitol Hill. “The Vietnam vet is a different kind of vet than Afghan or Iraq war vets; they were draft vets and they wanted in and out. Most veterans today are married with families, and that means new demands, new interests and new pressures.”

At times, the politically progressive leaders of some of the organizations — many from the Vietnam era — take positions that appear out of step with more socially conservative members from previous wars. This has irritated Robert L. Wilkie, the Veterans Affairs secretary, who views these as unwelcome partisan positions, said several agency and veterans’ group officials. Last April, Mr. Wilkie hosted a breakfast for veterans’ service organizations that

included representatives not just of the traditional Big Six, but also the Independence Fund and Concerned Veterans for America, which is financed by Charles G. and David H. Koch, who have backed conservative causes. The Koch-supported group was instrumental in ousting the last head of the department. It has also been pushing for more health care to take place outside the V.A. system, with the first step beginning soon under a sweeping new law. Their voices were welcomed by House Republicans as they passed the measure this year.

At a hearing last month on Capitol Hill, some Democrats suggested that Mr. Wilkie was ignoring the opinions of traditional organizations on this law. “A lot of V.S.O.s have talked to me about the communication within the V.A.,” said Senator Jon Tester of Montana, the ranking Democrat on the Senate veterans’ committee. “It’s not where it needs to be.” Mr. Wilkie made his position clear. “Half of our veterans are now under the age of 65,” he said, “which means they have different cares, they have different interests. What I have done in my short time is actually open the aperture to the table at the Department of Veterans Affairs to bring in veterans who are not traditionally part of the system.”

The shifts, while perhaps inevitable, leave some worrying that the hard work of pressing for the complicated and expensive health care needs, and other issues, will lack a generation of new leaders. “These smaller groups don’t do policy advocacy while the Big Six have been carrying all the water,” said Kristofer Goldsmith, an assistant director for policy and government affairs at the Vietnam Veterans of America. “The average vet has no idea what these groups are doing on their behalf. They have a free T-shirt from Red, White and Blue but don’t realize my 72-year-old boss with emphysema walks around Capitol Hill advocating for them on the G.I. Bill.”

The first large veterans’ service organizations, the Grand Army of the Republic and the United Confederate Veterans, arose after the Civil War, with new ones forming after each conflict to serve veterans lacking services. While there are thousands of nonprofit veterans’ organizations registered with the Internal Revenue Service, the majority of power has been consolidated among the Big Six: Disabled American Veterans; Veterans of Foreign Wars; American Legion; Paralyzed Veterans of America; Amvets; and Vietnam Veterans of America, which was developed after Vietnam veterans were turned away from other organizations.

According to a study this year by the Center for a New American Security, a nonpartisan policy research center in Washington, nonprofits that serve veterans generate about \$3.6 billion in annual revenue. While the older organizations control roughly 68 percent of total income in this market, the recent growth has been dominated by large post-9/11 organizations, which have grown in excess of 15 percent per year, compared with the 2 percent income growth of the Big Six. The study also found that post-9/11 organizations save their money at a rate almost 2.5 times greater than pre-9/11 organizations.

A relatively new entry, the [Wounded Warrior Project](#), has set a new model for advocacy organizations, raising money from outside the veterans’ community and funding research and services rather than infrastructure. The group is widely viewed as having finally recovered from a major [spending scandal](#) in 2016. “They figured out how to raise money from outside the vets community better than anyone else,” said Emma Moore, one of the authors of the Center for a New American Security report. “The Big Six are struggling with overhead. As the veteran population shrinks, how they end up dealing with the overhead of maintaining buildings and their structures is yet to be determined.” Through grants, the Wounded Warriors Project also marries legacy Big Six organizations with newcomers to build coalitions around issues like toxic exposure, which brings post-9/11 veterans into advocacy, and legacy groups into the future.

“Congress still listens to them,” said Phillip Carter, a senior policy researcher at the RAND Corporation who specializes in military and veterans’ issues, describing the continuing clout of the Big Six. “Members and staff understand the political throw weight of veterans’ groups based on their large membership and the degree to which they command public respect.” But when it comes to forming laws, some groups are clearly on the rise, like Student Veterans of America, which played a significant role in drafting a new G.I. Bill. These groups, lacking the large governance structures of the old veterans’ service organizations, tend to be faster on their advocacy feet.

Outside Washington, the contrasts between the groups is stark. Many of the old V.F.W. halls remain outposts of fellowship over beer, while younger veterans prefer community centers with healthier and more practical assets, like Wi-Fi, child care and yoga classes. In many cases, social media has replaced physical spaces as a place where veterans congregate. Many of the new groups steer away from lobbying on Capitol Hill, and have turned instead to community services, running races and other activities meant not to connect veterans to one another as much as to the rest of the communities they have rejoined.

“The epidemic of alienation and loneliness in society writ large is magnified in the vets community,” said Bana Miller, a spokeswoman for [Team Red, White and Blue](#), which engages veterans in community service and physical activities. “Many post-9/11 vets served five, 10, 15 years, and they are looking for connection and community and support,” she said. “We are key to getting people out into their communities and taking what they learned from their service, doing things together shoulder to shoulder to build deep bonds with other people. “Our organization is not necessarily in the advocacy space,” she added. “We work toward mental health solutions via physical and social activity.”

Traditional veterans’ organizations say this new focus does not replace theirs. “We get bills passed,” said Kayda Keleher, the associate director of national legislative service for the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States. “We provide financial assistance to cover bills for veterans who were attending a college that shut down. We provide scholarships and fellowship opportunities, our National Home for Children, and so much more. Those are our strengths and our legacy that will keep us around.”

The greatest demonstration of the power across the spectrum from old and new groups, as well as the Koch-backed organization that has the Trump administration’s collective ear, will be on display next year as Congress carefully examines major changes to health care services for veterans stemming from a large bill passed last year. “Veteran organizations can be like Sears, using the same business model with diminishing returns,” Mr. Carter said. “Or, they can reinvent themselves and their business models to remain viable, and focus on issues that appeal to all generations to remain relevant.” [Source: New York Times | Jennifer Steinhauer | January 4, 2019 ++]

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## **Afghan Welcome Home Bonus ► OTH Dischargees Win Lawsuit**

A Massachusetts judge sided with three Afghanistan war veterans who filed a lawsuit against the state after being denied “Welcome Home” bonuses because of their other-than-honorable military discharges. In a decision handed down Wednesday, Associate Justice Michael Ricciuti ordered the Massachusetts Veterans’ Bonus Appeal Board to reconsider rejecting the veterans. Lawyers in the case estimate that beyond their three clients, the decision means about 4,000 Massachusetts veterans will be eligible now for the bonuses. “Veterans with bad paper discharges are among the most at-risk veterans and yet are often told that they are ineligible for traditional veteran services and programs,” said Laurel Fresquez, an attorney who represented the three veterans. “Thanks to this decision and these three veterans, thousands of Massachusetts veterans will finally have a right to some recognition for their honorable service to our country.”

The Massachusetts legislature created the Welcome Home Bonus in 2005 for post-9/11 servicemembers. Under the program, people who deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan — and lived in Massachusetts for a period of at least six months before enlisting — are eligible to apply for a one-time, tax-free \$1,000 bonus. The program is run by the state treasury. Jeffrey Machado, Washington Santos and Herik Espinosa — three Army veterans named in the lawsuit — each completed enlistments and re-joined multiple times. They applied for the Welcome Home Bonus and were denied by the treasury and then the Veterans’ Bonus Appeal Board, which argued their other-than-honorable discharges from their final enlistments made them ineligible.

Machado, Santos and Espinosa, represented by student attorneys at Harvard Law School's Veterans Legal Clinic, filed a lawsuit in 2017 in Massachusetts Superior Court. In the complaint, they argued the board should take into consideration their prior enlistments, which they completed honorably. The judge agreed, calling the state's denial "erroneous as a matter of law, arbitrary and capricious." He said the board's decision to deny the benefit disincentivized servicemembers from enlisting multiple times. "The Bonus Law was designed to reward service to the country," Ricciuti's order reads. "The board's reading would penalize such service for military members who voluntarily remain in combat, a result at odds with the legislature's intent."

In a statement 30 DEC, Machado, the lead plaintiff, said the decision meant more than the \$1,000 – it was a symbolic win for veterans with other-than-honorable discharges. Those discharges, known as "bad paper," can prevent veterans from receiving federal assistance, such as Department of Veterans Affairs health care, disability payments, education and housing. Some lawmakers and veteran advocates have long argued servicemembers with bad paper were, in many cases, unjustly released from the military because of mental health issues. The Government Accountability Office released findings in 2017 that the Defense Department separated approximately 92,000 servicemembers for misconduct from 2011 through 2015, and 57,000 of them were diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder, traumatic brain injury or other conditions that can change servicemembers' moods and behaviors and lead to disciplinary problems.

Machado deployed to Afghanistan during Operation Enduring Freedom in 2012-13 and immediately re-enlisted. According to the complaint, Machado's service ended in 2014 with an other-than-honorable discharge that was "given out after the wounds of war and the stress of service became too great." Machado was later diagnosed with PTSD and applied for the Welcome Home Bonus during a particularly tough time, when facing the possibility of homelessness, his lawyers said. "What really matters to me is that other Massachusetts veterans will be recognized for their honorable service to our country," Machado said in a statement. "It's less about the bonus itself – it's about what it represents."

Veterans who believe they're now eligible for the bonus can apply for it through the state government website <https://www.mass.gov/global-war-on-terrorism-welcome-home-bonus-post-911-servicemembers>. Dana Montalto, a clinical instructor at the Veterans Legal Clinic, said she hoped the state would reach out to veterans who might be eligible. "For now, the burden is on these veterans to find out about this decision and apply," Montalto said in a statement.

The Massachusetts decision follows other recent wins for veterans with other-than-honorable discharges. Congress approved a measure in March that requires the VA to provide veterans with mental health screenings and care, even if they received bad paper. Veterans who served in combat zones or areas of hostilities, worked as drone operators in combat zones or experienced sexual abuse or assault are eligible. In addition, Connecticut opened its state VA resources in October to veterans who can show their other-than-honorable discharges are linked to PTSD, traumatic brain injury or sexual trauma. It's estimated 800 veterans could benefit from the change. [Source: Stars & Stripes | Nikki Wentling | December 31, 2018 ++]

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## **Vet Fraud & Abuse** ► **Reported 01 thru 15 JAN 2019**

**TREA Memorial Foundation** -- A nonprofit organization that sought and collected donations -- supposedly for paid phone cards for veterans and their families -- was ordered by a Minnesota court 27 DEC to shut down after the state Attorney General's Office said the charity fraudulently collected hundreds of thousands of dollars. Along with closing operations, Colorado-based TREA (The Retired Enlisted Association) Memorial Foundation must come up with more than \$400,000 that will be distributed to legitimate veterans-support groups in the state, according to the Minnesota Attorney General's Office, which prevailed in Ramsey County District Court. The foundation "did not purchase a single phone card to veterans or their families for years -- all while it collected hundreds of thousands in contributions from Minnesotans," read a statement from the office of Attorney General Lori Swanson.

TREA director of operations Debbie Osborne said 27 DEC the foundation actually did buy thousands of phone cards and distributed them to veterans and families "when applications were received." However, the lack of applications left many cards wanting for a recipient. That inventory was donated to the Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Aurora, Colo., for distribution to veterans and their families, Osborne said. In addition, Osborne continued, "advancements in cellphone and internet technology caused the phone card program to become obsolete before the foundation was able to hand out the inventory of cards." Swanson's spokesman, Ben Wogsland, said TREA has 60 days to pay out the money to veterans-related charities, which have yet to be identified, and 90 days to close shop, Wogsland said.

While TREA solicited money around the country and has many chapters in every U.S. time zone, Minnesota is the first state to win such a court order against TREA, Wogsland said. Between 2012 and 2017, the foundation raised at least \$14 million nationwide and more than \$345,000 of that total from Minnesotans through professional fundraiser Jeremy Squire and Associates, according to Swanson's office. **Most of the money, Wogsland said, went to pay the fundraiser.** About half of the mailed solicitations sent in Minnesota using the name "The Armed Forces Aid Campaign" promised the donations would help provide a phone card to allow a soldier or veteran to call home.

One mailing pledged the foundation would "use your gift to put a live, activated VA Hospital Phone Card in the hands of one of America's Heroes." No cards were handed out after 2014, and TREA's total spending on phone cards from that year through 2017 represented less than 0.9 percent of the nearly \$9 million it collected in donations. "Minnesota is home to more than 330,000 veterans and is one of the most generous states in the country," Swanson said. Charities that take advantage of the desire to give back to service members, veterans, and their families using deception have no place in Minnesota."

The foundation chose to settle with the state of Minnesota in order to use its remaining resources "to fulfill its mission of helping veterans and their families, rather than paying legal fees or fines and penalties," Osborne said. The foundation's dissolution also means an end to several of its other programs that Osborne said have provided millions of dollars in aid and support for thousands of veterans and military families. "It's a shame that all of these programs will now have to come to an end," she said. [Source: Star Tribune | Paul Walsh | December 29, 2018 ++]

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## **Cold War Vets** ► **Pete Schiavo | The Groin Crusher**

Nobody ever warns the patients at Pennsylvania Hospital about Pete Schiavo, "The Groin Crusher." The first time most people meet Schiavo, they've just come out of a coronary procedure and he's explaining that after the catheters are pulled out of their femoral artery, he's going to apply pressure to their groin for 20 to 40 minutes to aid in clotting. Awkward! Or it would be, if it was anyone else but Schiavo, a gregarious, emotional, wisecracking guy who is all South Philly, even if he lives over the bridge in Jersey now. Schiavo, 52, was so overwhelmed to learn that reader Sandy Kuritzky, whose husband's groin he crushed earlier this year, nominated him for this series that he wept tears of joy several times during his interview.

"I know he doesn't remember me or my husband because he has his hands on so many groins," Kuritzky said. "But Pete's attitude with his patients and their caregivers is so upbeat and friendly and caring and funny that it makes a stressful time less stressful and difficult." Patients and their families don't forget the way Schiavo touches them — physically and emotionally. He's won awards, had money donated in his name, and gets stopped all the time by former patients who want to buy him drinks or dinner. "I'm holding someone's groin for 20 minutes, they tend to remember me and nobody else," Schiavo said. "I tell them: 'I can promise you two things when I'm done: You'll never forget my name or my face.' And they never do."

Patients such as Patricia Walters, 73, of South Philly, are completely taken with Schiavo and his sense of humor. "What you're doing is really crazy!" Walters said to Schiavo. "You put your whole heart and soul and your whole

body into this. You have a gift and talent that's unique." Schiavo, who held Walters' hand throughout his visit, gave her a big hug. "I couldn't have been more privileged to hold your groin," he said. Schiavo estimates he has crushed "well over 10,000 groins, without even a sweat" during his 15 years at Pennsylvania Hospital. He's learned that a three-finger method works best because if you use your whole hand "you'll fatigue out in minutes," he said. At 5 feet, 2 inches, Schiavo sometimes needs a step stool to stand above patients as he applies pressure for 20 to 40 minutes.

But Schiavo is no stranger to pressure. He grew up at "Nint and Jackson" in South Philly and graduated from West Catholic High before joining the Navy. He spent six years in the service, during which he ran computers on anti-submarine aircraft, saw conflict in Libya, and was put in gator-infested swamps for survival training. "My training taught me situational awareness and attention to detail, which helps me in this job today," Schiavo said. "If I'm not attentive to detail here, somebody is going to die." After the Navy, Schiavo became a welder at a General Electric plant in Southwest Philly. When four of his colleagues died of heart attacks at the plant in a short period of time, GE offered to put employees through EMT and paramedic school so they might be able to aid their colleagues in the future. Schiavo raised his hand.

After training, he began moonlighting as a critical-care technician and volunteered with his local ambulance company. After the GE plant closed, Schiavo was hired at Pennsylvania Hospital — the nation's first hospital — where he worked as a critical-care tech for three years before his current position opened up. Within days, he knew it was the perfect job for him. "This fit me like a glove, this was like the missing piece of the puzzle for me," he said. Schiavo's wife of 29 years is a nurse at Pennsylvania Hospital and the couple have two adult daughters. On his down time, Schiavo likes to make his own wine, cook, and fish "downshore." "It takes too much energy to be miserable, it's just easier to be happy," Schiavo said, of his indomitably positive spirit. "I'm the party guy. I'm that guy. I'm all about la dolce vita — the sweet life. I love eating, drinking, and partying, when I'm not working, of course." [Source: The Philadelphia Inquirer | Stephanie Farr | January 13, 2018 ++]

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## WWII Vets 181 ► Duane Sherman | Birthday Greetings

When Sue Morse requested on Facebook that friends send her father well-wishes for his 30 DEC birthday, she expected maybe 160 cards. At 96, World War II veteran and Purple Heart medal recipient Duane Sherman has survived most of his friends. As of 9 JAN, Sherman received more than 50,000 letters at his home in Fullerton, California, the Orange County Register reported 11 JAN. Birthday cards and notes thanking Sherman for his service have come from all 50 U.S. states and 10 countries. His wife of 57 years, Lois, died in 2011. His daughter said she wanted her dad to feel special on his birthday.



Notes from elementary school students and prison inmates are among the stacks. The secretary of the Navy sent one. So did the Pittsburgh Steelers. "I was amazed, shocked and appreciative," Sherman told the newspaper. "All the good comments people made ... it just brightened my day." Postal bins packed with envelopes of every color are stacked high on two sofas and the floor of Sherman's home — and that's only a few thousand of them. Thousands

more are stored at a friend's house and there are bins still to be picked up at the post office, Morse said. Since her father is legally blind, Morse has been reading the cards and letters out loud to her dad.

The commander of the USS Cowpens, a guided missile cruiser stationed in San Diego, sent a letter and then visited with several officers to take Sherman to lunch. A group of officers from the U.S. Navy Sonar School in San Diego also paid a visit — listening intently as Sherman told stories about his WW II experience. The mail also brought gifts of mementos such as an American flag that flew over Pearl Harbor, a scale model of a battleship and a plaque carved out of wood from the USS Constitution. "It was very gratifying," Sherman said. "It was hard to believe." Sherman enlisted in the Navy shortly after Pearl Harbor was attacked on Dec. 7, 1941. He was stationed aboard the USS Lamson, a destroyer that saw several battles in the Pacific. So far, Morse has read about 1,700 letters. She will enlist the help of several friends for the rest and wants to respond to most of the letters. [Source: The Associated Press | January 13, 2018 ++]

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### **In Memoriam 2018** ▶ **Remembering Military Figures We Lost**

At the close of 2018, it's time to remember some of the notable service members we lost through the year. Military Times remembers some of those who served and made their mark on the military and their country. Refer to the attachment to this Bulletin titled, "**In Memoriam 2018: Military figures we lost**" for those selected who have passed. [Source: Military Times | Kathleen Curthoys | December 28, 2018 ++]

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### **Obit: Richard Overton** ▶ **27 DEC 2018 | Oldest WWII Vet**

Richard Overton, the nation's oldest World War II veteran, died the evening of 27 DEC, a family member said. He was 112. President Barack Obama met Overton in 2013 for a Veterans Day ceremony and led a standing ovation for him at Arlington National Cemetery. Overton later said it was one of the proudest moments of his life. "With his quick wit and kind spirit he touched the lives of so many, and I am deeply honored to have known him," Texas Gov. Greg Abbott said in a statement on Thursday. "Richard Overton made us proud to be Texans and proud to be Americans." On Twitter, the U.S. Army hailed Overton as a "hero to us all."



Born May 11, 1906, near Austin, Overton volunteered to join the Army in his 30s and served from 1940 to 1945. The all-black 1887th Engineer Aviation Battalion he fought in "island hopped" throughout the South Pacific, taking him to Guam, Palau and Iwo Jima. "You heard in Iwo Jima the water turned to blood? Well, it did," he told KVUE-TV in 2013. "When you're talking about some of the stuff we had to go through, I never want to go through that again." Overton left the Army in October 1945 as a technician fifth grade. That year, he built a house in East Austin that he called home for the rest of his life. On his birthday this year the city renamed the street Overton lived on in his honor.

Overton worked at local furniture stores and then as a courier for the Texas Department of the Treasury at the Texas State Capitol. After retiring, he filled his time with friends and family and spent afternoons on his porch. "He considers himself our neighborhood watchdog, and he knows everything that's going on," neighbor Helen Elliott told the Austin American-Statesman in 2016. "I don't think the neighborhood would be what it is without him. He's our legend, our icon." His secrets to longevity? Overton told KVUE that smoking a cigar every day, having an occasional whiskey and surrounding himself with good friends helped him stay in good health.

Before being diagnosed with another bout of pneumonia this month, KVUE reported, he also battled the infection in November 2015. A GoFundMe campaign raised more than \$450,000 to help pay for in-home care so he would not have to move to a nursing home. He died at a rehab facility in Austin, said Shirley Overton, whose husband was Overton's cousin and longtime caretaker. "They had done all they could," she said. Overton was also believed to be the oldest living man in the U.S. To watch a two minute KVEU birthday video when he turned 111, go to [https://videos.usatoday.net/Brightcove2/29906170001/201705/3185/29906170001\\_5431884275001\\_5431880508001.mp4](https://videos.usatoday.net/Brightcove2/29906170001/201705/3185/29906170001_5431884275001_5431880508001.mp4). [Source: USA TODAY | Kristin Lam | December 27, 2018 ++]

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## Obit: John Lyle ► 05 JAN 2019 | WWII Tuskegee Airman

World War II fighter pilot John Lyle, a Tuskegee Airman, has died at the age of 98. Lyle died 5 JAN at his home on Chicago's South Side, his wife, Eunice, said Monday. She added that Lyle had been battling prostate cancer. The members of the nation's first black fighter squadron won acclaim for their aerial prowess and bravery, despite a military that imposed segregation on its African-American recruits while respecting the rights of German prisoners. Lyle, who named his plane "Natalie" after his first wife, was credited with shooting down a German Messerschmitt. "We flew 500 feet above the bombers to keep enemy fighters from hitting our guys," he recalled in a 2012 interview with Jet magazine. "I loved flying, being up in the clouds, the scenery. I flew 26 combat missions, from southern Italy to Austria and southern Germany, over the Austrian Alps."



Lyle told Jet he was fired upon several times. "I watched bombers being torn apart, but they were performing the mission they signed up to do," Lyle said. "And when I had to shoot the guy who was shooting at the planes I was protecting, I did not feel bad because that was my assignment." "He had no fear," Eunice Lyle told the Chicago Sun-Times. "None at all." In 2007, President George W. Bush and Congress bestowed the Congressional Gold Medal on Lyle and other members of the squadron. After the war, Lyle served as a police officer with the Chicago Park District and founded a tree-trimming company. He later took up sailing. "He was an amazing sailor," said Janet Hansen of the Jackson Park Yacht Club. "He could sail his boat in any weather." In addition to his wife, Lyle is survived by three step-children. [Source: The Associated Press | January 7, 2019 ++]

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## Obit: Leo Dulacki ► 04 JAN 2019 | Served in 3 Wars

Omaha native Leo Dulacki had quite a year in 1942. And quite a life ever since. Assigned to the carrier USS Hornet, the young Marine lieutenant was aboard when James Doolittle's raiders took off for their impossible attack on the Japanese mainland on April 18, 1942. A few weeks later, he lived through the pivotal Battle of Midway, which turned the naval war in the Pacific in favor of the United States. And he survived the sinking of the Hornet near Guadalcanal that fall. Dulacki served in three wars, including a combat tour during the Korean War and two more during the Vietnam War. He was a lieutenant general and deputy chief of staff for manpower for the Marines when he retired in 1974.



Leo Dulacki served in the Marine Corps from 1941 to 1974. “We didn’t realize until we got older where he had been, what he had done,” said Paul Magiera, 63, of Omaha, Dulacki’s nephew. “People like that, there are not many of them left.” Now there is one fewer. Dulacki died 4 JAN at his retirement home in Sun City West, Arizona, near Phoenix. He was 100 years old.

Dulacki was the eighth of 10 children of Polish immigrant parents who moved to South Omaha. He graduated from South High in 1936. He was named to the high school’s hall of fame in 2013. A combination of patriotism and financial need prompted him to seek an ROTC scholarship at Creighton, where he became president of the Polish Club and served on the Students Union board of governors. He graduated in 1941. Dulacki completed officer’s training shortly before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor and was assigned to the Hornet, which was rushed from its base in Norfolk, Virginia, to the Pacific. The ship and its crew had an eventful year before it was sunk on Oct. 26, 1942. The crew of the destroyer USS Mustin rescued him and other Hornet crew members from the sea. Dulacki volunteered his Marines to relieve the Mustin’s anti-aircraft gunners. He later commanded the Marine detachment aboard the aircraft carrier USS Belleau Wood through a series of campaigns in 1943 and 1944, until the ship was severely damaged in a kamikaze attack in October 1944.

Dulacki established, and then commanded, the Marine Recruiters School at Parris Island, South Carolina, until 1948. He then studied Russian at the Army Language School and was assigned as an attaché in Helsinki. He commanded a Marine battalion during the Korean War and participated in the truce negotiations at Panmunjom as a translator. A career intelligence officer, Dulacki served as a Naval attaché in Moscow from 1958 to 1961, an eventful period that included the Soviet downing of the U-2 spy plane piloted by Francis Gary Powers. In Vietnam, he served in senior command positions in 1965-66 and 1969-70. As a major general, Dulacki commanded the 4th Marine Division at Camp Pendleton in California. During that tour, he was honored at a dinner at Creighton in May 1971.

By the time he retired in January 1974, Dulacki had earned a long list of awards, headlined by a Distinguished Service Medal with a gold star and a Legion of Merit with a Combat “V” with three gold stars. Years later, he donated

those medals to Creighton, along with his Marine Corps officer's sword. They are on display, along with his portrait, in the ROTC building. Dulacki retired in Carlsbad, California, and later moved to Sun City West. He never married because, he told relatives, he didn't want to subject his wife to the rigors of Marine Corps life. But he had a close-knit group of friends, and he made memorable visits to his two dozen nieces and nephews across the country. "He treated all of us like we were the most special," said his niece Karen Magiera, 59, of Omaha.

In retirement, Dulacki kept busy with genealogy and golf. He visited almost 40 countries, keeping extensive journals of his travels. "He played golf with presidents," including Nixon and Ford, Karen Magiera said. He lived independently until last summer. Many of his relatives traveled to Arizona late last month for a party in honor of his 100th birthday, which was 29 DEC. "We said, 'You just look great!'" Karen Magiera said. "It was his day, and he shone." Two days after his birthday, he suffered a fall while getting dressed for bed. His condition slipped quickly after that, and he died four days later. Dulacki will be buried later this year at Arlington National Cemetery.

[Source: Omaha World-Herald | Steve Liewer | January 8, 2019 ++]

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## **Vet Hiring Fairs ► Scheduled As of 16 JAN 2018**

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. refer to the Hiring Our Heroes website <http://www.hiringourheroes.org/hiringourheroes/events>. Listings of upcoming Vet Job Fairs nationwide providing location, times, events, and registration info if required can be found at the following websites. You will need to review each site below to locate Job Fairs in your location:

- <https://events.recruitmilitary.com>
- <https://www.uschamberfoundation.org/events/hiringfairs>
- <https://www.legion.org/careers/jobfairs>

[Source: Recruit Military, USCC, and American Legion | January 15, 2018 ++]

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## **Military Retirees & Veterans Events Schedule ► As of 16 JAN 2018**

The Military Retirees & Veterans Events Schedule is intended to serve as a one-stop resource for retirees and veterans seeking information about events such as retirement appreciation days (RAD), stand downs, veterans town hall meetings, resource fairs, free legal advice, mobile outreach services, airshows, and other beneficial community events. The events included on the schedule are obtained from military, VA, veterans service organizations and other reliable retiree/veterans related websites and resources.

The current Military Retirees & Veterans Events Schedule is available in the following three formats. After connecting to the website, click on the appropriate state, territory or country to check for events scheduled for your area.

- 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).

Please note that events listed on the Military Retirees & Veterans Events Schedule may be cancelled or rescheduled. Before traveling long distances to attend an event, you should contact the applicable RAO, RSO, event sponsor, etc., to ensure the event will, in fact, be held on the date\time indicated. Also, attendance at some events may require military ID, VA enrollment or DD214.

Please report broken links, comments, corrections, suggestions, new RADs and\or other military retiree\vetterans related events to the Events Schedule Manager, [Milton.Bell126@gmail.com](mailto:Milton.Bell126@gmail.com)

[Source: Retiree\Veterans Events Schedule Manager | Milton Bell | January 16, 2018 ++]

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## Veteran State Benefits ► Iowa 2019

The state of Iowa provides several benefits to veterans as indicated below. To obtain information on these refer to the attachment to this Bulletin titled, “**Vet State Benefits – IA** 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/iowa-state-veterans-benefits.html> and <https://va.iowa.gov>.

- Housing
- Financial Assistance
- Education
- Recreational
- Other State Veteran Benefits

[Source: <http://www.military.com/benefits/veteran-state-benefits> | January 2019 ++]

### \* 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.

## Government Shutdown USCG Impact Update 04 ► S.21 | Pay Our Coast Guard Act

After spending the Christmas Holiday, worrying there would be no pay for the US Coast Guard, the White House and Department of Homeland Security was able to find a way to make the final paycheck payment for 2018. With the current political climate looking the way it is, NCOA was pleased to see on 3 JAN that Senators Thune, Wicker, Cantwell, Sullivan, Blumenthal, Jones, Collins and Schatz, have come together in bipartisan fashion to introduce S. 21 the “**Pay Our Coast Guard Act**,” in the 116th Congress.

NCOA needs your help in contacting your members of the Senate and asking them to Co-Sponsor this legislation, encourage the Senate leadership to bring it to the floor for a vote and to promise to vote for this legislation, to ensure our members of the Coast Guard do not go without pay. This is a huge victory for all the associations who rallied behind the Coast Guard during this time, but it would not have been possible without the help of our Members and Supporters. Readers are encouraged to go to [https://www.votervoice.net/BroadcastLinks/jxJ40dex0zeT-5Z8e\\_COlg](https://www.votervoice.net/BroadcastLinks/jxJ40dex0zeT-5Z8e_COlg) and send the preformatted editable message to their Senators and the President.

[Source: NCOA DC | January 5, 2019 ++]

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## **VA Blue Water Claims Update 60 ► H.R.203 | Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act of 2019**

On 3, JAN Congressman David Roe introduced Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act of 2019 which has been passed to the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs. The bill would ensure that Vietnam Veterans receive the benefits they deserve. It mirrors the language of the Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act of 2018, which passed the House 382 - 0 during the 115th Congress. One of Rep. Roe's final acts as Chairman in 2018 was holding a bipartisan press conference to urge the Senate to pass the 2018 bill H.R. 299. Needless to say, despite the endless efforts of Senate Veterans Affairs' Committee Chairman Isakson and Ranking Member Tester, the Senate never passed the legislation. Thus he introduced this bill and is encouraging his colleagues in the House to once again swiftly pass this bipartisan piece of legislation. "Currently, Blue Water Navy Vietnam veterans are unable to receive the presumption of exposure to Agent Orange because VA's presumption policy extends only to those who served on land in Vietnam or in Vietnam's inland waterways. This legislation would extend the presumption of exposure of Agent Orange to our Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans.

[Source: Phil Roes Press Release | January 3, 2019 ++]

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## **Medicare Dental Coverage ► S.22 | Medicare Dental Benefit Act of 2019**

Currently there is no Medicare dental coverage for seniors. Sen. Benjamin L. Cardin (D-MD) on 3 JAN introduced the Medicare Dental Benefit Act of 2019 to amend title XVIII of the Social Security Act to provide for coverage of dental services under the Medicare program. This a bill, if enacted, would allow older adults and persons with disabilities to access their oral healthcare as they do their medical care — through Medicare. A provision under Medicare Part B signifies that all beneficiaries would receive coverage, including those enrolled in Medicare Advantage plans. The bill is more than adding dental and oral health services to Medicare Part B; it's about ensuring people can take part in their day to day activities like eating nutritious foods without pain, playing with their grandchildren without embarrassment and feeling confident about kissing their significant others!" says Beth Truett, President & CEO of Oral Health America.

If passed Medicare would pay zero percent for the first year beginning at least 6 months after the date of the bill's enactment, 10% for the year following the first year and 10% for each subsequent year through the seventh, 80% for the eighth year and each subsequent year. It would cover dental and oral health services that are necessary to prevent disease and promote oral health, restore oral structures to health and function, and treat emergency conditions, including:

- Two routine dental cleanings during a 12-month period
- Two routine exams during a 12-month period.
- Not more than one full upper and one full lower dental prostheses once every five years.

- Not more than one partial upper dental prostheses and one partial lower dental prostheses once every five years.

[Source: Inside Dentistry & <https://www.congress.gov> | January 7, 2019 ++]

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## VA Vet Dental Care ► H.R.96 | Bill Introduced to Require Care for All Vets

With 2018 now gone, and with it the 115th Congress, federal lawmakers left a lot on the table that would help veterans nationwide. One such bill would require the VA to provide dental care. The legislation, which was reintroduced by Rep. Julia Brownley (D-CA-26) on 3 JAN, would require the VA to provide dental care to veterans in the same manner as any other medical service. Where it stands now, only veterans with a service-connected disability rating of 100 percent, those with a service-connected dental condition, former prisoners of war, and some homeless vets, are eligible to open up and say “Ahhh” for a VA dentist.

The vast majority of veterans are stuck buying dental insurance in the private sector. The bill would also give the VA five years to build up the capacity to provide comprehensive dental care, such as hiring dental staff and building additional facilities. And it’s supported by the Coalition of Veterans Organizations who are sending letters to Congressional staffers to shore up support and hopefully gain some co-sponsors. “Dental care is not merely a matter of cosmetics, but rather, is an essential part of healthcare, as poor dental care is linked to diabetes, cancer, Alzheimer’s and many other diseases,” the letter reads. “The cost of this care would be outweighed by the care that would not need to be provided for these other diseases.”

[Source: ConnectingVets.com | Matt Saintsing | January 09, 2019 ++]

**\* Military \***



## A-10 Thunderbolt II ► Infantryman’s Best Friend... The Enemy’s Worst Nightmare.

First fielded in 1975, the A-10 was designed from the ground up for one mission: penetrate heavily defended airspace and sweep the battlefield of enemy tanks in case the Cold War ever turned hot. The A-10 Thunderbolt II may be slow and old, but this dedicated close air support aircraft is still an infantryman’s best friend... and the enemy’s worst nightmare. Almost 40 years later, the Warthog continues to serve as a lethal guardian angel, protecting coalition troops in trouble throughout the Middle East and Afghanistan.

With a top speed of only 0.75 Mach, climb rate just 1/8th of an F-16 and combat range of barely 300 miles, the A-10 Thunderbolt sure wasn’t designed as a nimble fighter plane. On the other hand, no other jet aircraft in the world can match the straight-wing Warthog’s accuracy and precision when strafing or bombing at treetop height. The Thunderbolt’s unique ability to loiter right over the shoulders of ground troops, choose its own targets with advanced onboard sensors and then engage “in the weeds” is the primary reason the Pentagon has yet to find a reliable replacement for this old warhorse. Each A-10 Thunderbolt can haul 16,000 lbs of just about every missile, bomb and rocket type in

the Air Force's inventory, or the equivalent boom boom gear of four AH-64 Apache attack helicopters. And that's just the secondary armament.



The Warthog's raison d'être is to deploy the gargantuan 30 mm GAU-8/A seven-barrel Gatling gun (above center) at close quarters. Making up 16% of the A-10's weight and firing depleted uranium tipped shells, the Avenger weapon system is the only machine gun in the world capable of shredding the heavy armor of main battle tanks. While A-10's skip the sensitive fly-by-wire controls found in most modern combat aircraft, they are equipped with the latest AN/AAQ-28 LITENING AT targeting pods. These Israeli-built sensors combine an infrared radar, laser designator and laser rangefinder into one unit, allowing the Warthog to mark its own targets without a ground spotter.

For self-defense, besides the standard complement of chaff and flares, the A-10 Thunderbolt II is armed with an AN/ALQ-184 ECM Pod. This cutting-edge electronic countermeasure system can jam multiple incoming threats at once, with near 100% reliability against MANPAD surface-to-air missiles. In case enemy fire does get through, the A-10 Thunderbolt lives up to its reputation as a true flying tank. The pilot sits in a titanium-armored bucket, rated to stop up to 23mm ground fire, plus every other vital component of the aircraft is protected by several layers of Kevlar and steel plating. As a final fail safe, all hydraulic and electric flight controls have backup manual systems to keep the plane airborne even after a catastrophic hit. The A-10 Thunderbolt is relatively cheap to operate, costing only \$11,500 per flight hour. A considerable savings over the \$58,000 an hour rate for its eventual replacement, the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter.

Thunderbolts made their combat debut during Operation Desert Storm and were a massive "hit" from the first shots fired. In that short conflict, A-10's managed 8,100 combat sorties and destroyed over 4,000 Iraqi armored vehicles and artillery pieces. To put that in perspective, the Warthog fleet alone wiped out the equivalent of 2-3 armored divisions while only suffering four losses of their own. In every major operation since then, A-10's have bore the bulk of the close air support role for the US Army. Even in the 21st century, Warthogs have flown 32% of all combat sorties in Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Unity. Their 2015 Unit Cost was \$18.8 million. [Source: Military Machine | Richard Peters | January 01, 2018 ++]

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## **USS Fitzgerald (DDG-62) Update 18 ► Collision Causes Worse Than Thought**

A scathing internal Navy probe into the 2017 collision that drowned seven sailors on the guided-missile destroyer Fitzgerald details a far longer list of problems plaguing the vessel, its crew and superior commands than the service has publicly admitted. Obtained by Navy Times, the "dual-purpose investigation" was overseen by Rear Adm. Brian Fort and completed 11 days after the June 17, 2017 tragedy. It was kept secret from the public in part because it was designed to prep the Navy for potential lawsuits in the aftermath of the accident.

Unsparringly, Fort and his team of investigators outlined critical lapses by bridge watchstanders on the night of the collision with the Philippine-flagged container vessel ACX Crystal in a bustling maritime corridor off the coast of Japan. Their report documents the routine, almost casual, violations of standing orders on a Fitz bridge that often lacked skippers and executive officers, even during potentially dangerous voyages at night through busy waterways. The probe exposes how personal distrust led the officer of the deck, Lt. j.g. Sarah Coppock, to avoid communicating with the

destroyer's electronic nerve center — the combat information center, or CIC — while the Fitzgerald tried to cross a shipping superhighway.



**Erin Elizabeth Rehm receives the American flag from Vice Adm. Jan Tighe during a graveside service for her husband, Fire Controlman Chief Gary Leo Rehm Jr., at Arlington National Cemetery on Aug. 16, 2017. Rehm died when the guided-missile destroyer Fitzgerald collided with the Philippine-flagged merchant vessel ACX Crystal on June 17, 2017.**

Unsparingly, Fort and his team of investigators outlined critical lapses by bridge watchstanders on the night of the collision with the Philippine-flagged container vessel ACX Crystal in a bustling maritime corridor off the coast of Japan. Their report documents the routine, almost casual, violations of standing orders on a Fitz bridge that often lacked skippers and executive officers, even during potentially dangerous voyages at night through busy waterways. The probe exposes how personal distrust led the officer of the deck, Lt. j.g. Sarah Coppock, to avoid communicating with the destroyer's electronic nerve center — the combat information center, or CIC — while the Fitzgerald tried to cross a shipping superhighway.

When Fort walked into the trash-strewn CIC in the wake of the disaster, he was hit with the acrid smell of urine. He saw kettlebells on the floor and bottles filled with pee. Some radar controls didn't work and he soon discovered crew members who didn't know how to use them anyway. Fort found a Voyage Management System that generated more "trouble calls" than any other key piece of electronic navigational equipment. Designed to help watchstanders navigate without paper charts, the VMS station in the skipper's quarters was broken so sailors cannibalized it for parts to help keep the rickety system working. Since 2015, the Fitz had lacked a quartermaster chief petty officer, a crucial leader who helps safely navigate a warship and trains its sailors — a shortcoming known to both the destroyer's squadron and Navy officials in the United States, Fort wrote.

Fort determined that Fitz's crew was plagued by low morale; overseen by a dysfunctional chiefs mess; and dogged by a bruising tempo of operations in the Japan-based 7th Fleet that left exhausted sailors with little time to train or complete critical certifications. To Fort, they also appeared to be led by officers who appeared indifferent to potentially life-saving lessons that should've been learned from other near-misses at sea, including a similar incident near Sasebo, Japan that occurred only five weeks before the ACX Crystal collision, Fort wrote. Fort's work took on added urgency after another destroyer assigned to the 7th Fleet, the John S. McCain, collided with the Liberian-flagged tanker Alnic MC on Aug. 21, 2017, killing 10 more American sailors. But it remained an internal file never to be shared with the public.

Pentagon officials declined to answer specific questions sent by Navy Times about the Fort report and instead defended the decision to keep the contents of the report hidden from public scrutiny. "The Navy determined to retain the legal privilege in order to protect the legal interests of the United States, but provided information regarding the causes and lessons learned to families of those sailors, the Congress and the American people, again to make every effort to ensure these types of tragedies to not happen again," said Navy spokesman Capt. Gregory Hicks in a prepared written statement to Navy Times. In the 19 months since the fatal collision, the Navy's Readiness Reform Oversight Council has made "significant progress" in implementing reforms called for in several top-level Navy reviews of the Fitzgerald and McCain collisions — nearly 75 percent of the 111 recommendations slated to be implemented by the end of 2018, Hicks added.

Navy Times withheld publication of the Fort report's details until Pentagon officials could brief the families of the dead Fitz sailors about the grim findings. Sailors Xavier Martin, Dakota Rigsby, Shingo Douglass, Tan Huynh, Noe Hernandez, Carlos Sibayan and Gary Rehm drowned in the disaster. Coppock pleaded guilty to a dereliction of duty charge at court-martial last year. The Fitz's commanding officer, Cmdr. Bryce Benson, and Lt. Natalie Combs, who ran the CIC, are battling similar charges in court but contend unlawful command influence by senior leaders scuttled any chance for fair trials. When Fort arrived at her CIC desk, he found a stack of paperwork Combs abandoned: "She was most likely consumed and distracted by a review of Operations Department paperwork for the three and a half hours of her watch prior to the collision," Fort wrote.

Although Fort's report drew parallels to a 2012 non-fatal accident involving the destroyer Porter and the supertanker M/V Otowasan in the Strait of Hormuz, his investigation focused on a near-miss by the Fitzgerald near Sasebo on May 10, 2017. During that incident, an unnamed junior officer "became confused by the surface contact picture" of vessels surrounding the destroyer and summoned the warship's then-commanding officer, Cmdr. Robert Shu, to the bridge, according to Fort. Shu set the course to steer the Fitz behind the merchant vessel and then left the bridge. But once the officer in charge had cleared the other ship's stern, he "became immediately aware that another vessel was on the opposite side" of the ship they had just dodged, Fort wrote. "(The officer) sounded five short blasts and ordered all back full emergency to avoid collision," something Lt. j.g. Coppock failed to do weeks later when the ACX Crystal loomed out of the darkness, the report states.

To Fort, the earlier incident should've been a wakeup call for both Shu and Cmdr. Benson, his executive officer who would soon "fleet up" to replace him as skipper, plus Benson's future second-in-command, Cmdr. Sean Babbitt. "FTZ's command leadership was unaware of just how far below standards their command had drifted," wrote Fort, a surface warfare officer with more than a quarter-century of experience. "Had the (commanding officer) and (executive officer) critiqued the near-collision, they may have identified the root causes uncovered by this investigation." When contacted by Navy Times, Shu recalled the incident that took place just east of the Tsushima Strait, "a normally busy and recognized waterway."

"As I was heading down the ladderwell to my cabin, I heard five short blasts and felt the ship back," Shu said. "I ran back up to the bridge and there was another vessel behind the one we had just maneuvered for." Although Shu couldn't recall how close the two vessels got to each other, he insisted that the incident wasn't a near-collision and that his bridge team "reacted appropriately" and later assured him that they had a good picture of the vessels around their destroyer. But Fort's investigation pointed to a disturbing pattern of watchstanders failing to follow standing orders from a skipper and XO who often were inexplicably absent from the bridge, even when the warship was transiting potentially dangerous waters at night.

One junior officer spoke of a similar near-collision during low visibility, when a watch team finishing their shift failed to identify a vessel that was closing on them and wasn't being tracked, according to the report. The oncoming officer of the deck maneuvered out of the vessel's way but never notified the commanding officer. Watchstanders admitted to knowing of other instances when ships got close enough to trigger a call to the CO, but they never made it, according to the report. "Procedural compliance by Bridge watchstanders is not the norm onboard FTZ, as evidenced by numerous, almost routine, violations of the CO's standing orders," not to mention radio transmissions laced with profanity and "unprofessional humor," Fort found.

### **Rules of the road**

Benson and predecessor Shu spent little time on the bridge during nighttime transits and Benson was asleep in his quarters on the fateful night the Fitzgerald collided with the ACX Crystal, Fort wrote. Some of Benson's bridge team had never transited the busy waterway before, or had only done so during the day, and "his watchstanders were at least as fatigued as he was from a long day of operations without sufficient rest," Fort found. It also was Benson's first transit from Sagami Bay to the open sea as the warship's skipper, a command he assumed just a few days after the near-collision off Sasebo. "It is inexplicable that neither Benson nor (executive officer Cmdr. Babbitt) were on the bridge



for his first outbound Yokosuka transit as CO, at night, in close proximity to land, and expecting moderately dense fishing and merchant traffic,” Fort wrote.

Ship travel is governed by the “rules of the road,” a set of guidelines regarding speed, lookouts and other best practices to avoid collisions, but Fort’s report casts doubt on whether watchstanders on board the Fitz and sister warships in the 7th Fleet had sufficient knowledge of them to safely navigate at sea. About three weeks after the ACX Crystal disaster, Fort’s investigators sprang a rules of the road pop quiz on Fitz’s officers. It didn’t go well. The 22 who took the test averaged a score of 59 percent, Fort wrote. “Only 3 of 22 Officers achieved a score over 80%,” he added, with seven officers scoring below 50 percent. The same exam was administered to the wardroom of another unnamed destroyer as a control group, and those officers scored similarly dismal marks. The XO Babbitt, Coppock and two other officers refused to take the test, according to the report.

Reached by email, Babbitt told Navy Times that he declined because of the investigation and the fact that Fort had read him his rights. “The exam was also given weeks after the collision when the wardroom had not been concentrating on the rules of the road,” he said. “The crew had been pulled from event to event to include the memorial service and the dignified send off and the last thing anyone had been thinking about was how many lights a 50 meter towing vessel on inland waterways should have.” Speaking through his defense attorney, Benson declined to comment on the Fort report’s findings. In an email to Navy Times, Lt. Cmdr. Justin Henderson said Benson “has never declined or avoided the responsibility that is the burden of command at sea” and remains “accountable for the Fitzgerald and her crew, who remain at the forefront of his thoughts.” [Source: MilitaryTimes | Geoff Ziezulewicz | January 13, 2019 ++]

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## **Military Lodging Update 04 ► Expect Rates to Rise Substantially**

Lodging at many U.S. military bases worldwide is getting pricier due to a Pentagon requirement that such facilities become self-sustaining. Rates could go up as much as \$75 a night, with variations by service, location and room type, according to military officials. The change comes as the Pentagon looks to make business operations more efficient and free up funds, as spelled out in Defense Department guidance issued to the services late last year. Beginning in October, military lodging programs won’t be supported by taxpayer dollars. Base lodges will have to use income generated from nightly room fees for all operations. Congress authorized the services to privatize lodging facilities in 2002. The Army began to do so in 2009. The other services chose not to privatize at the time, fearing higher room rates, according to a Pentagon watchdog report from 2010.

Appropriated funds may be authorized in limited cases, such as to restore a facility “destroyed by acts of God, fire or terrorism,” or to accommodate a mission change or influx of new units. Services may no longer assign military personnel to work at lodging, as all employees must be paid through nonappropriated funds. The Air Force says the service is in the process of reassigning airmen working in its lodging. Exceptions to the new guidance include morale, welfare and recreation recreational lodging; military treatment facility lodging, including Fisher Houses; and privatized lodging facilities.

**Air Force.** Air Force base lodging rates went up 1 JAN, service officials announced this week. They said to expect more increases. The smallest increase is to large distinguished visiting quarters, a jump from \$75 to \$83 a day. Other rate increases include: airman quarters (\$44 to \$55), officer quarters (\$60 to \$70), temporary lodging facilities (\$63 to \$77) and distinguished visiting quarters (\$69 to \$79). Rates are standard across the Air Force and also apply to rooms booked for non-official travel. The Air Force said the rate increase is within per diem levels, but if a location has a lower per diem rate, overnight fees will be dropped to match it.

**Navy:** At Navy Gateway Inns and Suites, rates went up 1 OCT and adjustments vary based on location, officials said. In the Europe, Africa and Southwest Asia regions, rates increased \$11 to \$31 per night, depending on room type, according to a Navy statement. The rate at Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam in Hawaii increased an average of \$45 a

night, Debra Couch, a Navy region lodging director, said in a statement. The increase “is mid-range compared to the DOD expected range of increase from \$1 to \$75 a night,” she said.

**Army.** Rates at U.S.-based Army lodges likely won’t be affected by the new Pentagon guidance because the service turned operations over to private companies a decade ago to save money and modernize facilities. It remains unclear whether the Army’s overseas lodges will raise prices.

[Source: Stars & Stripes | Jennifer H. Svan | January 10, 2019 ++]

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## **Navy Training Update 01 ► Iwo Jima Carrier-Landing Practice Potential Move**

The Japanese government is planning to buy an island in its Kagoshima prefecture for U.S. aircraft-carrier landing practice as soon as March, according to a 10 JANreport by the Jiji Press. For decades, Navy pilots have practiced their carrier-landing skills on Japan’s Iwo Jima. The island is known as the site of a fierce World War II battle that killed more than 25,000 Japanese and American troops. A photo taken during that battle inspired the iconic Marine Corps War Memorial in Virginia. Over the past several years, Japanese defense officials have pressed to move that practice from Iwo Jima — known in Japan as Iwo To — to Mageshima, an island closer to Marine Corps Air Station Iwakuni, where Carrier Air Wing 5 is based.

Originally, Iwo Jima was intended only as a temporary site for carrier-landing practice. In a brief interview 10 JAN with Stars and Stripes, a Defense Ministry spokesman emphasized the importance of finding a permanent location for landing practice. Navy pilots practice on the island at least once a year to help them qualify for carrier landings prior to deployments. Carrier Air Wing 5 practiced there in May before the USS Ronald Reagan’s first 2018 deployment. Since 2011, Japan’s Ministry of Defense has contemplated building a Japan Self-Defense Forces facility on Mageshima, where U.S. field-carrier landing practice could also be held. In 2014, Japan allotted \$1 million for an environmental survey of Mageshima to analyze its potential.

Talk of the move has sparked anxiety over potential noise issues for some residents of nearby islands. Tanegashima, 8 miles from Mageshima, is home to about 33,000 people, according to the 2010 census by Japan’s Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications. In contrast, remote Iwo Jima is 760 miles south of Tokyo. Civilian access is restricted, and the island is uninhabited aside from military personnel. “The Navy is aware of the noise concerns of the Japanese people and strives to minimize the impact of its training on local citizens while balancing our obligation to maintain operational readiness for the defense of Japan and to meet our agreements under the Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security,” the U.S. Navy said in a May statement on carrier-landing practice on Iwo Jima.

Most of Mageshima is owned by the defunct Taston Airport land development company. Tokyo District Court in June ordered the company’s assets be seized after creditors filed a bankruptcy claim against it, Jiji Press and Kyoto News reported on 28 JUN. Taston had liabilities of about 24 billion yen – or about \$260 million. If the reported plans go through, Japan would pay about 16 billion yen – or about \$150 million – for Mageshima, Jiji Press reported. A Japanese Defense Ministry official told the newspaper that leaders “will need to be able to offer an explanation on the purchase price during parliamentary deliberations.” A Defense Ministry spokesman told Stars and Stripes that the department has been negotiating with Taston but declined further comment.

Defense Minister Takeshi Iwaya said he is aware of reports that the Japanese government is close to buying the island for carrier-landing practice, but also declined to give details of the negotiation during a 8 JAN press conference. “We have had repeated negotiations with the owner of Mageshima, but nothing has been decided at this point,” said Iwaya. “We will continue to work steadily on building a permanent facility as we believe a facility for FCLP, or field carrier landing practice, is something that is needed as soon as possible.” [Source: Stars & Stripes | Caitlin Doornbos | January 10, 2019 ++]

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## **West Point Update 06 ► Email Change From .mil to .edu**

The U.S. Military Academy at West Point is pulling away from the Defense Department's email system, a move that could show the U.S. Army how to communicate differently in the future. Beginning this month, West Point will break free from the Pentagon-controlled .mil network and move to a commercially managed .edu network as part of a larger effort to upgrade its website, email and cyber presence, according to a West Point press release posted by the Defense Visual Information Service. West Point is currently serving as a pilot program for the Army by switching its network and email from Defense Department-controlled systems to commercially owned and operated platforms, the release states.

The need for a change emerged in 2015 when West Point officials realized that the tight security measures of the DoD network hindered the way the academy did business, as well as its ability to compete with universities such as Harvard, Yale and Stanford. "We are the Army's only university, so my peers are Penn State, Harvard and Yale," said Col. Edward Teague, West Point's chief information officer. "My peer is not the CIO at the 18th Airborne Corps. I have to set the staff, faculty and cadets up here for success by giving them appropriate [information technology] that is [commensurate] with the No. 1 public university in the United States. "We identified that there was a divide between what we needed to do as a university, as an academy, when you think about the university education missions versus what has to happen to be a military unit on a military network," he said.

The academy also launched a new website 20 DEC at the web address <https://www.usma.edu> , part of a branding transition from USMA to West Point, according to the release. These moves may appear to distance the academy from the Army, but one of the program's goals is to serve as a model to the service of what can be accomplished with commercial systems instead of "building and running everything in house," the release states. The pilot program will also demonstrate to the Army the ability to secure a cloud-based system, while at the same time enabling a free flow of ideas and greater accessibility.

"We are looking at what are those core competencies that the Army doesn't have to be in charge of. I submit that email is one of them. I submit that websites are another and storage," Teague said in the release. "It made a lot of sense for us to manage our own email system a long time ago because not a lot of people had it and you couldn't really buy something off the shelf. Now, you can." Military.com tried to contact Teague to find out more about how the Army might use the findings from the pilot but did not receive a response by press time. West Point's changes will take place throughout fiscal 2019 and be enhanced in fiscal 2020 before officials begin collecting and analyzing data on the changes starting in fiscal 2021, according to the release. "Security is paramount, but we also think that enabling IT in a way that people can work in the environment that we are used to now, which is work anywhere on any device, we are getting closer and closer to that as time passes," Teague said in the release. [Source: Military.com | Matthew Cox | January 3, 2018 ++]

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## **Air Force Bombs ► New Designs Needed To Fight Russia And China**

A growing cohort of Air Force researchers are arguing that the service needs to undergo a munitions revolution if it is to take on a peer-level adversary in open conflict. "We're developing a range of technologies to enable next-generation and improve precision effects on the battlefield," Col. Garry Haase, who helms the Air Force Research Lab Munitions Directorate, told an audience at the Air Force Association Annual Conference this fall. In some instances, that will mean more powerful munitions to breach and destroy Russian and Chinese structures in the event of war. "There is now a shift in emphasis away from minimizing to maximizing effects in a high-end fight," said John Wilcox, vice president of advanced programs and technology at Northrop Grumman, at the conference.



**Air Force researchers are working on new, more lethal munitions to outpace peer-level adversaries.**

“Requirements from our missions directorate say we continue to have to deal with the whole spectrum of threats as we shift to more of a near-peer threat focus,” Wilcox added. “We are looking at larger munitions with bigger effects.” And while neither members of the AFA panel named Russia or China specifically, a recent study by the Mitchell Institute, which is aligned with the Air Force Association, certainly did. In the document, titled “The Munition Effects Revolution,” several retired senior Air Force officers argue that the U.S. munitions arsenal is overdue for a shakeup. “The bomb body, a steel shell filled with explosive material, is relatively unchanged across the past 100 years,” the study reads. “But some elements of modern munitions have significantly evolved—particularly guidance elements. Munition effects—the destructive envelope of heat, blast, and fragmentation—remain essentially unchanged.”

High demand for combat aircraft is a key driver behind the need for enhanced munitions options, according to the Mitchell Institute. “The Air Force is currently operating the smallest and oldest aircraft force in its history,” the study reads. “Additionally, current mission capable rates are low and pilots are in increasingly short supply. To best meet combatant command requirements amidst these constraints, it is crucial to ensure each sortie flown and every bomb dropped yields maximum potential.”

[Source: AirForceTimes | Kyle Rempfer | January 3, 2019 ++]

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## **Navy | What To Watch For in 2019 ► 1 thru 9 of 19 Things**

More money and more personnel but also new challenges from rising rivals in the western Pacific, Europe and the Persian Gulf. Also, more changes to your leadership at the Pentagon and in the Navy and more innovations that promise to transform the ways the nation’s premier maritime service recruits, trains and retains its sailors. Sailors, here comes 2019. Buckle up!

**1. The rise of China and Russia** -- The South China Sea will remain a global flashpoint, with rising tensions sparked by Beijing’s ongoing efforts to fortify islands claimed by Western Pacific neighbors. And already parring over Moscow’s 2014 invasion and annexation of Ukraine’s Crimean peninsula and economic sanctions by western nations against strongman Vladimir Putin’s regime, relations between the United States and Russia got rockier throughout 2018. Expect more of all this in 2019.

For China, the U.S. Navy has vowed to continue conducting Freedom of Navigation Operations — or “FONOPS” — to remind the world’s most populous nation that the disputed islands are in international waterways. On 30 SEP near the Gaven Reef, a sprawl of rocks that are claimed by Beijing, Taiwan, the Philippines and Vietnam, the Chinese warship Lanzhou closed to within 45 yards of the U.S. Navy’s guided-missile destroyer Decatur, forcing the American

vessel to veer away to avoid collision. “U.S. Navy ships and aircraft operate throughout the Indo-Pacific routinely, including in the South China Sea,” U.S. Pacific Fleet spokesman Cmdr. Nate Chirstensen said in the wake of the incident. “As we have for decades, our forces will continue to fly, sail and operate anywhere international law allows.” Beijing’s ambassador to the U.S., Cui Tiankai, took to Fox News 30 DEC to blame the Americans for the confrontation “on China’s doorstep.” “It’s not Chinese warships that are going to the coast of California, or to the Gulf of Mexico. It’s so close to the Chinese islands and it’s so close to the Chinese coast. So who is on the offensive? Who is on the defensive? This is very clear,” he said.

With Russia, similar confrontations have played out in the air. On Nov. 5, 2018, a Russian Sukhoi Su-27 Flanker fighter zoomed close to a U.S. Navy EP-3 Aries II reconnaissance plane flying in international airspace over the Black Sea. The Russian pilot banked right, hit the afterburners and forced the Greece-based Navy crew to fly through the turbulent engine wash. It marked the third time in a 12-month span that Russian jets over the Black Sea intercepted American reconnaissance aircraft in what Pentagon officials said were potentially dangerous encounters. Then came the Nov. 25 incident in the Kerch Strait that divides the Sea of Azov from the Black Sea. Ukraine attempted to send two gunboats and a tug through the channel but Moscow’s forces fired on the flotilla and detained the crews, vowing to try them in a Russian court.

That triggered Kiev to declare martial law and bar all Russian men of military age from entering the country. “There is no justification for Russia’s use of military force against Ukrainian ships and naval personnel. We call on Russia to release the Ukrainian sailors and ships it seized, without delay,” read a NATO statement released amid escalating tensions that might not abate in 2019.

**2. A new SecDef** -- Just days after Defense Secretary Jim Mattis announced he would step down from that post in late February, President Donald J. Trump announced in a 23 DEC tweet that he’d push the popular Cabinet member out even earlier. Trump installed Deputy Secretary of Defense Patrick Shanahan as the acting secretary of defense starting Jan. 1. He praised the Pentagon’s second-in-command as having “a long list of accomplishments” and added in his tweet, “He will be great!” The move cuts short Mattis’ tenure by two months, and added to an acrimonious end of the relationship between the commander in chief and his top military leader. A resignation letter from Mattis urging the president to find “a secretary of defense whose views are better aligned with yours” likely irked Trump, who unlike the retired Marine four-star general never served in uniform. Mattis also mildly chastised Trump for the president’s belligerent statements about allies overseas, especially fellow democracies often at odds with strongmen in Russia, China and North Korea.

The end of Mattis’ reign over the Pentagon set the stage for potentially contentious confirmation hearings over his successor, who might not be Shanahan, a former top executive at defense contractor Boeing. It also sparked deliberations by the corral of prized national security hands personally recruited by Mattis to help oversee the armed forces. If they decide to depart Trump’s Defense Department en masse, there could be increased tension inside the Pentagon and on Capitol Hill, where Mattis enjoyed bipartisan support even amid growing concerns about the president’s handling of foreign policy and national security problems. A diplomat, Brett McGurk, the U.S. envoy to the global coalition fighting the Islamic State group, already joined Mattis in voting with his feet. In a protest over President Donald Trump’s abrupt decision to withdraw U.S. troops from Syria, McGurk on Dec. 21 tendered his resignation to Secretary of State Mike Pompeo. The next day, a tweeting Trump downplayed the development, insisting that he didn’t know the envoy and calling his departure a “nothing event.”

**3. Back to the future with 2nd fleet** -- After nearly two decades as a forgotten backwater, the Atlantic Ocean returned to relevance for the U.S. Navy in 2018. Levels of Russian submarine activity in the North Atlantic unseen since the end of the Cold War helped prod the Navy to reestablish the 2nd Fleet in Norfolk on Aug. 24. The fleet is expected to reach full operational capability in 2019, according to its commander, Vice Adm. Andrew Lewis. And his patrols won’t be tracking only Russians. Lewis said that China is “aspirationally in the Arctic,” as well. “There’s no question the logical sequence of events with China is they will be there militarily, as well.” Operating in colder northern waters will represent a stark change to traditional U.S. Navy tours, which is why Lewis beefed up his staff with seasoned hands

from the U.S. Coast Guard and allies from Canada, Norway and other northern nations. Lewis said 2nd Fleet will count about 80 staff members by early next year. He plans on keeping his team “lean and agile” as it spearheads what other flag officers have dubbed “the fourth battle of the Atlantic.”

**4. Homeport swaps** -- Three Navy aircraft carriers and three amphibious warships, plus their crews and families, will be prepping to swap homeports or will be on the move in 2019.

- The 36-year-old aircraft carrier Carl Vinson will likely leave San Diego in March for a planned incremental availability maintenance stint at the Puget Sound Naval Shipyard, joining the Navy’s oldest operational flattop, the Nimitz, in the state of Washington.
- Meanwhile, the carrier Stennis will depart Washington in May to prepare for an overhaul in Virginia, according to Navy Personnel Command. And the carrier Abraham Lincoln is expected to leave Norfolk for San Diego, too.
- Forward-deployed to Japan for just less than a year, the amphibious warship Wasp will leave Sasebo soon and return to Norfolk, replaced by the America, which will bid farewell to San Diego.

It’s part of a three-port swap orchestrated two years ago that also involves the Wasp-class amphib Bonhomme Richard, which also called Sasebo home before May. That’s when the warship completed its homeport shift to San Diego and began prepping for an extended modernization spell at the nearby General Dynamics National Steel and Shipbuilding yard. The Pentagon hoped the movements of the three vessels would be completed in 2018 but the Navy Personnel Command’s Decommissioning and Homeport Change webpage marked May 25, 2019 as the effective date for the America’s switch to Sasebo.

**5. Remedying readiness woes** -- The Navy’s Air Boss laid out an ambitious plan in 2018 to get the Navy’s F/A-18 E/F Super Hornet strike fighters back into fighting shape, hiking readiness through maintenance changes, service life extensions and other systemic overhauls buoyed by an increase in defense dollars. Navy leaders hope the spending spigot remains on and President Trump has telegraphed that he’s willing to push for more Pentagon funding. After waffling on a potential spending cut, he’s now expected to propose a \$750 billion defense budget for Fiscal Year 2020, a 5 percent hike over the previous year’s numbers.

Poised to take control of the House of Representatives when it reconvenes in 2019, several Democrats on Capitol Hill have signaled that a bloated defense budget could stand a diet, a sentiment shared by some fiscal conservatives. And a spending bill for much of the rest of the federal government this year languishes because of a standoff over Trump’s border wall proposal. Defense hawks and their critics must reach a budget deal by the fall of 2019 or automatic spending caps enacted in 2011 will return, slashing Pentagon funding to \$600 billion per year. For 2019, however, expect the Navy keep spending to revamp its aging aircraft fleet, with \$1.25 billion earmarked for aviation repair depots, \$338 million more than lawmakers provided in 2016. There’s more funding for airframe work, engine maintenance and aircraft components, too. “We still have a long way to go,” Naval Air Forces spokesman Cmdr. Ron Flanders told Navy Times. “But we’re now at that point where we can say that there’s light at the end of the tunnel.”

**6. More Ford flattops** -- Dogged by technology glitches and pummeled by critics for its \$12.8 billion price tag, the aircraft carrier Gerald R. Ford not only is expected to enjoy a banner year in 2019 but has inspired the Navy to buy more warships like it. The lead ship in its carrier class, the Ford is scheduled to leave its post-shakedown maintenance session at Huntington Ingalls Newport News Shipyard and head back to sea in late 2019. Navy officials have told lawmakers that fixes to the Ford’s high-tech electromagnetic catapult system, EMALS, and its Advanced Arresting Gear recovery system will be completed and the warship’s advanced radar installed. Technicians also are exorcising the demons that haunted the flattop’s weapons elevators. Ford’s sister carrier, the John F. Kennedy, is expected to be christened by the end of 2019. At the end of November, 84 percent of the flattop’s structure was finished. Congress capped the Kennedy’s costs at around \$11.4 Billion, cheaper than the Ford. It’s why the Navy is wrapping up a deal with Huntington Ingalls to build two more to replace the aging fleet of Nimitz-class carriers.

**7. Navy mulls frigate choices** -- The Navy retired the last of its workhorse Oliver Hazard Perry-class frigates in 2015, hoping to replace them with littoral combat ships. But the LCS program got mired in cost overruns, delays and a fickle Congress that bought more hulls than the Navy wanted, sometimes without the high-tech guts that go into them. Concerns within the Navy and on Capitol Hill about the future of the LCS have helped to drive the Pentagon to buy up to 20 new frigates, beginning in 2020. There are five finalists competing to build what's now called the FFG(X), using designs from existing warships — Austal USA in Alabama; Huntington Ingalls Industries in Mississippi; Lockheed Martin in Baltimore; a joint venture between Italy's Fincantieri and Wisconsin's Marinette Marine; and another tying General Dynamics/Bath Iron Works to Spanish shipbuilder Navantia. Austal is expected to base its design on the Independence-class LCS and Lockheed Martin on its Freedom-class LCS, HII on its Legend-class National Security Cutter, Fincantieri on its FREMM multi-purpose frigate and Bath Iron Works on Navantia's Álvaro de Bazán-class F100 Frigate.

The Navy hopes to select a winner in 2019, but the Congressional Research Service wants lawmakers and the admirals to first fix some problems with the FFG(X) program. In a report updated on Oct. 22, CRS urged them to identify the capability gaps and mission needs the new warships are supposed to address and then decide if they're the right vessels for the jobs. They also must determine if they'll end LCS procurement in 2019 and shift to the frigates, or keep buying both vessels. Should they use a "clean-sheet" design that starts from scratch or lean on "parent" vessels like the LCS that already have been built? How much space should be built into the frigates to add new technologies and systems as they're developed, perhaps decades from now? And how does a new frigate program affect Navy plans to buy more guided-missile destroyers or rehab the aging Ticonderoga-class cruisers? Those sound like questions that must be answered in 2019.

**8. Divided government** -- Just hours after Democrats won control of the House in November's midterm elections, House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi, a Democrat from California, said the victory delivered a clear mandate from voters. "We have a constitutional responsibility for oversight," she told reporters. "This doesn't mean we go looking for a fight. But it means that if we see a need to go forward, we will." Issues important to the armed forces and military veterans will be at the center of many of those squabbles. Already, Democrats on the House Armed Services Committee have vowed to probe President Donald Trump's decision to deploy active-duty troops to the southwestern U.S. border, suspecting that it's little more than a political stunt. Democratic critics of the president in the House also pledged to explore the military's transgender recruiting rules, Trump's strategy in the Middle East and the need for a new authorization of military force resolution for combat overseas. Senior party officials have promised to dig into reports of Trump cronies influencing DVA policies. They also will ask tough questions about GI Bill payment failures during the fall semester and probe plans to overhaul the agency's community care programs. Democrats will have broader subpoena power than they enjoyed in 2018 and will use it to investigate Trump's past tax filings and business connections to Russia. The new Congress convened on 3 JAN.

**9. Coast Guard needs icebreakers** -- The Navy draws its funding from the Department of Defense but its smaller sister service, the Coast Guard, relies mostly on the Department of Homeland Security. Lawmakers already wrapped up a 2019 spending package for the Pentagon but in December they were still working on the DHS budget. Congress and the White House have dangled a \$750 million icebreaker project to build what's now called the Polar Security Cutter. Coast Guard Commandant Adm. Karl Schultz wants to start building six breakers — three heavy, three medium. His service is down to one of each now, the Healy and the heavy Polar Star, which was commissioned in 1976. The Navy doesn't have icebreakers and with calls to increase America's presence in the Arctic region the Coast Guard is raising a hand to help. And the Coasties can help sooner if they can start building an icebreaker in 2019 and rebuilding the rest of their aging cutter fleet.

[Source: NavyTimes | Geoff Ziezulewicz , Mark D. Faram , Natalie Gross , Tara Copp , Leo Shane III , Carl Prine , & David Larter, Defense News | December 31, 2018 ++]

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## Navy | What To Watch For in 2019 ► 10 thru 19 of 19 Things

**10. CNO about to go?** -- Next September will be the four-year mark for Adm. John Richardson's stint as Chief of Naval Operations. And while officials have been mum on the nominee to become the Navy's next top officer, the norm has been a four-year tour. The only four-star to last longer than four in the 21st century was Adm. Vernon E. Clark, who held the post from July 2000 to July 2005, becoming the longest-serving CNO since Adm. Arleigh Burke helmed the Navy between 1955 and 1961. That's led to growing speculation about Navy Secretary Richard Spencer's pick as Richardson's replacement in 2019. Richardson and his predecessor, Adm. Jonathan Greenert, were career submariners, as is Adm. James Caldwell, currently the head of Naval Reactors, and Adm. James Foggo III, who has led naval forces in Europe and Africa, plus NATO's Joint Force Command Naples, since 2017.

Four-star aviators include Adm. Bill Moran, who has served as Vice Chief of Naval Operations since 2016, and Adm. John Aquilino. But Aquilino became the 36th commander of the U.S. Pacific Fleet in May and was soon joined in Hawaii by Adm. Phil Davidson, a surface warfare officer, at U.S. Indo-Pacific Command. Davidson was replaced at U.S. Fleet Forces Command by fellow SWO Adm. Christopher Grady. The most recent four-star switch occurred on Nov. 26, when Adm. Craig Faller relieved Adm. Kurt W. Tidd as commander of U.S. Southern Command. Tidd holds the titles of both "Old salt" and "Old Goat" — the oldest serving SWO and the longest-serving graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy.

**11. Fitz officers fight back** -- The Navy officer who commanded the warship Fitzgerald when it suffered a fatal collision in 2017 will finally have his day in court next year, and so will one of his lieutenants. Cmdr. Bryce Benson faces dereliction of duty and hazarding a vessel charges in connection to the June 17, 2017, collision with a merchant vessel off the coast of Japan that killed seven sailors. The Navy dropped a negligent homicide charge against him. The ongoing legal maneuvers continue to shine spotlights not only on the Navy's efforts to shore up years of shoddy maintenance and manning during an era of high operational tempo in the 7th Fleet but also on how senior leaders handle court-martial cases. Attorneys for Benson and Lt. Natalie Combs have moved to get the cases tossed out of court, arguing that public statements by CNO Richardson and several flag officers, combined with other alleged forms of unlawful command influence, spoiled their chances to get fair trials.

**12. Fat Leonard haunts the Navy** -- This past year saw several current and retired Navy leaders disciplined, tried and sentenced for their dirty dealings with "Fat Leonard" Glenn Francis, the portly shipping magnate who plied scores of senior officers and their top enlisted sailors with prostitutes, booze, cash and other perks to land ship servicing contracts in the Western Pacific. At least 21 active-duty and retired defendants have been charged by the U.S. Justice Department in connection with the Fat Leonard scandal and federal prosecutors passed hundreds of lower-level cases to the Navy for military adjudication. As of mid-December, 11 named defendants still await trials for public corruption. Several are expected to start in 2019, including those for Cmdr. Stephen F. Shedd, the former 7th Fleet planning officer, and retired officers Rear Adm. Bruce Loveless, Capt. David "Too Tall" Lausman and Cmdr. Donald "Bubbles" Hornbeck.

**13. Special warriors under fire** -- While trials targeting the Fitz officers and Fat Leonard defendants snatched headlines nationwide, quieter court-martial proceedings have played out for the Navy warriors who ply their trade in the shadowy world of counter-terrorism operations. In California, six SEALs are battling war crime charges tied to their service overseas in either Afghanistan or Iraq. In Virginia, two SEALs face murder charges for their alleged roles in the slaying of Army Special Forces Staff Sgt. Logan Melgar, who was strangled to death on June 4, 2017 in Bamako, Mali. They'll be joined in the Norfolk docket by Navy Lt. Craig Becker, an explosive ordnance disposal expert who authorities believe drugged and tossed his wife, Johanna Hanna Elizabeth Hove-Becker, from their Belgian apartment's window in late 2015, killing her.

All have pleaded not guilty but the strongest public support has gone to a pair of SEALs in San Diego, Chief Special Warfare Operator Edward "Eddie" Gallagher and his commanding officer, Lt. Jacob "Jake" Portier. Prosecutors allege Gallagher stabbed to death a young, wounded Islamic State prisoner of war near Mosul in 2017. He faces at least 14



criminal counts, including murder, aggravated assault, obstructing justice and drug charges tied to alleged pain reliever and anabolic steroid abuse. Portier is accused of failing to report rumors of his chief's misconduct to superiors in their chain of command. Both have proclaimed their innocence and predict they'll be exonerated. Supporters also point to Chief Special Warfare Operator Keith Barry, who won a landmark decision on Sept. 5 from the military's highest court after justices ruled senior Navy leaders committed unlawful command influence that tainted his case. But questions continue to mount about a culture of corruption and callousness inside the secretive teams of SEALs and the sailors who are attached to them. Nine very public court-martial trials might answer them.

**14. More money in your pockets** -- Sailors in 2018 saw lawmakers approve their biggest pay raise in a decade. And the next boost could be even bigger. Continuing a trend in recent years, the raise for 2020 is slated to rise again, thanks to the improving economy and expected increase in civilian sector wages. Based on the current federal formula, troops should see a 3.1 percent pay raise in January 2020, up 0.5 percent from the 2.6 percent raise this January. If that holds, it would mark the fifth year that troops saw a bigger pay raise than the previous year. But getting the money depends on Congress and the White House. This is an easy target for savings because of the large effects even small changes to salaries can make. Dropping the pay raise by 0.5 percent — which leaves troops with a large paycheck but not necessarily one that keeps up with civilian wages — can save up to \$3 billion over five years for the Defense Department. But military advocates have long argued that such moves undermine promises to provide for troops and their families. The White House's formal Defense Department appropriations request is scheduled to be unveiled in February. After that, expect months of wrangling over the totals and details.

**15. More chances to advance** -- The Navy is expected to grow in 2019, increasing manning to levels unseen in the sea service for over a decade, with advancement opportunities inching up alongside the size of the force. As of 5 DEC, the service had 329,867 people on active-duty, the highest number in uniform total since late 2010. By next December, the Navy is slated to have 335,400 officers and sailors, the highest total since late 2007. Navy personnel officials say the continued growth in end strength should spark more chances for you to get ahead, a trend spotted in 2018. Active duty petty officers enjoyed a 23.5 percent chance of moving up in the fall cycle, slightly higher than in the spring. Advancements to chief petty officer saw a steady rise over the past three years, cresting at a 25 percent selection rate in 2018. Since 1997, the selection rate to senior chief petty officer held steady at around 11 percent, until 2018. Then it shot up to 14 percent. There also will be more Meritorious Advancement Program picks. Since officials revamped the program in 2015, quotas have increased by 4,774 total slots. That's a 213 percent increase over the initial 2,238 quotas allowed. The Navy's top personnel officer, Vice Adm. Bob Burke, wants one out of every four petty officers to get ahead through merit-based advancements, a trend likely to continue in 2019.

**16. An end to the uniform madness** -- Nearly two decades of uniform changes should end in October of 2019 when the "Blueberry" Navy Working Uniform will no longer be authorized for wear. That's also the date when all sailors will be required to own and maintain two sets of the green Type III uniform. The transition officially started Oct. 1, 2017 when recruits were issued new uniforms at boot camp in Great Lakes. By early 2018, the Navy Exchange announced it was scrapping a phased two-year roll out for the uniform and made it available in every shop. All sailors will see the second year of a two-year plus-up in their annual clothing replacement allowances to pay for the uniforms. Still undecided is what sailors will wear at sea. The Navy began issuing the new "Improved Fire Retardant Variant" coveralls this year. Considered command-issued "organizational clothing," Big Navy foots the bill. But officials say that 84 percent of sailors in fleet focus groups demanded a two-piece version to wear. Initial testing of the prototype ended in September and drew poor reviews, with many sailors advocating for a fire retardant NWU Type III style of uniform. Navy leaders will make up their minds in 2019.

**17. LinkedIn, for the Navy** -- The Navy is expected to debut a new "Detailing Marketplace" system in mid-2019, with sailors in some ratings getting the chance to negotiate orders and assignment perks on their smartphones and desktop devices. Describing it as "LinkedIn for the Navy," Vice Adm. Bob Burke, the Navy's top personnel officer told Navy Times that it's all part of an ongoing effort to string multiple personnel databases together to better guide sailors through their careers. "It will know who the sailor is and have the ability to use that information to help them better manage their careers," Burke said. The Navy spent the latter half of 2018 testing the new technology on both

desktop and mobile devices for the aerographer's mate rating, what Burke called a "war game" to try out the new technology.

Burke said that the Navy has been using "real data and sailors will be able to test functions and negotiate for money, advance to vacancy, geographic stability, educational opportunities — all those things — just as if they're doing it for real." Officials are gathering data from the ongoing tests to refine the system for 2019. "Major muscle movement parts will be in place April or May 2019 to support this," Burke said. "Then we'll commence a rating-by-rating rollout because we won't be able to do it all at once as that would just be too difficult."

**18. A better tape test** -- The Pentagon expects to decide on changes to the dreaded tape test by next summer, potentially overhauling one of the main ways it evaluates sailors' fitness and body composition. For more than a year, the Defense Department has been working with the services on ways to better calculate the body fat composition of service members, which for a generation has mainly involved a tape test that relies on several key measurements of body size and height-weight proportions. The tape test has been widely criticized as an inaccurate method that unfairly penalizes people with certain body types. Failure to meet the services' body composition standards can result in involuntary separation. "The department is actively working closely with the services on this issue and we expect to have results we can discuss in late spring or early summer," said Pentagon spokeswoman Lt. Col. Carla Gleason. Other options could include using MRIs, water displacement or CT scans, methods that are more accurate but also more costly and gobble up more time.

**19. GI Bill changes** -- Earlier this year, the Pentagon changed the rules for troops who want to transfer their Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits to their dependents. Most notably, the new policy will end transfers for service members who have been in uniform longer than 16 years, starting in July 2019. It also immediately put an end to previous exceptions that have allowed certain service members with more than 10 years in uniform to transfer the benefit without committing to serve four more years, including those who were unable to continue serving because of mandatory retirement or high-year tenure. DoD officials have said the changes are "to more closely align the transferability benefit with its purpose as a recruiting and retention incentive." Officials said the policy change will impact about 9 percent of the total force.

The changes have been hotly contested by lawmakers and veteran advocates, and, after pushback, Defense Secretary Jim Mattis announced in September that none of the changes would apply to wounded warriors. Active-duty sailors who have earned a Purple Heart are now allowed to transfer their Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits to their family members whenever they want. More recently, Sen. Cory Booker, a New Jersey Democrat, has introduced legislation to scrap DoD's changes altogether and open GI Bill transfer to veterans who did not have dependents while on active duty. Meanwhile, long-serving sailors who want to transfer their GI Bill benefits to a spouse or child should plan on doing so before the July deadline kicks in.

[Source: NavyTimes | Geoff Ziezulewicz , Mark D. Faram , Natalie Gross , Tara Copp , Leo Shane III , Carl Prine , & David Larter, Defense News | December 31, 2018 ++]

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## **GI Bill Transferability Update 05 ► Changes You'll Need to Know About in 2019**

Earlier this year, the Pentagon changed the rules for troops who want to transfer their Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits to their dependents. Most notably, the new policy will end transfers for service members who have been in uniform longer than 16 years, starting in July 2019. It also immediately put an end to previous exceptions that have allowed certain service members with more than 10 years in uniform to transfer the benefit without committing to serve four more years, including those who were unable to continue serving because of mandatory retirement or high-year tenure. Defense Department officials have said the changes are "to more closely align the transferability benefit with its purpose as a recruiting and retention incentive."

“With these updates, the department addresses the intent of Congress and ensures the benefit is available for future service members,” DoD spokeswoman Jessica Maxwell in an email. She said the policy change will impact about 9 percent of active-duty service members, National Guardsmen and reservists. The changes have been hotly contested by lawmakers and veteran advocates, and after pushback, Defense Secretary Jim Mattis announced in September that none of the changes would apply to wounded warriors. Active-duty troops who have earned a Purple Heart for wounds in combat are now allowed to transfer their Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits to their family members whenever they want. But more recently, Sen. Cory Booker, D-N.J., has introduced legislation that would scrap the DoD’s recent changes all together and open GI Bill transfer to veterans who did not have dependents while on active duty.

In July, the Pentagon announced a new, controversial GI Bill transfer policy for troops who want to pass on the benefit to their dependents, creating a lot of concern and confusion among service members, veterans and their families. So what, exactly, are the changes? And who is — and is not — affected? We take you back to the beginning. Meanwhile, long-serving troops who want to transfer their GI Bill benefits to a spouse or child should plan on doing so before the July deadline kicks in. “We understand that it will take some time for service members and their families to decide on transferring benefits, so by giving them a one-year window, we believe it will give them ample time to gather information and make decisions,” Maxwell said. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Natalie Gross | December 31, 2018 ++]

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## UCMJ Update 04 ► Reforms Effective 1 JAN

A series of sweeping reforms and updates to the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ) kick in on Jan. 1, 2019, including the addition of some crimes, an expansion of victims' rights and standardizing the legal blood alcohol limit for drivers on some military bases. Many of the changes, which stemmed in part from Joint Chiefs of Staff recommendations made in 2013, were ordered in the 2017 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). Put into policy early this year through an executive order from President Donald Trump, they bring what Sen. John McCain, chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee during the 2017 NDAA process, called the "most significant reforms to the Uniform Code of Military Justice since it was enacted six decades ago." How will the new laws affect troops? Here's a rundown:

**Expansion of crimes** -- The law adds new acts to the list of crimes under the UCMJ and moves some crimes that had previously been considered under UCMJ's Article 134, known as the General Article, to their own article. For example,

- A new criminal offense bars sexual relations between troops in recruiting or training roles and their recruits or trainees, regardless of consent.
- An article barring "adultery" has been changed to "extramarital sexual conduct," while court-ordered legal separation has been added as an allowed defense against that charge.
- Theft carried out by credit or debit card is moving from falling under "larceny" to its own article.
- Both stalking and cyberstalking were newly added as crimes under their own articles.
- Newly considered a crime is any retaliation against those who witness or report a crime or gross waste, mismanagement or abuse of authority.

**Standardizes DUI rules** -- The new rules lower the highest acceptable blood alcohol level for those driving on a military base to .08 from .10. Most bases enforce a blood alcohol limit that is equal to the legal limit of the state in which the base is located. But in the past on bases which straddle two states, the base commander can select the enforceable limit, so long as it's no more than .10. The new .08 rule will directly affect those bases, bring these installations in line with a near nationwide limit of .08.

**New investigative authorities** -- Under the changes, military judges have the newly added ability to issue warrants ordering service providers like Facebook to disclose the contents of electronic communications, such as online

messages. Military judges also will be able to act on cases before referring them to court martial, allowing them to order wiretaps or issue subpoenas earlier in the investigative process.

**New victim protections** -- Any victim, regardless of the crime, can have an advocate or government counsel present during interviews, according to the new rules. The rights of victims also are being expanded to include a legal guardian or judge appointment representative. This means that if a victim is underage or unable to represent his or herself, victim rights, including those for an advocate, extend to those who are representing on their behalf.

#### **Changes to judges, panels**

- A new rule removes the option for the accused to pick either a panel, the military version of a jury, or a judge-only trial during a special court martial for certain crimes where the punishment is six months or less. Instead, the government will be allowed to choose which version is used in those cases. Crimes affected by this new rule could include being drunk on duty or disrespecting a noncommissioned officer, according to the Army.
- Convicted troops also will now receive what's known as segmented sentencing, similar to sentencing rules used in civilian federal courts. Under this change, the accused can request a panel to decide sentencing or allow the military judge to make a ruling. If the judge issues sentencing, each offense will now be considered separately. The judge will also rule as to whether punishment will be served concurrently.
- Another new law expands both the required panel size for special and general courts martial and the number of votes required to convict. Panel sizes will grow from three to four for special courts martial and five to eight for general courts martial, while a three-fourths vote will be required to convict. The ratio previously had been two-thirds.

[Source: Military.com | Amy Bushatz | December 31, 2018 ++]

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### **Railgun Update 03 ► China's Naval Version Ahead of Schedule**

China's futuristic electromagnetic railgun may already be the most powerful cannon to ever roam the high seas — ahead of schedule. In June, a U.S. intelligence assessment estimated that the Chinese military planned on fielding its own version of the electromagnetic railgun on naval vessels as early as 2025, far outstripping the Pentagon's truncated efforts to develop its own version of the much-hyped supergun. Now, new photos appear to show the railgun perched on the bow of its test ship at sea.



This is clearly the Haiyang Shan (right), the same Type 072III-class landing ship that was spotted in January 2018 docked at the Wuchang shipyard (left) in China's central Hubei province, the largest of the People's Liberation Army Navy's inland shipyards and a major production hub for the country's conventional submarines. The Chinese railgun was first developed in 2011 and tested in 2014, but a People's Liberation Army-run news outlet claimed in February that the Chinese navy had achieved a "breakthrough" during sea trials for the new railgun. Indeed, the June U.S.

intelligence assessment suggests the supergun underwent trials even earlier than the PLA said, with initial tests underway as early as December 2017.

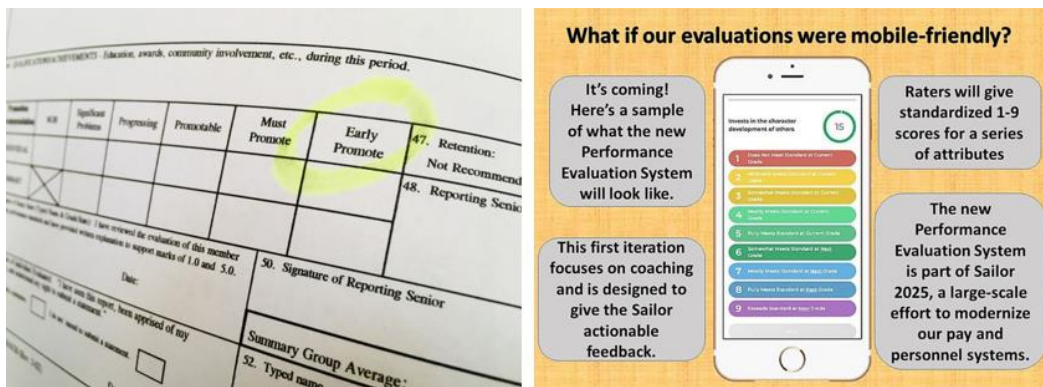
Meanwhile, the Office of Naval Research was still trying to figure out how to fire multi-shot salvos with its version of the railgun amid budget challenges and changing research and development priorities within the Pentagon. As of now, the U.S. Navy has yet to successfully mount the railgun aboard a naval platform, although the service is reportedly integrating the necessary infrastructure to power the system in its next class of large surface combatant warships. But in terms of actually developing an operational shipboard prototype, things may be looking up for the Navy. The 2019 National Defense Authorization Act included an additional \$20 million for Innovative Naval Prototypes Advanced Technology Development (0603801N) explicitly to accelerate the development of a shipboard tactical demonstrator, well beyond the \$15 million recommended by Rep. Jim Langevin, a Democrat from Rhode Island and co-chair of the Congressional Directed Energy Caucus, in last year's NDAA to help the railgun make the transition from shore to ship.

When taken with the additional \$20 million allocated in the 2019 NDAA for the Army's distinct railgun efforts, this suggests that the Pentagon hasn't totally given up hope of fielding the supergun despite existing obstacles. "With China and Russia challenging our technological superiority, we cannot just play defense," said Langevin of the defense budget back in May 2018. "Instead, we must promote and accelerate the adoption of game-changing technologies including hypersonics, directed energy, and applications of artificial intelligence." This is a good sign for the future of the Navy's powerful supergun, true. But with the Haiyang Shan prowling the high seas — and tensions between the U.S and Chinese navies at a boiling point — this funding may simply be too little, too late. [Source: Task & Purpose | Jared Keller | December 29, 2018 ++]

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## Navy Evals ► New Criteria

The Navy's new annual performance evaluation will be missing several exclamation points, lots of capital letters and a rating block system that some sailors said allows lesser performers to advance because they aren't being compared broadly enough with their peers. The Navy's Performance Evaluation Transformation will scrap a written comments section where phrases like **\*\*\*ROCKSTAR SAILOR WITH UNSURPASSED TECHNICAL KNOW-HOW!!!!\*\*\*** have become boilerplate, and not just for actual rock-star sailors.



The block (left) indicating whether sailors should receive an "early promote" or a lesser designation when ranked against their immediate peers is going away under plans for a new evaluation system for sailors. A Navy Personnel Command graphic (right) displays a planned 9-point ranking system for sailor evaluations on a new mobile app.

It will also eliminate a “forced distribution” system that sailors say can stymie promotions for outstanding sailors who work with outstanding peers, while favoring an average sailor with little competition in their workplace. Sailors will be compared across the entire Navy within their pay grades and ratings using a “specific defined standard,” said

Capt. John Sedlock, the transformation lead at Navy Personnel Command in Millington, Tenn. Sailor scores under the new system “provide a more realistic measurement of the Sailor’s performance and broader differentiation, not just how they rank against peers within the command,” Sedlock said.

Sailors who discussed the changes with Stars and Stripes generally welcomed them, but with some reservations about the system replacing it, which is still in testing. Another previously announced aspect of the new system – input from subordinates and peers within the annual evaluations — drew a mix of reviews, as did a smartphone app that allows sailors to test some of the program’s new coaching and self-assessment features. “The evaluation system needed to break away from the word game (making mediocre sound fantastic and good leaders sound bad because of personal vendettas, conflicts, and leadership differences), forced distribution for seniority benefit, and writing styles that may or may not grasp your ratings attention at a board,” Chief Petty Officer Wendell Harrison, a boatswain’s mate from Sigonella, Italy, said in an email.

However, commands have over the years adapted to the hyperbole of the 18-line maximum, written comment section known as Block 43, often learning to read between the lines. The block also gives commands an opportunity to learn what impact a sailor made beyond numeric values, said Petty Officer 1st Class Sylvia Nealy, stationed in Bahrain. “On the flip side, sailors will NOT have the opportunity to add false and unnecessary ‘fluff’ in their evaluation while exaggerating the truth,” Nealy wrote in an email. Nealy said the end of forced distribution will give high performers a better shot at promotion. The current system includes a block where sailors receive either an “early promote,” a “must promote,” “promotable” or a lesser mark. The top 20 percent of sailors in a department, which may have only one sailor or dozens, generally are eligible for the early promote ranking.

Under the current system, sailors do not have “the opportunity to move up for promotion if a previous Sailor from the command “already” has the EP and the command “continues” to assist this Sailor,” regardless of whether the sailor deserved the early promote, Nealy said. The new evaluation will include an expanded value statement section, which grades sailors based on professional knowledge, work quality, military bearing and other areas. The 5-point ranking will now include a 9-point scale that will judge whether a sailor is doing the job below, at or above the standards of their rank. Evaluators will be timed in their responses, “to provide an instinctual assessment of their qualities and is based on proven behavioral science studies that indicate an initial response is usually the most candid and accurate,” Sedlock said.

Chief Petty Officer Matthew Herndon, an administration yeoman from Naval Air Station Sigonella, Italy, tried out the new system by completing an online self-assessment. Herndon liked the new system’s timed inputs, but wasn’t impressed by the new coaching system, which begins with a self-assessment. “The new system doesn’t describe how sailors can fix (weaknesses listed by the sailor) nor gives insight on why the things they’re doing good or things they need to work on is good for them ... or vice versa,” Herndon said.

Petty Officer 2nd Class Richard White, a personnel specialist in Bahrain, says he likes the 9-point rating scale and the incorporation of peer and subordinate input, which allows for the inclusion of “strengths and weaknesses that may not be noticed or voiced in regular evaluations.” But White also expressed concern for potential delays with so many inputs affecting a timely completion. Some expressed concern that subordinates might not have a complete picture of a sailor’s duties or might input during the coaching phase to further a grudge; however, any such ranking would only be part of a larger coaching report. Others said subordinate input during the coaching phase would be a benefit. “We as sailors and leaders can all make improvements to ourselves, and the ones who will not shy away from letting you know that are the junior leaders,” Harrison said.

The evaluation overhaul team is now conducting its third test phase of the system, which includes 10,000 participants from 140 commands, and is primarily focused on the coaching system. Sedlock added that the biggest challenge for the new system is the expected resistance to change around the fleet. “This endeavor requires a fundamental change in culture where we embrace the delivery and receipt of honest and candid feedback that enables us all to better achieve our optimal levels of performance,” Sedlock said. The overhaul is part of a larger push from

Navy leadership called Sailor 2025, an initiative designed to improve pay, personnel and career management systems, Navy officials said. [Source: Stars & Stripes | Joshua Karsten & Erik Slavin | December 31, 2018 ++]

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## **Mk 13 Mod 7 Sniper Rifle ► Fielding To Begin in 2019**

Earlier in 2018 the U.S. Marine Corps announced it was finally ready to replace the Vietnam-era M40 sniper rifle with the new Mk 13 Mod 7. Marine scout snipers have been carrying versions of the M40 for decades and have long complained of the need to engage targets beyond 1,000 meters. The M40 sniper rifle has been in service since 1966. The Corps answered those complaints by selecting the sniper rifle currently employed by elite Marine Raiders, the Mk 13 Mod 7.



Marines with I Marine Expeditionary Force out on the West Coast have already started to get their hands on the new rifle. Fielding is expected to continue with II MEF and III MEF in 2019. The Corps says the new sniper rifle increases the range of Marine snipers by nearly 300 meters and can hit targets beyond 1,000 yards. The new sniper rifle will come with the powerful Nightforce ATACR 5-25x56 F1 Advanced Tactical Riflescope. [Source: MarineCorpsTimes | Shawn Snow | December 28, 2018 ++]

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## **Navy Terminology, Jargon & Slang ► Baby Shit thru BAM**

Every profession has its own jargon and the Navy is no exception. Since days of yore the military in general, and sailors in particular, have often had a rather pithy (dare say 'tasteless'?) manner of speech. That may be changing somewhat in these politically correct times, but to Bowdlerize the sailor's language represented here would be to deny its rich history. The traditions and origins remain. While it attempted to present things with a bit of humor, if you are easily offended this may not be for you. You have been warned.

Note: 'RN' denotes Royal Navy usage. Similarly, RCN = Royal Canadian Navy, RAN = Royal Australian Navy, RM = Royal Marines, RNZN = Royal New Zealand Navy, UK = general usage in militaries of the former British Empire

**Baby Shit** – Yellowish, evil-smelling grease.

**Back Afty** - (RN) Anything to do with the nuclear power plant or the people who operate it. See NUKE.

**Back in Battery** - Originally an artillery term for a gun which has completed its recoil/postfiring cycle and is ready to fire again. Common usage now is 'ready to go,' or recovered. Also seen as 'Back to Battery.' "I set my hair on fire last night, but five hours' rack time and I'm back in battery."

**Backing** – (1) Operating astern propulsion machinery. (2) A change of wind direction in the counter-clockwise direction (as one looks into the wind).

**Bag** - (1) Get, or collect. "Let's go bag some traps." (2) Stop, or leave. "Let's bag this project."

**Ball (the)** - The glowing image projected by the FRESNEL LENS. Gives glideslope reference. Short for 'meatball,' the term for the red ball of light seen in the old mirror landing system which predated the fresnel lens system.

**Ballbuster** – (1) Something difficult. (2) A sexually teasing woman.

**Balls (or Four Balls)** – Midnight, which in the military's 24-hour timekeeping system may be written as "0000," although writing midnight as "2400" is perhaps more common.

**Balls Out** – Refers to an early design of engine governor, in which a pair of masses (balls) spun at an increasing rate as engine speed increased. Centrifugal acceleration threw the masses outward, so "balls out" refers to maximum possible engine speed.

**Balls to Four** – Four to midnight watch.

**Balls to the wall** – Maximum speed, or maximum effort.

**BAM** – Originally this term meant Bad-Ass Marine. It has since come to mean Broad-Ass Marine, i.e. a woman Marine. See also BOSNIA.

[Source: <http://hazegray.org/faq/slang1.htm> | January 15, 2019 ++]

## Warships That Will Change The Future ► BNS Riachuelo (S40)



With such a huge maritime border, it is no wonder that Brazil sees it in its best interest to have a strong and formidable navy. This navy, also has submarines. They aren't used as a part of a nuclear triad, but in an effort to combat people smuggling illicit substances out of the country. Cartels and smugglers have their own submarines now, necessitating the use of the Oberon class BNS Riachuelo.

BNS Riachuelo (S40) is the lead ship of the emerging four-strong class of diesel-electric attack submarines for the modern Brazilian Navy. The vessel underwent construction at the new Itaguai Shipyard in Brazil to later (by 2020) be joined by her sister boats Humaita (S41), Tonelero (S42) and Anjo Stura (S43). The Riachuelo and her sisters are born from the French-originated Scorpene-class which also forms the basis of several attack boats for the Chilean, Indian



and Malaysian navies. The Brazilian offering is a 75-foot long vessel capable of 21 knots when submerged (approximately 12 knots when surfaced) through a 220-cell battery propulsion and auxiliary systems arrangement. As with other hybrid diesel-electric designs, Riachuelo utilizes its diesel power plants for surface travel and its electric system for submerged travel, surfacing (at about snorkel depth) to recharge oxygen stores, expel deadly built-up gasses and recharge its battery cells.

The propulsion system includes 4 x MTU 12V396 SE84 series diesel engines coupled with Kermount Industries 580kW generators. Sensors and processing are made up of an acoustic surveillance system, digital-assisted attack, and dedicated analysis and monitoring hardware. The sonar system was provided by Thales. As an attack submarine, the boat showcases six torpedo tubes cleared to fire the widely-accepted 21" torpedo as well as the French SM-39 "Exocet" Block 39 Mod.2 anti-ship missile. The torpedo of choice is the French "F21" model series, a dual-role torpedo weapon featuring high speeds (up to 50 knots) and extended ranges (up to 50 kilometers). The SM-39 missile was initially launched within a torpedo-type body surrounding the actual missile. This body makes its way to the surface and releases the missile proper, the missile's motor then engaging and leading itself to its intended target.

The arrival of Riachuelo represents a step forward in Brazilian power projection in the South American region. Additionally, the completion of a viable shipyard for the construction of warships will assist in making Brazil a self-sustained military naval power in this part of the world.

### SPECIFICATIONS

Unless otherwise noted the presented statistics below pertain to the base BNS Riachuelo (S40) design. Common measurements, and their respective conversions, are shown when possible.

CREW: 31

LENGTH: 218 feet (66.45 meters)

BEAM: 20 feet (6.10 meters)

DRAUGHT: 19 feet (5.79 meters)

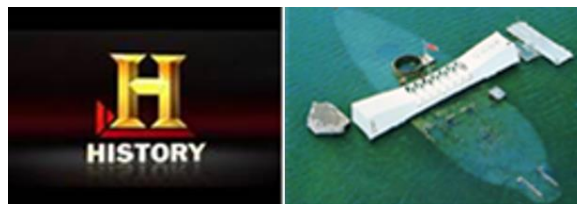
DISPLACEMENT (SURFACE): 1,668 tons

PROPULSION: Diesel-Electric Propulsion; Battery service for submerged travel; 1 x Shaft.

SPEED (SURFACE): 20 knots (23 miles-per-hour)

RANGE: 5,648 nautical miles (6,500 miles; 10,461 kilometers)

### \* Military History \*



### Davis Gun ► Navy's Attempt to Build A Flying Cannon

In a peculiar contravention of American capitalist principles, the U.S. Navy established its own aircraft production facility — the Naval Aircraft Factory — in Philadelphia in October 1917. Its first product was the Curtiss H-16 flying boat, 150 of which were produced under license. By the end of March 1918, NAF-built H-16s were flying anti-submarine patrols over European waters. Apart from the license-produced Liberty Engine de Havilland DH-4, the H-16 was the only American-built aircraft to serve in the American Expedition-ary Forces over Europe during World War I.

It was not long, however, before the NAF initiated development of an original aircraft design Designated the N-1, it was the first Navy airplane designed specifically for the attack role, as well as one of the most unusual aircraft ever developed for that service. To understand why it looked the way it did requires an understanding of the weapon it was designed to employ. The Davis Gun, the world's first successful recoilless cannon, fired a shell from its muzzle while simultaneously firing a charge of lead balls and grease out the rear of the gun to cancel out the recoil. Designed by Navy Cmdr. Cleland Davis in 1910, it came in bores of 40mm, 62mm and 76.2mm, firing shells of 2, 6 and 12 pounds, respectively.

Since the Davis Gun was a single-shot weapon, a Lewis machine gun was frequently attached to it to aid in lining up on the target before firing the shell. During WWI Britain experimented with mounting the Davis Gun in the noses of various aircraft. It briefly appeared on the Handley Page O/100 bomber and the Curtiss HS-2L flying boat for potential use by the Royal Naval Air Service against submarines. In May 1916, Robey Company Ltd. began work on a large single-engine biplane designed by J.A. Peters, with two Davis gunners perched in nacelles on the upper wing to attack Zeppelins.



**Lewis machine gun and a 61B Davis Gun mounted on HS-1 flying boat (left), mounted on F-5-L, Naval Aircraft Factory, Philadelphia, (center), and N-1 Seaplane commander Stone and Davis Gun at Naval Aircraft Factory, Philadelphia (right).**

On its first test flight in May 1917, however, the Robey-Peters Davis Gun Carrier crashed into a local mental hospital. The pilot was unhurt, but Robey apparently considered this a bad omen and burned the prototype. Another unusual aircraft intended for anti-Zeppelin duties, the Supermarine P.B.31E quadruplane had a glazed enclosed cabin accommodating up to five men and a sleeping berth for off-duty crewmen. Powered by two 100-hp Anzani 9-cylinder radial engines, it was intended to stay up for nine to 18 hours, waiting to intercept Zeppelins with its Davis gun or two Lewis machine guns atop the upper wing. First flown in February 1917, it was promptly rejected because its 60 mph speed and 60-minute climb to 10,000 feet made it slower than its intended prey.

After the United States entered the war in April 1917, the Navy also became interested in using the Davis Gun as an airborne weapon against U-boats. But whereas the British had adapted large maritime-patrol flying boats to carry the gun, the NAF built an aircraft specifically for that purpose. Designed by Jerome Hunsaker, the N-1 was a large, two-seat, single-engine pusher floatplane powered by a single 330-hp Liberty engine. Although the pusher configuration was obsolescent by that time, it was considered necessary in this case in order to provide a roomy cockpit in the nose from which the gunner would have a clear field of fire for his bulky Davis Gun.

The N-1 was a clumsy-looking biplane with the upper wing mounted flush with the top of the fuselage and the tail surfaces supported by a latticework of four longerons and bracing struts in order to clear the propeller. The lower wing was mounted well below the fuselage, and the twin main floats were attached to a spindly set of struts well below that. The gunner stood in the bow of the nacelle, an arrangement that provided him with a perfect view and field of fire. The N-1 was 37 feet 8 inches long, with a 51-foot wingspan. Its ceiling was 7,800 feet, and while the maximum speed is not specified, it could not have been much above 100 mph. The N-1 looked both top-heavy and flimsy, so it's hardly surprising that in May 1918 the first prototype was damaged beyond repair when its landing gear collapsed as it was about to take off. Thus postponed, the N-1's first flight was achieved by the second prototype on 27 JUL.

Two more N-1s were built and flown after the war, in July 1919. Reports of the resulting flight trials indicate that while the Davis Gun mounting worked well enough, the aircraft itself was unsatisfactory. The engine overheated

frequently while taxiing, and takeoffs were difficult when the N-1 was loaded with more than a half-hour's worth of fuel, which was clearly insufficient for its proposed mission of anti-submarine patrol. Consequently, the N-1 was deemed operationally useless, and both the aircraft and the concept were rejected. The NAF continued to produce aircraft, most famously the N3N biplane basic trainer of World War II, more familiarly known to naval aviation cadets as the "Yellow Peril," of which about 1,000 were built. In May 1956, the Naval Aircraft Factory became the Naval Air Engineering Facility (Ship Installations), at which point it ceased airplane production and development activities. [Source: Aviation History Magazine | Robert Guttman | December 27, 2018 ++]

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## **Project Blue Book ► The Air Force's Covert UFO Investigation is Brought to TV**

In the words of X-Files-assigned FBI Special Agent Fox Mulder: "I want to believe." Once upon a time, maybe the U.S. Air Force wanted to as well. In the early days of the Cold War, the skies over the continental U.S. were flush with sightings of objects that led many Americans to look to the stars for answers. The Air Force's own answer was more bureaucratic. The service began Project Blue Book in 1952 as a systematic study of unidentified flying object sightings. The project was charged with scientifically analyzing UFO data to determine whether UFOs were a national security threat.

Although it was officially terminated in December 1969, the project has captured the imagination of science fiction fans ever since its findings were publicly disclosed. Now, a new generation of UFO researchers may be spawned with the airing of the History Channel's new TV series "Project Blue Book." The series premiered 8 JAN, and will run for ten episodes in the first season. History Channel described the new show as being "based on the true, top-secret investigations into [UFOs] and related phenomena conducted by the United States Air Force." In the show, as well as real life, University of Chicago-trained astronomer Dr. Joseph Allen Hynek is recruited from his college professorship to serve as the scientific adviser to the clandestine Project Blue Book.

Hynek also consulted for the Air Force on two earlier UFO investigations known as Project Sign and Project Grudge, which both began and ended prior to Blue Book. In the show, he and his partner, Air Force Capt. Michael Quinn, are summoned to investigate UFO sightings across the country. The duo quickly find, though, that some encounters cannot be easily dismissed. The series diverges from historical fact when Hynek begins to suspect that he has been duped by the government into a conspiracy to cover up the truth. The show is set against the backdrop of the Cold War and the rise of atomic weapons. Each episode in the series draws from the source material of actual Project Blue Book case files, "blending UFO theories with authentic historical events from one of the most mysterious eras in United States history," according to the History Channel.

Still, there is some basis for Hynek's mistrust of the Air Force. In his 1977 book titled "The UFO Experience," Hynek chronicled a personal shift away from his role as a UFO debunker, the role which he said the Air Force expected him to perform. Over time, Hynek came to believe that while a great many UFO sightings could be explained as normal phenomena misidentified by untrained eyes, some cases could not be reconciled with known scientific knowledge. Before the service shut the project down, he reported that he believed UFO sightings deserved more rigorous scrutiny, and that the surplus of reliable witnesses, including pilots and high-ranking military personnel, indicated that there was more than what meets the eye when it came to UFOs. Regardless of his later beliefs, Project Blue Book officially concluded on a more skeptical note. Thousands of UFO reports were filed and studied as part of the project. In its final report on Blue Book, the Air Force summarized its findings as follows:

- No UFO reported, investigated and evaluated by the Air Force was ever an indication of threat to our national security;
- There was no evidence submitted to or discovered by the Air Force that sightings categorized as "unidentified" represented technological developments or principles beyond the range of modern scientific knowledge; and

- There was no evidence indicating that sightings categorized as “unidentified” were extraterrestrial vehicles.

All Air Force documentation pertaining to Project Blue Book was eventually transferred to the Modern Military Branch, National Archives and Records Service, and is available for public analysis. “Since the termination of Project Blue Book, nothing has occurred that would support a resumption of UFO investigations by the Air Force,” the service said in an archived fact sheet on the report from July 2012. “Given the current environment of steadily decreasing defense budgets, it is unlikely the Air Force would become involved in such a costly project in the foreseeable future.”

Funny enough, though, the U.S. Defense Department’s intelligence arm was actually involved in UFO research at that time. In December 2017, the Pentagon acknowledged for the first time that a program was established in 2007 to investigate service members’ reports of unidentified flying objects. That project didn’t end until 2012, though some officials speculated that it is ongoing, according to the New York Times. The project, called the Advanced Aerospace Threat Identification Program, had the backing of then-Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid as well as former Sens. Ted Stevens (R-AK) and Daniel Inouye (D-HI).

“I’m not embarrassed or ashamed or sorry I got this thing going,” Reid said after the project became public in 2017. “I think it’s one of the good things I did in my congressional service. I’ve done something that no one has done before. One of the most famous of the publicly disclosed videos from Reid’s pet UFO project involved footage taken by U.S. Navy fighter jets as they tracked an unknown object maneuvering in inexplicable ways off the coast of southern California in 2004. [see <https://youtu.be/wxVRg7LLaQA>]. The existence of these programs doesn’t necessarily mean that UFOs are extraterrestrial in nature. But they do show that the government takes unidentified aerial objects seriously, perhaps worried about the ever-growing capabilities of near peer adversaries — or far. [Source: AirForceTimes | Kyle Rempfer | January 10, 2019 ++]

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## **Black-Eyed Peas ► Why Southerners Eat Them on New Year’s**

It was the winter of 1864 when the devil went down to Georgia. William Tecumseh Sherman issued special field order no. 120 which commanded his soldiers to forage liberally. The 60,000 man army would forcefully live off the people of the South; foragers rode off in all directions looking for loot. According to Sherman’s own estimates, his armies seized over 5,000 horses, 4,000 mules and 13,000 head of cattle, while confiscating 9.5 million pounds of corn and 10.5 million pounds of livestock fodder.

Unfortunately, there was much more involved than an entire army stealing food from homesteads. A scorched earth policy existed to ensure military, as well as, industrial targets, infrastructure and civilian property were destroyed to disrupt the Confederacy’s economy, transportation networks and ability to wage war. Sherman decided that the time had come to widen the pain with what he called the hard hand of war to include Southern civilians. In the same way he later targeted Indian villages- Southern towns, cities and homesteads were laid waste. The horses, cows, pigs and chickens were stolen while Southerners found their homesteads, barns and fields completely devastated and burned to the ground.

Originally planted for livestock, northerners considered black-eyed peas, often called field or cow peas, as not fit for human consumption. Since the Union Army already stole all the livestock, there was no need to take the time nor trouble to destroy the animal food. As Sherman’s troops stole or laid waste to all other crops, luck had it that complete fields of black-eyed peas were left standing. The little black-eyed pea soon became a crucial staple for Southerners to survive. So this is how the Southern Tradition began. Every New Year’s Eve our people still eat a healthy dose of black-eyed peas for good luck...and to always remember. [Source: Identity Dixie | Tex Wood | December 31, 2018 ++]

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## War Memorials ► Patriots Peace Memorial, Louisville Kentucky



Patriots Peace Memorial is dedicated to active duty, reserve and National Guard military personnel, from the Kentucky - Indiana region, who have died in the line of duty, under conditions other than combat or hostile action. To date there have been 452 patriots enshrined within the memorial's walls. Names are inscribed on glass plates, which are installed in the wall in place of concrete blocks which are removed in the process. Although the memorial is owned by the City of Louisville, Kentucky, it is maintained by the Patriots Peace Memorial Committee, Inc, a totally volunteer non-profit organization. Enshrinement ceremonies are conducted annually on Memorial Day, with the active participation of active duty, reserve and veterans, as well as families of those being enshrined. The memorial was installed November 11, 2002 at 3742 Upper River Road, Louisville, Kentucky 40207. Refer to <http://www.patriotspeacememorial.org> for more info on the memorial.

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## USS Indianapolis (CA-35) Update 03 ► The Final Chapter Video

In July 1945, the USS Indianapolis has just delivered “Little Boy” – the atomic bomb destined for Hiroshima – when she is sunk by a Japanese sub. 300 sailors go down with her, and the 900 survivors drift for four and a half days, battling the sun, thirst, sharks, and their own fear. Ultimately, only 316 of them are pulled from the sea alive. PBS has put together a 1hr 25 min special at <https://www.pbs.org/video/uss-indianapolis-the-final-chapter-aabbsw> titled “**USS Indianapolis: The Final Chapter**” which is available for viewing until 5 FEB. It addresses in video the events leading up to the sinking of the ship, the search thereafter for its remains, and recounts of survivors’ harrowing battle for survival. [Source: NavyTimes | J.D. Simkins | January 9, 2019 ++]

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## Operation Magic Carpet ► Bringing Home the 8 Million Boys After WWII

After victory had been declared in Europe and the Second World War had come to an end with the surrender of Japan there remained the enormous task of bringing home the thousands of military personnel scattered across the globe.

Under the codename Operation Magic Carpet, the efforts to repatriate the newly demobbed soldiers involved as much military planning as many of the battles of the preceding war years.

In December 1945, at the start of the operation, almost 8 million Allied military personnel were waiting to begin their journey back home. During the 14-months of Operation Magic Carpet, an average of 435,000 military personnel were being transported back every month. The record for a single ship was set by the aircraft carrier *Saratoga* which repatriated a total of 29,204 soldiers. Among the British aircraft carriers, *HMS Glory* made one of the longest voyages including one from Manila in the Philippines to Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, a journey of more than 6,000 miles.



Soldiers returning home on the *USS General Harry Taylor* in August 1945 (left), hammocks crammed into available spaces aboard the *USS Intrepid* (left center), bunks aboard the Army transport *SS Pennant* (right center), and troops performing a lifeboat drill onboard the *Queen Mary* in December 1944, before Operation Magic Carpet (right)

The operation was launched in June 1945, but planning began well beforehand. The War Shipping Administration was in charge and had started planning as far back as 1943. It understood the scale and complexity of the task and the need to bring servicemen and women home as quickly as possible. The operation also involved returning German and Italian POWs to Europe. Around half a million POWs were repatriated in the course of Operation Magic Carpet. In September 1945, the Pacific phase of the operation began to bring back those who were stationed in South East Asia and territories in the Pacific Ocean. Four battleships accompanied by two aircraft carriers set out from Tokyo Bay for Okinawa to collect the soldiers of the U.S. Tenth Army and ferry them back home across the Pacific

In total around 370 vessels were involved in Operation Magic Carpet. These included aircraft carriers, battleships, and destroyers. Even Luxury passenger ships were drafted in to help with the effort. The *Queen Elizabeth* and *Queen Mary*, which had been called into service at the beginning of WWII, and had swapped their usual bold colors for drab grey camouflage. This caused the *Queen Mary* to be referred to as the “Grey Ghost”. These massive ships made several voyages across the Atlantic to bring the troops home. Warships, especially those which had been designed primarily as destroyers and aircraft carriers, had to be adapted to make them more suitable for the task of carrying a large number of passengers. Conditions were certainly not luxurious with soldiers packed into bunks, some as many as five tiers high in order to get as many home as quickly as possible.

In September 1945 there were 2,000,000 American army personnel eligible to be relieved of their wartime duties and waiting to be returned home. As the year wore on hopes were raised of getting the troops home in time to spend Christmas with their families. The task (sometimes referred to as Operation Santa Clause) was never going to be easy and was hindered further by heavy storms which delayed travel by sea.

Once the American troops returned to their homeland they faced further delays crossing the continent to reach their homes. Their initial destination was one of the many repatriation centers along the West Coast. Although not “home” these centers provided temporary accommodation while officials ensured that all the paperwork to release the service men and women from their duties was processed correctly. While it must have been hard to be so close to home yet still so far away, many were just glad to be back on American soil. To make matters worse, there were traffic jams across the country as well as train delays of between 6 and 12 hours. In addition to the delays, there were simply not enough trains to accommodate all the soldiers trying to make their way back home.



**U.S. soldiers recently liberated from Japanese POW camps (left), hangar of the USS Wasp during the operation (left center), the crowded flight deck of the USS Saratoga (right center), and overjoyed troops returning home on the battleship USS Texas (right)**

On 24th December 1945 almost all the passengers (94%) travelling in trains from the west coast were recently released veterans. Those who did not make it back to their own homes were offered hospitality by locals living near the repatriation centers. The soldiers were touched by the generosity of strangers who opened their homes to them, sharing their Christmas dinner. Others ate the Christmas dinner provided in the separation centers while others celebrated the holiday still on board the ships that had brought them, now docked in the harbor. Although they were still not back with their families, in the words of one returning soldier, just being back on American soil was the best Christmas present he could ask for.

Those attempting the journey home were also overwhelmed by the generosity and support shown to them by their fellow countrymen. There were impromptu parties thrown for them in towns where the trains had to make a stopover. There were stories of civilians giving up their own places on the trains so that the returning veterans could travel in their place. Because trains were overcrowded and many soldiers were unable to get tickets, local truckers and taxi drivers stepped in, volunteering to take servicemen and women home even although it meant they would miss spending time with their own families at Christmas. A taxi driver from Los Angeles took a group of six veterans all the way to their home in Chicago – a journey of 2,000 miles – while another transported his passengers from LA to The Bronx and Manhattan. Both drivers accepted only the cost of the gas they had used for the journey as payment.

In total, there were over 8 million Allied soldiers waiting to be brought home from their stations in the European Asian and Pacific Areas and the operation to return them all took eighteen months to complete. The European phase of Operation was completed by February 1946, but it took until September 1946 to complete the final Pacific phase. As a whole, it was a massive operation made possible by a great deal of careful planning and helped by the goodwill of civilians who appreciated the sacrifices the returning troops had made on their behalf.

Author's note: Operation Magic Carpet is also used to refer to an operation between June 1949 and September 1950 that brought 49,000 Yemenite Jews to the new state of Israel. This was an entirely separate operation.

[Source: War History Online | Elly Farelly | Jun 29, 2016

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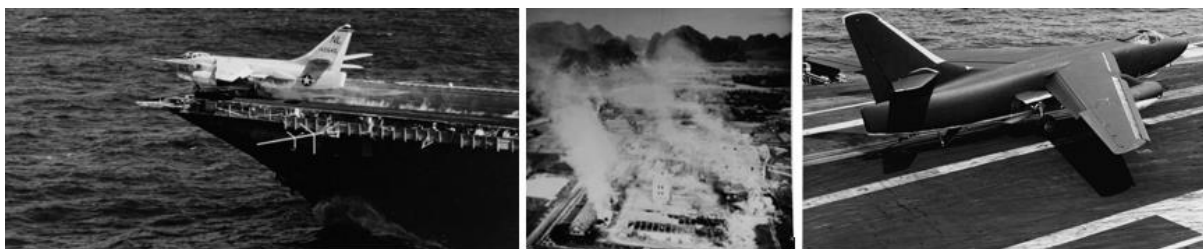
### **Carrier Exchange Pilot ► USAF Pilot Assigned to USN Carrier Ops**

In 1964 U.S. Air Force fighter pilot Capt. Ron Williams was selected for a prestigious two-year U.S. Navy exchange assignment with Heavy Attack Squadron 8 (VAH-8). He flew 110 combat missions in the Douglas A-3B Skywarrior, the heaviest and among the longest-serving aircraft to operate continuously from U.S. carriers. Nicknamed the “Whale” for its sheer size, the Skywarrior also earned another moniker among its three-man crews based on the difficulty of landing it on carriers, its lack of ejection seats and previous A3D designation: “All 3 Dead.” Williams vividly recalls several harrowing missions during his assignment. The first in March 1965, while en route to Yankee Station off North Vietnam, he was in an A-3B being “hot refueled” with an engine idling on USS Midway, one of the smallest carriers

in the fleet. A perfect landing in the Skywarrior had brought his right wingtip to within just 40 feet of Midway's island and three feet from parked aircraft.

The second was an unexpected launch order when Williams confidently told his two-man crew, "No way they're going to launch us, ceiling and visibility are hovering at minimums and it's getting dark." He admitted to feeling somewhat dismayed when Primary Flight Control commanded, "Launch the duty Whale to refuel." (Among the Skywarrior's many functions was serving as a refueling tanker.) The loaded A-3B was catapulted from 0 to 150 knots in 217 feet, and entered the cloud cover at 100 feet. Visibility appeared to be less than a half-mile. Reaching his assigned 5,000 feet, Williams was told the last jet had landed and instructed to immediately dump 30,000 pounds of fuel, keeping 5,000 pounds for a maximum 50,000-pound trap weight. Radar vectored his Whale onto final at 600 feet, then radioed, "You're at a half mile — go ball."

Williams looked up from his instruments. Nothing. Back on the gauges, he tried to hold the same heading and descent rate. At just 1/8th of a mile and 100 feet he finally saw the dim red "meatball." It was perfectly lined up with the green datum lights and deck center, and he trapped on the no. 3 wire. "I walked to our squadron ready room with weak, shaking legs and heart pumping 1,000 rpm," he said. "Most of the pilots had watched my approach on the PLAT [Pilot Landing Aid Television] and were waiting for me." Several of them grinned and one said, "Hey, Air Force, how'd you like night, no bingo, open-water carrier operations?" As a typical USAF fighter pilot, Williams calmly answered, "No sweat. Any chance the skipper could schedule us for a second launch?" "I don't know what I'd have done if he'd said, 'Sure.'"



An A-3 Skywarrior (left) is launched from the flight deck of the aircraft carrier Coral Sea in the Gulf of Tonkin in early 1972. A supply dump in North Vietnam (center) burns after a strike by planes from the aircraft carrier Midway on May 28, 1965. A-3B Skywarrior (right) of VAH-4 prepares to release arresting cable after landing aboard the carrier Kitty Hawk while the warship sailed the South China Sea on April 13, 1966. The plane has been camouflaged for operations in Southeast Asia.

The third, his most memorable, was on return from a solo night mission to drop a dozen 500-pounders on an enemy early-warning radar site northeast of Haiphong Harbor. Ceiling and visibility had dropped to minimums, and the sea was extremely rough, causing the carrier deck to rapidly pitch up and down. Experienced Douglas A-4 and McDonnell F-4 pilots were bolstering: missing the carrier's arresting cables and going around for another attempt. "So, here I was, a fledgling USAF pilot flying his huge, ungainly Whale, hearing that my experienced USN buddies couldn't get their little birds on board," Williams commented.

Due to an inoperable air-to-air refueling system, his A-3B couldn't be refueled. Bingo fuel (military slang for the minimum fuel required for a safe return to base) was 4,500 pounds—enough to get to Da Nang with barely 1,000 pounds remaining. But, he noted, the Navy only used a USAF base as a last resort. The air boss ordered him to descend from a fuel-conserving 25,000 feet to an uneconomical 1,000 feet and orbit 30 miles from the ship. When Williams radioed that he was bingo fuel and couldn't refuel in flight, he received a "Roger" and instructions to come 10 miles closer. With 2,000 pounds remaining, he transmitted, "If I can't have an approach right now, then please launch the rescue helo and give me a bailout heading." That finally got the air boss' attention, but he cleared Williams to commence air refueling! An uncomfortable Williams again reported that his plane couldn't air refuel. This prompted a response of "Sorry. Cleared to CCA [Carrier Controlled Approach] frequency."

As Williams rolled inbound, he took a last look at the fuel gauge, and wished he hadn't. It showed less than 1,000 pounds — enough for only one approach. Midway was pitching so badly the meatball was moving quickly from full-



scale low to high. Inside a half-mile, the deck started drastically down. To get back on glide path without building airspeed, Williams did a big no-no: He pulled the twin J57 throttles to idle. Spoolup to full power would take an impossible 18 seconds. "I felt sure the ship would act like always and wallow around in the bottom of the swell long enough to land," Williams recalled. "The only other option was to hope we had enough fuel to get high enough to bail out."

He pulled the yoke back in an effort to arrest his rate of descent, which only magnified it. "It looked like I was going to plant 23 tons of aluminum and the three of us in the 'spud locker,'" he said. "The deck was rising fast as we hit, and I do mean hit, the deck short of the no. 4 wire, and probably with 9 or more Gs. The impact knocked all three of us unconscious. Two things saved us: first, the A-3B's strength; second was my idle rpm allowed the airspeed to decrease so much that there wasn't the energy to bounce the tailhook over the wires."

When Williams regained consciousness, a glance at the fuel gauge showed it flickering a hair above 0 pounds. "Such a landing normally would have been most severely graded by the LSO [landing signal officer]," he noted. "However, when LSO Stu Corey entered our ready room, all he did was give me a big hug!" When Williams left Midway, he said, "I was certified as a Centurion with a minimum of 100 arrested A-3B landings on one carrier — and I was a half-inch shorter." He would go on to earn his colonel's eagles in the Air Force Reserve, and later retired from TWA as a 747 captain with 28,000 hours in his logbook. [Source: Aviation History Magazine | Chester Peterson Jr. | December 28, 2018 ++]

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## **Emancipation Proclamation** ► **A Strategic "War Measure" to Beat the Confederacy**

On New Year's morning of 1863, President Abraham Lincoln hosted a three-hour reception in the White House. That afternoon, Lincoln slipped into his office and - without fanfare - signed a document that changed America forever. It was the Emancipation Proclamation, decreeing "that all persons held as slaves" within the rebellious Southern states "are, and henceforward shall be, free." However, the proclamation did not immediately free any of the nation's nearly 4 million slaves. The biggest impact was that for the first time, ending slavery became a goal of the Union in the bloody civil war with the Confederacy.



**The first reading of the Emancipation Proclamation before President Abraham Lincoln's Cabinet**

The news sent shock waves throughout the divided country. Southern newspapers responded with outrage. Lincoln's action was "the most startling political crime, the most stupid political blunder yet known in American history," the Richmond Enquirer thundered. "The Southern people have now only to choose between victory and death." In the North, the Cleveland Morning Leader exulted "The day of Jubilee has arrived, and the all-important words 'Be Free' have been spoken." The New York Times declared "President Lincoln's proclamation marks an era in history, not only of this war, but of the world." But some Northern whites opposed fighting for the freedom of black

slaves. The Cincinnati Enquirer said Lincoln's proclamation represented the "complete overthrow of the Constitution he swore to protect and defend."

Free African-Americans in the North celebrated the news. "We are all liberated by this proclamation," said the noted orator and former slave Frederick Douglass. "Everybody is liberated. The white man is liberated, the black man is liberated, the brave men now fighting the battles of their country against rebels and traitors are now liberated." But Douglass cautioned that the proclamation was only a first step; slaves who celebrated the proclamation risked being beaten or hung. The proclamation was not a surprise. Lincoln had presented his draft of a preliminary order at a Cabinet meeting on July 22, 1862. Secretary of State William Seward suggested the president wait until after the North had scored a fresh win over Southern troops before releasing the document. On 22 SEP, a few days after Union forces claimed victory in the Battle of Antietam, Lincoln issued the preliminary proclamation. It stated that if Southern states did not surrender by Jan. 1, 1863, the president would issue a final order to make their slaves "forever free."

The fighting continued. Some doubted Lincoln would back up his threat. But on the afternoon of 1 JAN, he paused only to steady his hand before signing the final Emancipation Proclamation. "I never, in my life, felt more certain that I was doing right than I do in signing this paper," Lincoln said. "If my name goes into history, it will be for this act, and my whole soul is in it." Many abolitionists criticized Lincoln's action as too limited. The proclamation purported to free millions of slaves in the Southern states that had seceded from the Union. It exempted 850,000 slaves in Border States and parts of three Southern states that were not in rebellion. The New York Herald said of Lincoln's order: "While the proclamation leaves slavery untouched where his decree can be enforced, he emancipates slaves where his decree cannot be enforced."

While Lincoln believed freeing the slaves was the right thing to do, his proclamation was a strategic "war measure" in the battle to defeat the Confederacy. The proclamation allowed black men to join the Union military forces. Eventually, nearly 200,000 African Americans fought for the North. By making the abolition of slavery a Union goal, the proclamation also discouraged intervention by anti-slavery foreign nations, such as England, on the Confederate side. Lincoln, who won re-election in 1864, knew his war order was temporary and pressed Congress to amend the Constitution to end slavery forever. By Jan. 31, 1865, both houses of Congress passed the 13th Amendment that "neither slavery or involuntary servitude ... shall exist in the United States."

Slavery officially ended on Dec. 18, 1865 after 27, or two-thirds, of the 36 states ratified the amendment. Lincoln did not live to see the culmination of his proclamation. On April 14, 1865 – five days after the South surrendered - the president was shot and killed by Southern sympathizer John Wilkes Booth at Ford's Theatre in Washington, D.C. The end of slavery was just the beginning of a long struggle by African-Americans for full rights as U.S. citizens. Racial segregation in the South continued into the 1960s in everything from public accommodations to schools. At the dedication of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington in 1922, the crowd of 50,000 people was segregated by race.

An integrated crowd of more than 250,000 swarmed around the Lincoln Memorial in August 1963 for the March on Washington. The Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. began his "I Have A Dream" speech by praising the Emancipation Proclamation as a "great beacon light of hope to millions of Negro slaves who had been seared in the flames of withering injustice. ... But 100 years later, the Negro still is not free."

Though the outcome was far from certain when Lincoln signed the proclamation, one group of black Americans had faith when they met in mid-January 1863 at the Oak Grove school in Leesburg, Ohio. The group agreed on a resolution expressing hope that the proclamation would lead to freedom for all black people in America. "Should all this be accomplished," the resolution said, "the name of Abraham Lincoln will ever be gratefully remembered by the colored race of America; and the 1st of January should be celebrated to our latest posterity as the most important event in all our history." [Source: The Washington Post | Ronald G. Shafer | January 1, 2019 ++]

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**WWII Bomber Nose Art [22] ▶ Call House Madam**



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**Post WWII Photos ▶ Heinkel He-162 "Volksjaeger" Captured Experimental Aircraft**



Many of Germany 's captured new and experimental aircraft were displayed in an exhibition as part of London 's Thanksgiving week on September 14, 1945. Among the aircraft are a number of jet and rocket propelled planes. Here, a side view of the Heinkel He-162 "Volksjaeger", propelled by a turbo-jet unit mounted above the fuselage, in Hyde park, in London . (AP Photo)

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**Every Picture Tells A Story ▶ Almost**



Almost didn't make it home. While this well-timed photograph of a landing P-51 Mustang (F-6 Photo Recce variant) ground-looping and crashing into a parked aircraft is powerful enough to make it into this story, it's the date of the crash, 8 May 1945, that makes it truly dramatic for me. This pilot, likely having fought his way across Europe, very nearly kills himself

on VE Day at a captured German airfield (Bad Aibling, Bavaria) when he slams into a wrecked Luftwaffe fighter (a Messerschmitt Bf 109 K-4). The scene is stranger still as, according to the Imperial War Museum notes with this photo, the German fighter had just crashed a few moments before. Since it was after the German surrender, the Luftwaffe fighter was possibly being flown by another American pilot having a little fun with a Nazi aircraft. Bad Aibling was a postwar boneyard for hundreds of Luftwaffe wrecks. These boys were lucky to get home alive—the Mustang pilot, Captain Fred Buell of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Tactical Recon Squadron walked away with cuts and bruises... and possibly a major chewing out by his commanding officer.

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## Military History Anniversaries ► 16 thru 31 JAN

Significant events in U.S. Military History over the next 15 days are listed in the attachment to this Bulletin titled, “**Military History Anniversaries 16 thru 31 JAN**.” [Source: This Day in History [www.history.com/this-day-in-history](http://www.history.com/this-day-in-history) | January2018 ++]

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## Medal of Honor Citations ► Robert Merlin Hanson | WWII



*The President of the United States takes pride in presenting the  
MEDAL OF HONOR  
To*

**ROBERT MERLIN HANSON**

**Rank and organization:** First Lieutenant, U.S. Marine Corps Reserve, Marine Fighting Squadron 215

**Place and date:** Empress Augusta Bay, Bougainville, Territory of New Guinea *November 1, 1943*

**Entered service:** DEC 1941 St. Paul, Minnesota

**Born:** February 4, 1920 in Lucknow, India

**Died:** February 3, 1944 (aged 23) Cape St. George, Papua New Guinea, New Ireland Province

### Citation

For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life and above and beyond the call of duty as fighter pilot attached to Marine Fighting Squadron 215 in action against enemy Japanese forces at Bougainville Island, 1 November 1943; and New Britain Island, 24 January 1944. Undeterred by fierce opposition, and fearless in the face of overwhelming odds, 1st Lt. Hanson fought the Japanese boldly and with daring aggressiveness. On 1 November, while flying cover for our landing operations at Empress Augusta Bay, he dauntlessly attacked 6 enemy torpedo bombers, forcing them to jettison their bombs and destroying 1 Japanese plane during the action. Cut off from his division while deep in enemy territory during a high cover flight over Simpson Harbor on 24 January, 1st Lt. Hanson waged a lone

and gallant battle against hostile interceptors as they were orbiting to attack our bombers and, striking with devastating fury, brought down 4 Zeroes and probably a fifth. Handling his plane superbly in both pursuit and attack measures, he was a master of individual air combat, accounting for a total of 25 Japanese aircraft in this theater of war. His great personal valor and invincible fighting spirit were in keeping with the highest traditions of the U.S. Naval Service.



Robert M. Hanson was the son of Methodist missionaries who served for several decades in India. In Lucknow, India, his playmates were Hindu children. He attended an American-run missionary school, Woodstock School, in Mussoorie in the Western Indian Himalayas, along with his siblings, Mark, Stanley, Earl Hanson, and Edith Hanson. After attending junior high school in the United States, he returned to India to become light-heavyweight and heavy-weight wrestling champion of the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh, at the time a large province in northern India. In his honor, the sports field at his alma mater Woodstock School in the Indian Himalayas is still named Hanson Field.

In the spring of 1938, on his way back to the United States to attend college, he bicycled his way through Europe and was in Vienna during the Anschluss. He was attending Hamline University, St. Paul, Minnesota, at the time of the attack on Pearl Harbor. He enlisted for naval flight training and earned his wings and a Marine Corps commission as a second lieutenant on February 19, 1943 in Corpus Christi, Texas.

First Lieutenant Hanson arrived in the South Pacific in June 1943 and his daring tactics and total disregard for death soon became well known. A master of individual air combat, he downed 20 enemy planes in six consecutive flying days. He was commended in the citation accompanying the Medal of Honor..

A member of VMF-215 flying the F4U-1 Corsair, the ace was shot down twice. The first time, a Zero caught him over Bougainville Island. Bringing his plane down on the ocean, he paddled for six hours in a rubber life raft before being rescued by the USS Sigourney (DD-643). His second and fatal crash occurred one day before his twenty-fourth birthday. He was last seen on February 3, 1944, when his plane crashed into the sea after a cancelled (due to overcast) fighter sweep mission over Rabaul, New Britain. He was attempting to destroy a lighthouse on Cape St. George, Southern New Ireland that often gave the fighter group trouble by firing flak at the fighter group as they passed the lighthouse. His squadron leader Capt. Harold L. Spears watched as he attempted to land his damaged plane in the water during rough seas. His plane cart wheeled when one of the wings grabbed a wave and the plane disintegrated. He had no time to escape the cockpit, thus sank with his plane. He was subsequently declared killed in action.

He has cenotaph (empty Tomb) memorials at Manila, Philippines and Newton, Massachusetts.

[Source: <https://history.army.mil/moh/wwII-g-1.html> | January 2019 ++]



## Hypothermia Update 01 ► Impact on Older Adults

As the winter months approach, it is important to understand risks that cold exposure can pose for older adults and those with chronic medical conditions. Older adults can lose body heat quickly, and changes in the body as we age can make it harder to recognize a drop in body temperature. The result can be a serious condition called hypothermia—a dangerous drop in core body temperature. This can occur when it is cold inside or outside and the body is unable to produce the heat it needs to function. Even a relatively short exposure to cold conditions can result in hypothermia. Older adults are especially vulnerable to hypothermia because their bodies' response to cold can be diminished by chronic medical conditions and by use of some medicines, including over-the-counter cold remedies. For an older person, a body temperature of 95°F or lower can cause many health problems, such as heart rhythm disturbances, kidney problems, liver damage, or worse.

Warning signs of hypothermia include slowed or slurred speech; sleepiness or confusion; shivering or stiffness in the arms and legs; poor control over body movements; slow reactions, a weak pulse, or a core body temperature of 95 degrees F or lower. If you think someone has the warning signs for hypothermia, call 9-1-1 right away and try to move the person to a warmer place.

To help older adults understand the risks, the National Institute on Aging (NIA) at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) has some tips to avoid some of the dangers and prevent hypothermia:

- When going outside in the cold, wear a hat, scarf, and gloves or mittens to prevent loss of body heat through your head and hands. Wear several layers of loose clothing to help trap warm air between the layers.
- If possible, let others know when you're planning to spend time outdoors and carry a fully charged cellphone.
- Make sure your home is warm enough. Set your thermostat to at least 68 to 70 degrees Fahrenheit (F). Even mildly cool homes with temperatures from 60 to 65 degrees F can lead to hypothermia in older adults.
- To stay warm at home, wear long underwear under your clothes, along with socks and slippers. Use a blanket or afghan to keep your legs and shoulders warm and wear a hat or cap indoors.

States, territories, tribes, and tribal organizations may be able to help eligible households pay for home heating and cooling costs. People interested in applying for assistance should contact their local or state social services agency. The NIA has free information about hypothermia in a brochure "[Stay Safe in Cold Weather](#)," and a fact sheet in Spanish "[La hipotermia: un peligro del clima frío](#)." You can find these and other free publications on healthy aging on the NIA website or order free copies by calling NIA's toll-free number 1-800-222-2225. [Source: NIH | Kim Calvin | December 21, 2018 ++]

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## Toxic Exposure Health Monitoring ► Gulf War, Post-9/11 Vets & Offspring

Researchers with the influential National Academy of Medicine have recommended that the Defense and Veterans Affairs departments track troops' exposure to environmental toxins and monitor their -- and their offspring's -- health to better understand the risks and consequences of military deployment. In a report released 28 NOV by the National

Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine, a panel of 16 scientists said they could not definitively link health issues in some 1990-1991 Gulf War and post-9/11 veterans and their families to environmental exposures, but they recommended the government and other institutions establish a health monitoring and research program to determine what health effects, if any, military deployments have on the veterans and future generations.



Nearly 700,000 service members deployed to the Persian Gulf region during Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm, and 2.7 million have been stationed in or fought in Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere since Sept. 11, 2001. Many of these veterans may have been exposed to "potentially hazardous agents and situations," the report noted, such as pesticides, solvents, chemicals and biological agents, vaccines, burn pit and oil well fire smoke, dust and depleted uranium. To determine whether exposure to any of these substances is responsible for illnesses found in some of these veterans and their family members, the panel looked at more than 80,000 publications on reproductive and genetic effects of environmental exposures, mostly research on civilian populations exposed to the same substances, or animal studies, because research specific to military exposures is scant.

The committee largely concluded that there is **insufficient evidence** in the existing literature to link reproductive conditions or health problems in veterans' offspring with the most common contaminants seen on the battlefield. Members did note, however, that there is limited or suggestive evidence that sulfur mustard may have a negative effect on men's reproduction, that the bacterial infection leishmaniasis may negatively affect pregnancy outcomes, and that chromium -- a chemical used in paint and as an anti-corrosive -- can negatively impact men's reproduction, pregnancy outcomes and child development. Also, the committee found sufficient evidence of an association between prenatal exposure to some pesticides and neurodevelopmental effects; prenatal exposure to particulate matter and adverse pregnancy outcomes, such as low birth weight and preterm birth; and prenatal exposure to benzene and childhood leukemia.

A health monitoring and research program would help broaden the understanding of deployment-related exposures and the long-term effects on generations, according to the report. Establishing such a program would require "substantial resources, long-term commitment by the Defense and Veterans Affairs departments and other governmental organizations and considerable engagement by past, current, and future veterans and their families," but the contribution to science would be significant, said Dr. Kenneth Ramos, panel chair and executive director of the Center for Applied Genetics and Genomic Medicine at the University of Arizona. "The results that arise from studying generational effects will ultimately be rewarded with new knowledge of veterans' exposures, their reproductive health, and the health of their children and grandchildren. Importantly, the new understanding derived from these investments will be relevant to the health of all Americans now and for future generations."

By direction of Congress in 1998, the VA contracted with NASEM to conduct systematic reviews of research on associations between illnesses and serving in the Persian Gulf. The National Academies have created 11 reports on the subject, including Gulf War and Health, Generational Health Effects of Serving in the Gulf War. In November, the National Academies also recommended that the VA study the generational exposure to dioxin in children of Vietnam veterans exposed to Agent Orange. [Source: Military.com | Patricia Kime | December 6, 2018 ++]

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## TRICARE User Fees Update 104 ► Once Again, In the Crosshairs

Yes, your TRICARE fees and cost shares are once again in the crosshairs. The Congressional Budget Office (CBO) recently published their annual list of budget strategies with options for policymakers to consider as they begin the budgeting process for next year. And as we know, they will be looking to increase revenue any way they can get it - so knowing in advance the areas they are going to focus on is a powerful offense for MOAA. The CBO has targeted the below areas in TRICARE, and none of the proposals reflect, or even hint at, the price a military retiree or their family has paid up front for their health care with their service and sacrifice. Nor, that DoD's annual outlays for TFL have actually gone down or remained flat year over year.

**TRICARE for Life (TFL)** -- There are several options put forward by the CBO which would result in increased costs for TFL beneficiaries. Specifically, with either requiring an enrollment fee for TFL, or requiring beneficiaries to pay out of pocket cost shares - or both. Their objective is to reduce spending for Medicare and TFL by both increasing revenue and providing incentives for beneficiaries to use their TFL benefit less, or to even switch to a commercial Medicare supplement. *Key CBO recommendations:*

- An annual enrollment fee of \$485 for individual coverage and \$970 for family coverage could start in calendar year 2021. The cost savings estimate from this would be \$12 billion between 2021 and 2028 and savings are projected to increase by about 5 percent, mainly by indexing this enrollment fee to Medicare cost growth.
- Introducing minimum out-of-pocket requirements starting in 2022. In this proposal, TFL would not cover any of the first \$750 of an enrollee's cost-sharing payments under Medicare and would cover only 50 percent of the next \$6,750. Essentially, TFL beneficiaries would pay a maximum of \$4,125. In anticipation of TFL beneficiaries returning to the military treatment facilities (MTFs) to avoid these cost shares, the MTFs would be required to charge the same amount as civilian facilities would.

**TRICARE Prime and Select Cost Sharing for Retirees Under Age 65** -- Again, the CBO claims that health care has been among the fastest growing portions in the DoD's budget. However, by DoD's own numbers, it still remains a third of the personnel budget since 1980. By targeting working-age military retirees and claiming they are not paying their share, provides the rationale to abolish the current grandfathering originally established in the 2017 NDAA, and to push beneficiaries away from utilizing their earned benefits. *Key CBO recommendations (starting in 2021):*

- TRICARE Prime - individual enrollment fees could increase to \$650 and family enrollment to \$1,300.
- TRICARE Select - individuals could pay an annual enrollment fee of \$485 and \$970 for a family. The annual deductible for an individual would be \$300 and \$600 for a family.

These cost shares would be tied to a national health expenditure index and not COLA. The total cost savings from these proposals is projected to be \$12.6 billion between 2020 and 2028. MOAA strongly opposes each and every one of the above proposed options, on the grounds that they represent more than dis-proportional fee increases for military retirees. Military retirees and their families have already accumulated a wide variety of fee increases - and this is on top of the price they have paid up front with their decades of service and sacrifice. Readers are encouraged to ACT NOW and send the MOAA's suggested preformatted editable message "Do Not Raise TRICARE Fees" at <http://takeaction.moaa.org/app/write-a-letter?0&engagementId=494195> to your Congressional representatives. [Source: MOAA Newsletter | January 10, 2019 ++]

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## Medicare Fraud Update 135 ► Disclosures 1-14 JAN 2019

**Lincoln, NE** -- A former state Medicaid audit administrator now admits he bilked the program of \$84,000 — and his 85-year-old father of nearly \$300,000 — while he was in the job. **Craig A. Barnett**, 5310 Sawgrass Drive, waived



indictment and pleaded guilty to two counts of wire fraud and two counts of mail fraud for the scheme last week in U.S. District Court in Omaha as part of a plea agreement. At the time of the fraud, he was working at the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services as the administrator of the Medicaid Audit and Financial Support division.



In court records, Assistant U.S. Attorney Frederick Franklin said that after Barnett's mother died in 2010, his father granted him power of attorney over his affairs, sold his home and moved to a nursing home in Elkhorn on Dec. 26, 2014. By Nov. 15, 2016, his father's account at the nursing home was \$118,000 in arrears and, later that month, he was approved for Nebraska Medicaid. In the meantime, Franklin said, Barnett used the power of attorney, which he held until Aug. 5, 2016, to take his father's pension, retiree grant payments and payments from mutual funds, while spending only a portion of it on his father's expenses. "The remainder was used by Craig for his personal benefit," Franklin wrote in an information filed 3 JAN.

The amount of loss and restitution is in dispute, according to a written plea agreement. But in the information, Franklin alleged as a result of Barnett's scheme, Dean Barnett suffered a loss of \$294,396, and Nebraska Medicaid a loss of \$84,110. Specifically, he said the payments included \$75,000 in monthly checks from the Broadcasters Foundation of America approved for his father, a news industry retiree, based on financial need; \$45,000 from his mutual funds account; \$13,872 from his pension and \$113,858 in Social Security Administration checks. Craig Barnett's attorney, Sean Conway, didn't immediately return a request for comment.

Barnett left his administrator job at DHHS, where he'd worked for more than 11 years, on Sept. 30, 2016, according to HHS spokeswoman Julie Naughton. Because it was a personnel matter, she said she was unable to comment further. After leaving, Barnett went to work as a financial associate at the Nebraska Innovation Campus Business Center, according to its website. When asked if Barnett's position at the time of the crime made it more egregious, a spokeswoman with the Nebraska Attorney General's Office, which investigates Medicaid fraud, said the office "does not comment on such matters, including whether someone may be under investigation." Barnett is set for sentencing in April. [Source: Lincoln Journal Star | Lori Pilger | January 8, 2019 ++]

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**Montgomery, AL** -- Court documents indicate former State Rep. **Ed Henry** will plead guilty to charges surrounding a kickback scheme aimed to defraud a federal health care program. The charges stem from Henry's former business, MyPractice24, that provided chronic care management services for Medicare Part B recipients. The charges are not related to Henry's former legislative office. The government alleged Henry's company would offer things of value to doctor offices in exchange for referring Medicare Part B patients to his business.

On 9 JAN, Henry's co-defendant, Dr. **Nicole Scruggs**, 46, pleaded guilty to one count of conspiracy to pay and receive kickbacks in relation to a federal health care program. In open court, Scruggs said Henry's company supplied an employee to her practice at no cost in exchange for referring patients to his business. Henry's employee collected copays and fees from Scruggs' patients and identified patients to enroll in MyPractice24. Scruggs tearfully entered a guilty plea at the end of the hearing. Scruggs will remain on bond pending sentencing. She could serve up to five years in prison.



Henry's notice to change his plea to guilty was filed 9 JAN. It's unclear what charge or charges would be involved in Henry's guilty plea. His attorney Maxwell Pulliam was not immediately available for comment. Henry is indicted on more than a dozen counts including money laundering, conspiracy to defraud the United States, violation of the anti-kickback statute, and conspiracy to commit health care fraud. Henry is also accused of offering the same kickbacks from government programs in exchange for patient referrals to other doctors, including Montgomery doctor **Gilberto Sanchez**, who is currently in federal prison serving time for running a pill mill.

“MyPractice24 would provide various kickbacks to Sanchez and his staff in return for the providers at Sanchez’s practice referring Medicare beneficiaries to MyPractice24 for chronic care management services,” the U.S. Attorney’s Office stated after his indictment in 2018. “Among the kickbacks provided were direct payments to a member of the staff, free chronic care management services, free medical billing services, and free clinical services unrelated to the provision of chronic care management services. Additionally, Henry assisted Dr. Sanchez in paying kickbacks to patients who enrolled in the chronic care management program. Sanchez paid these kickbacks by systematically waiving copays, copays which Medicare required Sanchez to collect.” Until Wednesday, Henry vigorously defended his innocence in this case. No current court filings indicate Henry’s other co-defendant, **Punuru Reddy**, will change his plea. [Source: WSFA 12 News | Jennifer Horton | January 9, 2019 ++]

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**Florida** -- Court A former physician assistant faces up to 10 years in prison after pleading guilty in Florida federal court 9 JAN to his role in a \$1 billion Medicare fraud scheme. Four things to know:

1. **Arnaldo Carmouze**, who pleaded guilty to one count of conspiracy to commit healthcare fraud, was one of three defendants charged in an indictment unsealed in July 2016.
2. According to the indictment, **Philip Esformes** operated a network of more than 30 skilled nursing homes and assisted living facilities in Florida. Prosecutors alleged he and his co-conspirators, including Mr. Carmouze, admitted many Medicare and Medicaid beneficiaries to the facilities, even if they did not qualify for skilled nursing home care or for placement in an assisted living facility. Once admitted, the patients received medically unnecessary care that was billed to Medicare and Medicaid.
3. Mr. Esformes and his co-conspirators also allegedly steered patients to other healthcare providers in exchange for kickbacks. Those providers also performed medically unnecessary treatments that were billed to Medicare and Medicaid, according to the DOJ.
4. Mr. Carmouze's sentencing is scheduled for 20MAR. In addition to the prison term of up to 10 years, he faces a fine of up to \$250,000 and up to three years of supervised release.

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**McAllen, TX** -- The owner and operator of a durable medical equipment company was sentenced to three years in prison for submitting fraudulent claims to the Texas Medicaid program, according to the Department of Justice. **George Louis Moreno**, who pleaded guilty Jan. 24, 2018, owned and operated MARS DME, a durable medical equipment company in McAllen, Texas. From August 2008 to January 2016, Mr. Moreno billed Medicaid for

incontinence supplies that were not delivered to beneficiaries. In some instances, he paid Medicaid beneficiaries cash in lieu of delivering supplies, according to the Justice Department. In addition to his prison term, Mr. Moreno was also ordered to pay roughly \$1.5 million in restitution to the Texas Medicaid program.

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### **Pneumonia Update 03: HIV Sufferers At Greater Risk**

People who are prescribed opioids to reduce pain are at a greater risk of developing pneumonia, according to study led by researchers at Yale School of Medicine. The drugs tend to weaken the immune system and are especially risky for patients with HIV, according to a press release. Those who take codeine, fentanyl and morphine are particularly susceptible to being less able to fight off bacterial infections, such as pneumonia, the study found.

The researchers used data recorded between 2000 and 2012 by the Veterans Aging Cohort Study, a national study of those who receive medical care from the Veterans Health Administration, part of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. The patients included those with and without HIV, which weakens the immune system, increasing the risk of opportunistic infections. "We saw that prescription opioids were independently associated with pneumonia requiring hospitalization," said Dr. E. Jennifer Edelman, corresponding author and an associate professor at the Yale School of Medicine, in the release. Prescription opioids may increase the risk of pneumonia by suppressing respiration, mucus secretion and the ability to cough, the release said. The study "lends credence to the hypothesis that opioids have effects on the immune system that are clinically relevant," Edelman said in the release.

Edelman and her fellow researchers matched patients hospitalized for pneumonia with others who did not have the disease, the release said. The dosages of opioids, length of time the patient was on the drug and whether the opioids had immunosuppressive qualities were all examined. Patients given medium or high doses of opioids were more likely to develop pneumonia, the study found, especially if the drug had immunosuppressive properties, such as fentanyl, codeine and morphine. Those patients with HIV were at risk of pneumonia even at low doses of the painkillers. According to the release, the study, published in JAMA Internal Medicine, is the first to look at the effect of opioids on HIV-positive patients, the release said. The authors recommended increased vaccination against pneumonia, urging patients to stop smoking and reducing the dosages or opioids prescribed, the release said. [Source: New Haven Register | Dr. E. Jennifer Edelman | January 7, 2019 ++]

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### **HIV/AIDS Update 05 ► Air Force Will Now Approves PrEP Use With a Waiver**

The U.S. Air Force has approved the use of a medication designed to prevent HIV infection for pilots and aircrew, overriding an older policy that prohibited its use. The service in September officially approved the use of the pre-exposure prophylaxis treatment (PrEP) medication, commonly known as Truvada, which helps reduce the risk of contracting the human immunodeficiency virus, the Air Force Surgeon General's office recently told Military.com. Last year, Military.com profiled pilots whose careers were negatively affected because PrEP had not been authorized for them.

But there's a catch: Pilots and aircrew who wish to use PrEP must apply for a waiver, said Air Force Surgeon General spokeswoman Angelica Lopez. "As of September 2018, airmen in a flying status were able to request a waiver to use Truvada," Lopez said in an email statement. "The waiver, once approved, will help ensure providers are monitoring the safety of the medication and aircrew compliance." Airmen in flying status had tried to use waivers before, but their attempts were unsuccessful. Since 2012, when Truvada was approved for HIV PrEP by the Food and Drug Administration, no Air Force waivers had gone out to the rated community before the service sanctioned its use

for the group, according to Col. John Oh, chief of flight and operational medicine branch. The Air Force has since approved five waivers, while three are awaiting final determination, Lopez said.

Waivers for PrEP normally are not required for airmen in a non-flying status, said Oh, who previously served as chief of preventive medicine for the Air Force Medical Support Agency at Defense Health Headquarters. Airmen on a flying status, however, were required have an aeromedical waiver in place to take Truvada, because it was not on the approved list of medications, Oh previously said. The Air Force began reviewing a number of medications that pertain to aerospace medicine in August. "The Air Force Medical Standards Working Group has been actively investigating the use of Truvada (emtricitabine/tenofovir combination drug) for HIV Pre-exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP) by airmen in a flying status," Lopez said. "The working group met to discuss the use of the drug and its impact to flying safety." The review's results were then sent to the Air Force Flight and Operational Medicine board for a final review. The members voted to add Truvada to the approved aircrew medication list before 1 SEP.

The Surgeon General's office said waivers are necessary because they allow physicians to better monitor how a pilot or aircrew member react to the drug, Lopez said. "Numerous medications on the approved medication list require aeromedical waivers for continued flying or special operational duties," she said. "The waiver includes a systematic, comprehensive risk assessment of the individual's condition managed by the medication." She added, "A time-limited waiver, subject to periodic renewal, ensures the medication remains clinically necessary, [that] the medication is being taken as prescribed, and [that] the patient is free from adverse effects that could jeopardize his/her health or operational safety."

Airmen who previously spoke to Military.com said they were frustrated with the lack of clarity on the policy, knowing that some of their friends had been on the drug because their Air Force flight doctors turn a blind eye to its use, while they -- working through proper waiver channels -- had been denied. The airmen at the time said they believe the Air Force is the least forward-thinking service when it comes to the medical needs of men who have sex with men. They expressed concern that a confusing medical policy makes the service less attractive to gay men. Oh said that airmen developing HIV has a clear, adverse effect on operational readiness. But some pilots who asked to remain anonymous said being forced to choose between protecting their health and their careers also affects readiness.

Service officials, including Chief of Staff Gen. David Goldfein, say the Air Force invests between \$3 million and \$12 million into each pilot over the course of his or her career. "If you lose just one fighter pilot, you can't tell me that if a congressman or congresswoman doesn't get told that [millions of dollars] was simply wasted, that they wouldn't care at the congressional level," said an Air Force major who is a special operations pilot and combat systems officer. "I would bet money that they would." [Source: Military.com | Oriana Pawlyk | January 3, 2019 ++]

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### **3D Bone Printing ► DoD \$2M Grant To Help Military Personnel**

A lab in Arizona is hoping to help wounded veterans – through 3D printing. Arizona's Orthopedic Research Lab is hoping to use the technology to help military veterans with bone injuries. Dr. John Szivek, who runs the University of Arizona Orthopaedic Research Lab, said the lab received a \$2 million grant from the Department of Defense to create 3D bone printing to help military personnel. "I'm in favor of all forms of medical technology, advancements in medical technology...I'm in favor of anything they can do to recreate an artificial bone, if necessary," Young said. "We could regenerate their bone by 3D printing a scaffold that's specific to that bone and that patient and then filling it with stem cells from that patient, adult stem cells," Szivek said.

"Surgeons in the military would try to treat military personnel with blast injuries, in particular. Those injuries usually cause massive bone loss and unfortunately, in many cases, they're currently amputating military personnel who have those types of injuries. But in this way, they could regrow the bone for that person and they could continue their service in the military." David Gonzales, the lab's research specialist, said the technology could eventually also

help civilians and cancer patients. “It’s really exciting to see that we can potentially benefit not only our soldiers who are helping serve our country, but everyone else, as well,” Gonzales said. But 3D printing technology experts are concerned about the cost of these types of prints.

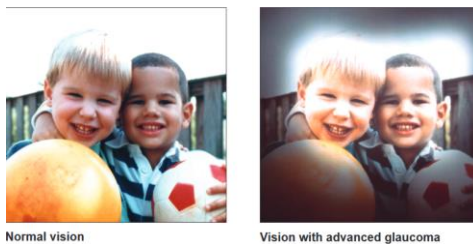
Adam Jakus, Dimension Inx chief technology officer, ran a 3D printer at Northwestern University, and said although it’s huge that the government is now starting to fund academic research on health 3D printing, the technology has been around for a while. “What’s coming out of the University of Arizona is really nice to see but I’m not sure, from my perspective, if the technology is anything that new—what really needs to be done is, it’s one thing to regenerate a bone, scientists and engineers have figured that out,” Jakus said. “It’s another thing to make it cost effective and surgically viable...money is everything in healthcare. Unfortunately, even in the military.” The grant will be funded over a five-year period. Szivek is aiming to test patients near the end of that period to prove they can print these individualized bones to help those suffering from severe limb injuries. [Source: Fox News | Charlie Lapastora | January 8, 2019 ++]

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## Glaucoma Update 05 ► Why Vets Need Regular Eye Exams

Glaucoma is a disease that damages your eye’s optic nerve. It usually happens when fluid builds up in the front part of your eye. That extra fluid increases the pressure in your eye, damaging the optic nerve. However, some forms of glaucoma can damage the optic nerve, even when the eye pressure is in the normal range during the eye exam. This can happen when the eye pressure becomes high at other times of the day and the patient does not feel the pressure elevation. It can also happen when blood flow to the optic nerve becomes reduced below a critical level, which can happen during periods of very low blood pressure, even during sleep.

For example, in some patients who take their hypertension medications right before bedtime, it can cause the blood pressure to drop too low during hours of sleep. Another risk factor that can adversely affect glaucoma is obstructive sleep apnea, which may also reduce the delivery of oxygen to the optic nerve. Glaucoma is a leading cause of blindness for Veterans over 60 years old. But blindness from glaucoma can often be prevented with early treatment. At <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5SlcOTqrwTw&t=15s> is a very helpful video by VA’s Dr. Dan Bettis which answers some of the common patient questions about glaucoma. Take five minutes and watch it with your family. At <http://www.iowaglaucoma.org/patient-resources> is a very detailed patient’s guide to information about the disease. Below is an example of what your vision would be like with glaucoma.



Veterans enrolled in VA health care can schedule appointments directly with Ophthalmology or Optometry without a referral from primary care. Schedule an eye exam at your VA health care facility. At <https://www.va.gov/find-locations> can be found the nearest one.

VA is at the forefront of vision research and glaucoma is one of their top priorities. A current study by Dr. Markus Kuehn is a Bioassay to Predict the Development and Progression of Glaucoma, sponsored by the VA Rehabilitation, Research, and Development Division. The project makes use of a recent discovery that glaucoma is associated with the development of a cellular autoimmune response that can further reduce vision. The investigators are testing if the strength of the reaction is predictive of future loss of vision and quality of life of the patient.

Early identification of patients at high risk to develop vision loss allows more aggressive treatment before the damage occurs. The development of a predictive assay would provide ophthalmologists with a valuable tool and preserve the quality of life for Veterans. Approximately 2.2 million Americans have been diagnosed with glaucoma and the prevalence of the disease will rise to a projected 3 million by 2020. The prevalence of glaucoma is three times higher in African Americans than in non-Hispanic whites. Additionally, the risk of visual impairment is higher and the age of onset is earlier than in whites. [Source: Vantage Point | January 8, 2019 ++]

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## Health Saving Account Update 01 ► Reasons To Consider Opening One

Millions of savers overlook one incredibly underrated way to add extra oomph to their efforts to build a nest egg. The health savings account is a great place to save for today's medical expenses. But it might be an even better place to stash cash for your golden years assuming you meet the eligibility requirements. Here are some key reasons to consider using an HSA to save for retirement.

**1. It's triple tax-advantaged** -- A health savings account's huge selling point is the fact that it is triple tax-advantaged:

- You get a tax deduction during the year of contribution.
- The money grows tax-free.
- You withdraw the money tax-free when it's used for qualified health expenses.

In essence, if you use HSA money to pay for health care expenses, it's never taxed. Never. It's tough to think of any other savings vehicle that offers such a powerful combination of tax incentives.

**2. It can be a back-door IRA** -- This is one of the most overlooked — and misunderstood — advantages of the HSA. Many people think the HSA must be used to pay for medical expenses. In fact, once you reach the age of 65, you can withdraw your HSA funds for any reason. Just as with a traditional IRA, you will pay income taxes on the withdrawal at that point. However, you will not pay any penalties. As the IRS states in Publication 969:

*Additional tax. There is an additional 20% tax on the part of your distributions not used for qualified medical expenses. Figure the tax on Form 8889 and file it with your Form 1040 or Form 1040NR.*

*Exceptions. There is no additional tax on distributions made after the date you are disabled, reach age 65, or die.*

So, if you use the money for qualified medical expenses, it's never taxed. If you use it for other purposes during retirement, you only have to pay the same type of taxes you would on an IRA withdrawal.

**3. There's a sneaky way to avoid those taxes** -- If the idea of paying taxes on nonqualified withdrawals rubs you the wrong way, there is something you can do to eliminate such fees. But it probably only works if you are a super-saver who delays using HSA funds for many years. Some people who open an HSA account pay for their annual medical expenses out of pocket from taxable accounts instead of using their HSA funds. This allows the HSA money to continue to compound tax-free for years, and hopefully even decades. Every time these super-savers rack up a new medical expense, they write a check to cover the bill. Then, they take their medical receipts and quietly file them away. Why? Because as it turns out, you can ask for reimbursement of your medical expenses at any point during your lifetime. According to IRS Publication 969:

*You are permitted to take a distribution from your HSA at any time; however, only those amounts used exclusively to pay for qualified medical expenses are tax free.*

The key phrase, of course, is "at any time." So, as long as your expense was a qualified medical expense — and you did not receive reimbursement or a deduction for it previously — you're golden, even if you make a withdrawal to

reimburse costs incurred decades earlier. While news outlets such as Forbes and CNBC have written about this strategy, it remains largely under the radar. Theoretically, you could decide to buy a car when you turn 65 and fund much or all of the purchase by using thousands of dollars in tax-free HSA money. To do so, you simply have to make sure you can produce those receipts from yesteryear. Pretty neat — and totally legal — trick.

**4. It helps trim your medical costs today, as well in the future** -- Everyone knows health care costs have exploded in recent years. In 2016, the average American spent \$1,400 in out-of-pocket medical expenses, up from \$250 annually in 1980, according to New York-based health care market research publisher ‘Kalorama Information’. An HSA can help mitigate some of this financial pain by providing you with an upfront tax break that returns a modest amount of such soaring costs to your pocket. And you get that tax break now even if you don’t actually tap your HSA funds until years into the future. So, the HSA remains a great way to trim ever-growing health care costs, both now and in retirement.

**5. It can be a great estate-planning tool** -- When you die, your health savings account does not travel with you to the great beyond. Instead, it remains behind on this earthly plane and can be used by loved ones to make their lives better. If you name a spouse as a beneficiary, he or she will inherit the HSA and will be able to use it just as you did, with a right to tax-free distributions for qualified medical expenses. If you leave the money to someone else, it will be distributed to your heirs and will be fully taxable.

### HSA Eligibility Criteria

You must be enrolled in the High-Deductible Health Plan (HDHP) to make or receive contributions to a health savings account (HSA). Also, eligibility requires that you are not:

- Covered by any other health plan that is not an HDHP, generally meaning you or your spouse do not have disqualifying health coverage that pays for any medical expenses before the HDHP deductible is met (except for certain limited preventive care expenses).
- Receiving any benefits from Medicare (including Medicare Part A), generally meaning that you have not reached age 65.
- Eligible to be claimed as a dependent on another person's tax return.

Disqualifying health coverage is health coverage that will pay for your medical expenses (other than preventive care) before the HDHP deductible is met. Examples include:

- Coverage under a spouse's health reimbursement arrangement (HRA).
- Coverage under a spouse's general purpose health care flexible spending account (FSA).

**Note:** If you are enrolled in the HDHP and married to someone who has elected a general purpose health care FSA, his or her FSA will automatically cover you; therefore, contributions to your HSA will not be permitted during the general purpose health care FSA coverage period. This is typically the case even if your spouse works for another employer; however, it is best to check with his or her benefits department.

- A balance in a general purpose health care FSA that provides you with coverage during a grace period.
- Medicare coverage (including Medicare Part A).
- Benefits received from the Veterans Administration within the past three months.

[Source: MoneyTalksNews | Chris Kissell | May 31, 2018 ++]

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## Inflammations ► What They Are & What They Do

When a wound swells up, turns red and hurts, it may be a sign of inflammation. Very generally speaking, inflammation is the body’s immune system’s response to an irritant. The irritant might be a germ, but it could also be a foreign

object, such as a splinter in your finger. This means that an inflammation doesn't only start when, for instance, a wound has already been infected by bacteria, is oozing pus or healing poorly. It already starts when the body is trying to fight against the harmful irritant. Many different things can cause inflammations. These are the most common:

- Pathogens (germs) like bacteria, viruses or fungi
- External injuries like scrapes or damage through foreign objects (for example a thorn in your finger)
- Effects of chemicals or radiation

Diseases or medical conditions that cause inflammation often have a name ending in “-itis.” For example:

- Cystitis: an inflammation of the bladder
- Bronchitis: an inflammation of the bronchi
- Otitis media: an inflammation of the middle ear
- Dermatitis: a disease where the skin is inflamed

There are five symptoms that may be signs of an acute inflammation: Redness, Heat, Swelling, Pain, and Loss of function. Examples of a loss of function include not being able to move an inflamed joint properly, having a worse sense of smell during a cold, or finding it more difficult to breathe when you have bronchitis. Inflammations don't always cause all five symptoms. Some inflammations occur “silently” and don't cause any symptoms.

If the inflammation is severe, it can cause general reactions in the body. These may include the following signs and symptoms:

- Generally feeling ill, exhaustion and fever. These are signs that the immune system is very active and needs a lot of energy, which may be lacking for other activities. If the rate of metabolism is higher due to a fever, more antibodies and cells of the immune system can be produced.
- Changes in the blood, such as an increased number of immune system cells.

A very rare but dangerous complication of an infection is called septicemia (blood poisoning). The possible signs of this complication include chills, feeling very ill, and a very high fever. Septicemia may occur if bacteria multiply quickly in a certain part of the body and then a lot of them suddenly enter the bloodstream. This can happen if the body isn't able to fight the infection locally, if the germs are very aggressive, or if the immune system is very weak. Septicemia is a medical emergency and needs to be treated by a doctor as soon as possible.

### **What happens when you have an inflammation**

When an inflammation occurs in your body, many different immune system cells may be involved. They release various substances, known as inflammatory mediators. These include the hormones bradykinin and histamine. They cause the small blood vessels in the tissue to become wider (dilate), allowing more blood to reach the injured tissue. For this reason, inflamed areas turn red and feel hot. The increased blood flow also allows more immune system cells to be carried to the injured tissue, where they help with the healing process. What's more, both of these hormones irritate nerves and cause pain signals to be sent to the brain. This has a protective function: If the inflammation hurts, you tend to protect the affected part of the body.

The inflammatory mediators have yet another function: They make it easier for immune system cells to pass out of the small blood vessels, so that more of them can enter the affected tissue. The immune system cells also cause more fluid to enter the inflamed tissue, which is why it often swells up. The swelling goes down again after a while, when this fluid is transported out of the tissue. Mucous membranes also release more fluid when they are inflamed. For instance, this happens when you have a stuffy nose and the membranes lining your nose are inflamed. Then the extra fluid can help to quickly flush the viruses out of your body.

### **Inflammations can cause chronic diseases too**

Inflammations don't always help the body. In some diseases the immune system fights against the body's own cells by mistake, causing harmful inflammations. These include, for example:

- Rheumatoid arthritis, where many joints throughout the body are permanently inflamed
- Psoriasis – a chronic skin disease



- Inflammatory bowel diseases like Crohn’s disease or ulcerative colitis

Collectively known as chronic inflammatory diseases, these diseases can last for years or even a lifetime. Their severity and level of activity varies.

[Source: Informed Health | January 3, 2018 ++]

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## Stroke Update 09 ► Fitness Affects Risk

Low fitness levels have long been tied to higher risk for heart problems. Now researchers say men’s cardiorespiratory fitness is tied to their risk for stroke as well. Researchers in Norway followed 2,014 middle-aged men for more than 20 years. Those who were unfit for the whole study period, or who started out fit but became less so, were twice as likely to have a stroke as those who stayed fit or became fit, they reported in the journal *Stroke*. “Stroke is a devastating condition that can be lethal and leaves most patients disabled or speech impaired for life,” said lead study author Dr. Erik Prestgaard from Oslo University Hospital in a phone interview. “Prevention is important,” he added, “and patients can directly change their fitness.”

The men in the study were enrolled in 1972-1975 at ages 40 to 59. At the start and again seven years later, their cardiorespiratory fitness was assessed with a bicycle test and with measurements of blood pressure and heart rate. Researchers then followed the men’s health for about 24 years through medical records and national registries. Based on the men’s cardiorespiratory fitness trend between the initial assessments seven years apart, about 39 percent of them “remained fit” (i.e., maintained an average fitness level throughout). Another 39 percent “remained unfit” (started out below average and stayed there). Eleven percent “became unfit” (dropped from above average), and another 11 percent “became fit” (improved from below average to above average).

Overall, 199 men had strokes, with the highest risk seen among those who became unfit. The average age of first stroke was 73 in both of the unfit groups, 75 in the “remained fit” and 77 in the “became fit” groups, the study team notes. Men who had higher fitness levels while younger and became unfit had twice the stroke risk as men who remained fit, study also found. Similarly, those starting with low fitness levels who became fit cut their stroke risk in half compared to those who stayed unfit. “You would expect that fitness would reduce the risk of stroke, but we were surprised by the large reduction,” Prestgaard said. In further analyses, he added, “each small improvement in fitness helped.”

Future studies should confirm these findings using better measures of cardiorespiratory fitness than were available in the 1970s, the authors note. In addition, fitness levels should be evaluated based on gender, race and ethnicity, body composition, medications, smoking status and nutrition, said Dr. Jari Laukkanen of the University of Eastern Finland in Kuopio, who wasn’t involved in the study. “Research is needed to show if decreased stroke can be achieved by incorporating regular exercise and following the widely recognized recommendations for physical activity,” he told Reuters Health by email.

The recently updated Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans ([bit.ly/2QS3ojP](https://bit.ly/2QS3ojP)) say adults should do at least 150-300 minutes of moderate-intensity activity per week and muscle-strengthening activities at least two days per week. “Fitness recognizes no age, and it’s never too old to start exercising,” said Peter Kokkinos of the Veterans Affairs Medical Center of Washington, D.C. “This study shows that exercise benefits last for years, and you can see the difference all the way to 25 years,” he said in a phone interview. “Early changes have lasting effects.” [Source: Reuters | Carolyn Crist | December 31, 2018 ++]

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## Prescription Drug Costs Update 21 ► Democrats Look To Unlikely Ally On Drug Pricing

Prescription drug companies and their legions of Washington lobbyists are strapping in for their rockiest year on Capitol Hill in at least a decade, as newly empowered House Democrats prepare a raft of bills to check U.S. drug prices. Democrats surged to power in the 2018 midterm House elections promising to protect Americans from ever-increasing prescription costs. They are buoyed by populist anger in individual states and a potential — if unpredictable — ally on the issue in the White House. The biggest idea in the House to reduce drug costs is to require Medicare to exercise its enormous leverage as the nation's largest payer for health care and negotiate lower prices with drug companies.

Other Democratic proposals include: ending industry strategies that delay generics; requiring price transparency for drugs discovered with taxpayer money; curbing lucrative industry rebates to insurance companies (which critics call kickbacks); and allowing the import of drugs from Canada. “A lot of Republicans in the light of day, forced to vote for their constituents or PhRMA, I think they will vote for consumers,” said Rep. Peter Welch (D-VT), lead co-sponsor of the bill to require Medicare to negotiate drug prices.

Former speaker Paul D. Ryan “protected [GOP] members from even having to vote on this. He kept these bills off the floor.” Under normal circumstances, bills passed by Democratic representatives would be long shots to pass a Republican-controlled Senate or win acceptance by a GOP president. But this White House may not necessarily provide refuge for drug executives. President Trump gleefully bashes them for imposing high prices and engaging in anti-competitive practices. His administration has proposed some price checks and transparency measures, including a Medicare requirement that drugs administered in doctors offices and hospitals be indexed to lower prices overseas. Trump knows hammering drug companies is a winner with his populist base. Per capita drug spending in the United States has more than doubled over the last 20 years, according to the Kaiser Family Foundation. Drug costs have risen faster than other categories of health spending. “I think you’re going to see a tremendous reduction in drug prices,” Trump said Wednesday at a Cabinet meeting, as Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar sat nearby.

The presumptive firewall for the drug companies, the Republican-controlled Senate, may have some gaps. The Senate Finance Committee that oversees pricing issues in Medicare and Medicaid will now be headed by Chairman Charles E. Grassley (R-IA), who has a reputation as a consumer watchdog and often investigates price gouging and consumer rip-offs. Grassley is replacing pharma-friendly Orrin G. Hatch of Utah, who is retiring. Grassley may not endorse a sweeping government intervention like Medicare negotiations, but he has often advocated for transparency and fair play in health-care markets. In a statement 3 JAN after he was nominated as finance chairman by his colleagues, he put drug and health executives on notice. “For far too long, increases in prescription drug prices and health care generally have been causing tremendous difficulties for Americans,” he said, citing “barriers” to care that especially affect rural and underserved areas. “The Senate Finance Committee has broad jurisdiction to improve access to affordable health care. I intend to use those authorities.”

More broadly, in the Senate, Republican senators facing reelection in 2020 will be hard-pressed to buck Trump (and the president's fervent base) if Trump does wind up cutting a deal over drug pricing with House Democrats. Drugmakers have a well-oiled public relations machine that has helped them weather assaults over prices. Their argument is that slapping curbs on U.S. drug prices will stifle medical innovation and prevent new treatments from reaching patients. “Congress ... would be making a horrible mistake if they adopted policies that drove investors away from the industry, because then people would suffer and die unnecessarily,” James C. Greenwood, chief executive of the Biotechnology Innovation Organization (BIO), said in an interview. “That would be the crime of the century.”

Seeking to redirect anger, drug companies also are placing blame on other players in the health-care system. Consumer frustrations, Greenwood said, are being driven by high-deductible health insurance plans that expose patients to increasingly bigger bills at the pharmacy counter. “We can't price our way out of patients' out-of-pocket dilemma,” he said. The environment is potentially as volatile as the last time big changes were proposed in health care, when the Obama administration won passage of the Affordable Care Act in 2010. In the year leading up to the

ACA's passage, the pharmaceutical lobby won peace with Democrats. It avoided prescription cost controls in exchange for supporting the bill.

Makers of biologic drugs faced greater upheaval in 2010 because the ACA created a system to approve lower-cost copies of their products. But even biologic drugmakers came out well in a final compromise, winning 12 years of exclusivity before cheaper competition could gain access to the originator drug's trial data. The upshot of the ACA was a big victory for drug companies. The government created a system for tens of millions of newly insured Americans to afford their prescriptions, with little pain in return. However, there are some signs the run of wins could end. This year, as part of a budget deal, Congress levied up to \$12 billion over 10 years on drugmakers to help reduce pharmacy co-payments for Medicare beneficiaries.

The final numbers for 2018 are not in, but pharmaceutical and health-products companies were on track to top \$300 million in lobbying expenditures for the year, according to data maintained by the nonprofit Center for Responsive Politics. Nearly 1,500 lobbyists reported working on behalf of the industry, and more than 800 of those were "revolving door" lobbyists who previously held jobs in Congress or elsewhere in the federal system. [Source: The Washington Post | Christopher Rowland | January 4, 2019 ++]

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## **TRICARE Podcast 483** ► **Qualifying Life Events - Publications - New TRICARE Enrollees**

**Qualifying Life Events** -- Did you or a family member experience a life change recently? Certain changes in your life, such as getting married, having a baby, moving, or becoming Medicare eligible are called Qualifying Life Events, or QLEs. QLEs may mean different TRICARE options are available to you. A QLE status allows you to enroll in or change your TRICARE health plan coverage within 90 days of the QLE. QLEs include both military and family changes.

When you experience a QLE, the first step is to update your information in the Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System (DEERS). Then, if you meet the eligibility requirements, you may change or update your enrollment. If one beneficiary in a sponsor's family experiences a QLE, any member of the family may change their enrollment status during the QLE period. QLEs play an important role in determining whether and when you can apply for new coverage or change from your current health plan. Learn more about QLEs at [TRICARE.mil/lifeevents](http://TRICARE.mil/lifeevents).

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**TRICARE.mil Publications** -- Do you have questions about your benefit? Answers to most questions can be found on the TRICARE website under the publications section. The TRICARE website includes downloadable publications that provide information on the go.

- The TRICARE Stateside Guide provides an overview of TRICARE plans and benefits. It includes information about health care, pharmacy, and dental options.
- The Costs and Fees Sheet includes cost information associated with TRICARE program options.
- The TRICARE Contact Wallet Card gives you contact information in a size that's perfect for your wallet.

For more resources, visit [www.TRICARE.mil/publications](http://www.TRICARE.mil/publications).

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**New TRICARE Enrollees** -- If you're new to TRICARE in 2019, welcome! You've joined 9.4 million beneficiaries who receive comprehensive health and dental coverage. You can now connect to a network of military and civilian providers worldwide. Learning about your benefit will help you make the most of your coverage and take command of your health this year. For TRICARE Prime, including the US Family Health Plan and TRICARE Select, you may only choose or change your enrollment during two occasions. When you or a family member experiences a Qualifying Life Event, or QLE, or during the annual TRICARE Open Season. Other TRICARE plans offer continuous open

enrollment. TRICARE covers care offered by two types of TRICARE-authorized providers: network and non-network. To locate a provider, visit [www.TRICARE.mil/FindDoctor](http://www.TRICARE.mil/FindDoctor).

Depending on who you are and the plan you have, you may pay out-of-pocket costs. Use the TRICARE Compare Cost Tool at [www.TRICARE.mil/costs/compare](http://www.TRICARE.mil/costs/compare) to view your costs and compare them with other plans. It's important that you keep your contact information up-to-date in the Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System, or DEERS. Anytime you experience a change or QLE, update DEERS. You have several options for updating your information in DEERS. Either online, by phone, or by mail. You must keep your information updated in DEERS to remain eligible for TRICARE coverage. Learn more about TRICARE by exploring the information and resources at [www.TRICARE.mil](http://www.TRICARE.mil).

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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> | January 3, 2019 ++]

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## **TRICARE Podcast 484 ► Flu Vaccine - Preventive Services - Virtual Lifetime Electronic Record**

**Flu Vaccine** – According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, flu season peaks between the months of December and February. An estimated 960,000 people were hospitalized and an estimated 79,000 died due to flu complications during the 2017-2018 flu season. Did you know that you can use your TRICARE benefit to get the flu vaccine for free? To help prevent the flu and keep you and your family healthy, remember to:

1. Take Time to Get a Flu Vaccine. People who should get vaccinated each year include:
  - Children six months and older
  - Adults age 65 and older
  - People with certain health conditions
  - Pregnant women and women up to two weeks postpartum
  - Health care, child care, and elderly care workers

You and your family can get the flu shot at no cost at a military hospital or clinic, a participating network pharmacy, or from a TRICARE-authorized provider. For more information on how to get the flu vaccine for free, visit [www.TRICARE.mil/flu](http://www.TRICARE.mil/flu).

2. Follow Healthy Practices to Stop the Spread of Flu. This means, wash your hands often with soap and water. Cover your mouth and nose when you cough or sneeze. Avoid contact with sick people; and stay home if you have flu-like symptoms.

3. If You Get the Flu, Take Flu Antiviral Drugs as Prescribed.

For more about the flu vaccine and resources to help prevent the flu, visit [www.TRICARE.mil/flu](http://www.TRICARE.mil/flu).

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**Preventive Services** – Do you have questions about preventive services that TRICARE covers? TRICARE covers many preventive services, like screenings, vaccines, and physical exams for beneficiaries. You can see the list of covered preventive services at [www.TRICARE.mil/preventive](http://www.TRICARE.mil/preventive), as well as any guidelines that apply. If you have questions, join TRICARE on Facebook for its next TRICARE SITREP on Tuesday, January 15th from 3:15 p.m. to 4:15 p.m. eastern. TRICARE subject matter experts will answer your questions about TRICARE preventive services, costs, and how to get care based on your health plan live on Facebook. For more information on how to join the Facebook event on Tuesday, check out the news article at [www.TRICARE.mil/news](http://www.TRICARE.mil/news).

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**Virtual Lifetime Electronic Record** – When it comes to your health, information is critical. Your health care team relies on your medical history to gain a full picture of your health. The Military Health System makes it easier for you and your providers to access the information you need with the Virtual Lifetime Electronic Record, or the VLER, Health Information Exchange Initiative. Access to your information is important to all of your providers, regardless of where you receive care. Through this private and secure network, authorized health care professionals can access your health care information. The information exchanged is part of your TRICARE benefit and is already shared through VLER.

Non-active duty beneficiaries may choose not to participate in VLER. Once you opt out, the Military Health System will not be able to share your information, even in case of an emergency. To opt out, visit [TRICARE.mil/vlerhealth](http://TRICARE.mil/vlerhealth) and download the VLER Opt-Out Letter template. Complete the form and mail it to the address provided. If you choose to opt out now and change your mind later, you may opt back in using the VLER Opt-Back-In Letter template.

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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> | January14, 2018 ++]

**\* Finances \***



**Hospital Charges Update 01 ▶ Will Soon Be Available online**

You will soon be able to find the prices that a hospital charges online. A recently finalized federal regulation includes a provision that requires hospitals to make a list of their current standard charges available online and to update the list at least annually. This provision takes effect 1 JAN. The new rule “will affect approximately 3,330 acute care hospitals,” according to the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS), the federal agency that issues a new version of the regulation each year. CMS described the provision on hospital charges as part of “an effort to encourage price transparency” by giving the public more accessibility to pricing information.

Federal law already requires hospitals to establish a list of their standard charges and make it available to the public. But currently, they are only required to make it available upon request, according to the industry publication Becker’s. While requiring hospitals to post prices online is a step in the right direction for consumers, some health care providers are concerned that it could confuse consumers, Modern Healthcare reports. The publication explains: “Hospitals argue that a list of charges could be misleading because they don’t reflect prices negotiated by insurers. In addition, not-for-profit hospitals must provide reduced rates or charity care based on patient household income.” Other health care providers tell Modern Healthcare that increased price transparency could prompt some patients to avoid seeking care. [Source: MoneyTalksNews | Karla Bowsher | December 31, 2018 ++]

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**Mortgage Update 11 ▶ Government Shutdown Impact on Getting & Managing**

The partial federal government shutdown is complicating the already complicated process of getting and managing a mortgage. For one thing, the political storm is like severe weather at a major airport: You can expect minor delays or

worse. And if you're among the 800,000 federal employees going without a regular paycheck, it could mean trouble making a house payment. Here's how the shutdown is affecting homebuyers and homeowners — and what you can do about it.

### **IF YOU'RE GETTING AN FHA, VA OR USDA LOAN**

If you're getting a Federal Housing Administration or Department of Veterans Affairs loan, it's likely you can expect delays in the underwriting process, and it's possible your closing date will be pushed back as well. There's good news for most FHA-qualified homebuyers: Single-family FHA loans are being funded, even during the shutdown. FHA home equity conversion mortgages (known as reverse mortgages) and FHA Title I loans (financing for permanent property improvements and renovations) are the exception — and won't be processed during the shutdown. The processing of VA loans will continue, according to the Mortgage Bankers Association, but you may have to wait. Support staff at the VA and at the Department of Housing and Urban Development who handle underwriting or entitlement questions "are unavailable, so FHA/VA borrowers may experience delays," says Ted Rood, a senior loan officer in St. Louis.

Because of the shutdown, VA and FHA spokespeople weren't available to provide an estimate of how many borrowers could have their loans delayed. But the most-recent data suggest delays could potentially affect thousands of borrowers. In January 2018, the FHA insured mortgages for 64,401 single-family homebuyers — of those, 82 percent were first-time buyers. The VA doesn't report loan guarantees by month, but it guaranteed 148,379 loans in the first three months of 2018, or nearly 50,000 a month. The U.S. Department of Agriculture isn't approving new USDA loans during the shutdown. According to USDA data, the department guaranteed or made about 10,000 single-family loans each month in the most recent fiscal year that ended in September.

### **IF YOU'RE SEEKING A CONVENTIONAL LOAN**

Most mortgages are considered conventional loans, meaning they aren't backed by the federal government. However, they are facilitated by government-sponsored enterprises, such as Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac. As private companies, Fannie and Freddie aren't directly affected by the shutdown. Mortgage processing is continuing as usual, except in cases where the federal government provides information required for underwriting. "The IRS has not been processing 4506-T tax transcripts — tax return verifications — which are required on most files, although that service is restarting," Rood says. "There will still be a backlog due to requests that have been piling up since Dec. 22." Self-employed borrowers are particularly affected by the lack of access to federal income tax transcripts. Some lenders may accept signed tax returns in lieu of transcripts. And the shutdown could also stall verification of employment for government employees.

### **IF YOU NEED FLOOD INSURANCE**

Getting flood insurance if you're buying in a flood-prone area shouldn't be a problem despite some earlier troubled waters. The Federal Emergency Management Agency announced on 28 DEC that it would resume selling and renewing flood insurance policies. That reversed a 26 DEC decision to suspend policy sales and renewals during the partial shutdown. "This new decision means thousands of home sale transactions in communities across the country can go forward without interruption," National Association of Realtors President John Smaby said in a press release.

### **IF YOU OWN A HOME BUT AREN'T GETTING PAID**

If the lack of a paycheck has you worried about paying an existing mortgage on time, contact your loan servicer immediately. Explain your situation and ask about alternatives. One common option is forbearance, an arrangement designed to help homeowners during periods of financial hardship. Forbearance temporarily reduces or suspends your mortgage payments while money is short. For example, Wells Fargo and LoanDepot list forbearance on their websites, though cases are approved on an individual basis. A short-term loan that makes up for missed pay is another possible option. Navy Federal Credit Union, for example, is offering one-time zero percent APR loans of up to \$6,000 for federal employees and active-duty members of the Coast Guard who typically use direct deposit for their paychecks. Talking with your lender before you miss a payment could keep your credit score from suffering a hit. "We will work

with each customer individually and can help with things such as late fees and not reporting to the credit bureau," Tom Kelly, a JPMorgan Chase spokesman, said in an email.

### **IF YOU'RE CONSIDERING A MORTGAGE RATE LOCK**

Mortgage rates already had been falling when the shutdown began 22 DEC, and they fell more than an eighth of a percentage point in the two weeks that followed. That's why the shutdown could give you a chance to grab a good mortgage rate. "Our expectation is that this will be a short-term blip and you'll be glad if you were able to take advantage of the drop in mortgage rates," says Danielle Hale, chief economist for Realtor.com. Her forecast assumes that the shutdown won't last for months and that mortgage rates will rise this year.

### **'LENDERS ARE CLOSING THOUSANDS OF LOANS A DAY'**

Shutdown-related issues are causing delays of up to two weeks on typical loans, according to Alan Rosenbaum, CEO and founder of Guardhill Financial in New York City. Still, one industry leader thinks it's mostly business as usual. "The government shutdown is having a minimal impact on the mortgage industry," Mat Ishbia, president and CEO of United Wholesale Mortgage, says. "Lenders are closing thousands of loans a day. Everything is moving forward." As well, a 7 JAN survey of 2,211 members by the National Association of Realtors found that 75 percent of respondents said the shutdown hasn't had an impact on contract signings or closings.

Of those Realtors who said the shutdown had affected transactions, a quarter said a buyer decided not to buy because of general economic uncertainty; 17 percent had clients whose closings were delayed because they were getting USDA loans; 13 percent said a client's closing was delayed because of IRS income verification issues; 9 percent reported delays with FHA loans; and 6 percent with VA loans. And 9 percent said they had a client who was a federal employee who decided not to buy because of lost income or furlough.

[Source: NerdWallet | Holden Lewis | January 13, 2019 ++]

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## **SNAP Update 08 ► Food Stamps Funded thru FEB Despite Government Shutdown**

The Agriculture Department has issued assurances that funding is in place to continue its food stamp program through February, despite the partial government shutdown. Thousands of active-duty troops and an estimated 1.4 million veterans benefit from the program. Agriculture Department funding expired 21 DEC with the onset of the shutdown, but officials announced 9 JAN that full benefits for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) will continue through February.

Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue said stopgap ways had been found to appropriate money for the SNAP and child nutrition programs under budgeting authorities that remained from a previous continuing resolution passed by Congress. "At President Trump's direction, we have been working with the administration on this solution. It works and is legally sound," Perdue said in a statement 9 JAN. "And we want to assure states, and SNAP recipients, that the benefits for February will be provided," he said. "Our motto here at USDA has been to 'Do Right and Feed Everyone.' With this solution, we've got the 'Feed Everyone' part handled. And I believe that the plan we've constructed takes care of the 'Do Right' part as well." Under the new accounting arrangement, the department will have about \$4.8 billion to continue funding through February for SNAP and the Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program in the event that there is no resolution to the shutdown, according to Agriculture Department officials.

In 2016, a total of more than 44 million low-income Americans received SNAP benefits, according to the Agriculture Department. The number of active-duty military households currently participating in SNAP has been difficult to track, but the most recent estimate by the Government Accounting Office in 2016 put the number at about 23,000. The GAO report said the difficulty in estimating the number stems from the failure of the Agriculture Department and the Department of Defense to share data on active-duty troops in SNAP, Military.com's Amy Bushatz

reported last year. The Department of Veterans Affairs referred questions on the number of veterans in SNAP to the Agriculture Department, which did not immediately reply. Last year, the Center for Budget and Policy Priorities, in a detailed analysis of census figures, estimated that about 1.4 million veterans were in SNAP.

In a report 10 JAN, CBBP said that the Agriculture Department's stopgap fix to keep SNAP benefits flowing through February comes with "administrative burdens and operational complexities." However, the department's solution "should ensure that SNAP is able to stay open through February 2019 and that eligible low-income households will not face cuts to their food assistance, at least in the short term," CBBP said. President Donald Trump and congressional Democrats have been at an impasse on appropriations to reopen the government in the dispute over funding for the southern border wall. Trump has demanded \$5.7 billion for the wall. Democrats have offered \$1.6 billion for border security, but nothing for the wall. In a tweet 11 JAN, Trump said, "The Steel Barrier, or Wall, should have been built by previous administrations long ago. They never got it done - I will. Without it, our Country cannot be safe. Criminals, Gangs, Human Traffickers, Drugs & so much other big trouble can easily pour in. It can be stopped cold!"

About 800,000 federal workers have either been furloughed or are working without pay during the shutdown. According to the Congressional Budget Office, about 31 percent of federal workers are veterans. The Union Veterans Council of the AFL-CIO provided statements from several veterans who have been affected by the shutdown, on the condition that only their first names be used. Harris, an Air Force veteran working at the Federal Aviation Administration, said, "I just took out a hardship withdrawal from my Thrift Savings Plan because I'm terrified this is going to go long. I just bought a house this spring. I have car payments, credit cards and utilities along with the mortgage payment" that he won't be able to make if the shutdown continues. Michael, an Army veteran and furloughed Agriculture Department employee, said, "We had a very austere Christmas because we thought this might happen. We didn't buy the new car we were saving up for. Thank God we didn't because we need to pay bills and the mortgage." He added, "I figure our savings will hold out about six weeks or so." [Source: Military.com | Richard Sisk | January 11, 2019 ++]

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## **Property Tax Update 01 ► Postponement Program**

If you're an older homeowner in need of more cash, some states offer a little-known way to slash your property tax bill. In about two dozen states, older homeowners can legally defer their property tax bills. These programs allow you to put off taxes for as long as you live in the home. When you die — or sell the home — the state steps in and finally claims the money, plus interest, from your home equity. States that have these programs range from California in the West to Massachusetts in the East. Some states, such as Colorado, extend the program to military personnel. Others, such as Oregon, offer the program to the disabled.

In most cases, states have age and income requirements that determine whether or not you will be eligible for their programs. But the ceiling on these income limits can be high. For example, in Minnesota, you qualify for the program with an income as high as \$60,000. Eligibility requirements vary by state. To find out yours, you will need to contact your state's Controller Office. A call to California's Controller Office at (800) 952-5661 [postponement@sco.ca.gov](mailto:postponement@sco.ca.gov) revealed the following:

- The State Controller's Property Tax Postponement Program (PTP) returned in 2016 after being suspended by the Legislature in 2009. Applications can be requested by phone or email.
- Their PTP applies to homeowners who are seniors, are blind, or have a disability to defer current-year property taxes on their principal residence if they meet certain criteria including 40 percent equity in the home and an annual household income of \$35,500 or less.
- Military retirement pay, VA disability pay, and Social Security count towards household income.



- The owner must have occupied the property as a principal residence since 31 DEC of the prior year on a continuous basis.
- If more than one person is on the title it does not affect the applicant's eligibility
- The filing period for the 2018-19 tax year is October 1, 2018 to February 10, 2019.
- Upon sale of the house or death of the applicant all taxes postponed plus interest compounded at 7% is payable. If a spouse 62 or over is on the title, the program extends to that spouse's sale of the home or death. If upon the spouse's death children under 62 are on the title they will have to pay all postponed taxes plus interest. If unable to do so they will have to sell the house and use the proceeds to pay. A lien will be placed on the property until the account is paid in full.
- Repayment under the PTP Program becomes due when the homeowner:
  - Moves or sells the property;
  - Transfers title;
  - Defaults on a senior lien;
  - Refinances;
  - Dies; or
  - Obtains a reverse mortgage.

Another way to lower your property taxes is to fight them. “According to the National Taxpayers Union, 30 percent to 60 percent of taxable property in the U.S. is overvalued for property tax purposes, yet less than 5 percent of homeowners challenge them. In my experience, appealing tax bills isn't all that difficult. And because it can result in saving hundreds — even thousands — every year, if you think you have a case, you should try it.” [Source: MoneyTalksNews | Chris Kissell | January 10, 2019 ++]

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## IRS 2018 Filing Season Update 04 ► Four Things You Need to Know

The federal government shutdown is still in effect, but the IRS just got a pass. Like other federal workers, IRS employees have been furloughed as part of the shutdown. But the IRS announced this week that it will recall a “significant” share of its employees to work as the 2019 tax season nears. Here's what this means for your 2018 tax return — the one you can start filing now:

### 1. The 2019 tax season starts Jan. 28 — but you can file now

Jan. 28 is the official start date for the 2019 tax season, and the IRS will start processing returns on that date, the agency said in its announcement. Taxpayers do not have to wait until 28 JAN to start filing tax returns, however. The IRS explains: “Software companies and tax professionals will be accepting and preparing tax returns before 28 JAN and then will submit the returns when the IRS systems open later this month.” Note that the IRS advises that taxpayers file their returns electronically to receive a speedy refund, as well as to minimize errors.

### 2. The IRS will issue refunds as usual

Despite recent speculation in the media that tax refunds might be delayed due to the government shutdown, the IRS says its recalled employees will be working to issue refunds to taxpayers “as scheduled.” “We are committed to ensuring that taxpayers receive their refunds notwithstanding the government shutdown,” IRS Commissioner Chuck Rettig said. This is a change from past shutdowns. As The New York Times reports: “*Under previous shutdown plans — and interpretations of federal law — the I.R.S. was prohibited from dispensing tax refunds when Congress has not approved money to fund the Treasury Department, as is the case now.*” According to the Times report, Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin said there should be enough employees recalled to handle 60 to 70 percent of phone calls seeking IRS assistance. Those workers will not be paid until the shutdown ends, however, Mnuchin said.

### 3. Returns are due April 15 for most taxpayers

This week the IRS also announced the official date for Tax Day 2019. For most taxpayers, returns are due by Monday, 15 APR. For those in Maine and Massachusetts, however, returns are not due until April 17 due to regional holidays.

#### 4. What happens when you file late

Will you owe a fine for missing the April 15 filing deadline? Maybe not. The government does assess both failure-to-file and failure-to-pay penalties — from the due date of the return until the tax is paid in full — and those aren't cheap. The failure-to-file penalty is 5 percent of your unpaid taxes each month the taxes are due and not paid, up to a maximum of 25 percent. "If your return is over 60 days late, there's also a minimum penalty for late filing; it's the lesser of \$210 or 100 percent of the tax owed," the IRS adds. The failure-to-pay penalty isn't quite as hefty, coming in at one-half of 1 percent of your unpaid taxes for each month or part of a month, up to a maximum of 25 percent, of the amount of tax that remains unpaid from the due date of the return until the tax is paid in full. Other factors can increase or decrease this amount, so be sure to check out the IRS website for more details.

However, the IRS also states the following: *The IRS may abate your penalties for filing and paying late if you can show reasonable cause and that the failure wasn't due to willful neglect. Making a good faith payment as soon as you can may help to establish that your initial failure to pay timely was due to reasonable cause and not willful neglect.* Still, it is not recommended taking your chances here. When you owe money to the IRS, the agency will charge you interest that compounds daily: "The IRS doesn't generally abate interest charges and they continue to accrue until all assessed tax, penalties, and interest are fully paid."

[Source: MoneyTalksNews | Karla Bowsher | January 9, 2019 ++]

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## Airline Tickets ► Senior Discount Comparisons

The average domestic airfare is \$349.17, according to the latest federal data. That's before baggage fees or in-flight entertainment. To cut costs, you pack lighter, use frequent-flyer miles and select the most inconvenient travel times. But if you're 50 or older, there's one more way to save: Ask for a senior discount. Whether you're retired or simply enjoying an empty nest, these are prime traveling years. Take advantage of your newfound free time with discounted airfare — not to mention discounted hotel room rates. The following airlines offer senior discounts when you book online, over the phone or both.

**1. American Airlines** -- Discounted tickets are offered on select international flights for passengers over the age of 65, a company spokesperson tells Money Talks News. To view such fares, the airline advises using the advanced search feature on its website. Visit the [www.AA.com](http://www.AA.com) home page and click on the words "Advanced search" — which is below the blue "Search" button. On the next page, fill in your flight preferences and then look for the drop-down menus in the "Passengers" section. From there, select the "Senior (65+)" passenger age option to indicate that you are eligible for any senior discounts that may be available for your itinerary.

**2. British Airways** -- Turning 50 years old comes with a few perks, including eligibility to join AARP. Currently, AARP members can save up to \$200 on trans-Atlantic flights with British Airways. This discount applies to round-trip flights from select U.S. gateways to the United Kingdom and beyond that are booked by Jan. 31. According to British Airways' terms and conditions for this offer, "All discounted fares will be highlighted with a red 'Discount.'" The discount is available to both AARP members and those traveling with an AARP member, according to the terms. However, flights must be booked through the AARP website to be eligible for the discount, and only an AARP member who is a registered user of AARP.org can do that. To proceed, click the blue "Book Now" button on AARP's webpage <https://advantages.aarp.org/en/offer.british-airways.10047.html> for this offer.

**3. Delta Air Lines** -- Delta may offer discounts for select itineraries to seniors, according to the airline's website <https://www.delta.com/us/en/booking-information/fare-classes-and-tickets/fares-and-discounts>. However, they are not available on Delta.com. To find out if you're eligible for a senior discount for your next trip, contact the airline directly. The phone number for the general sales and service department is 800-221-1212, which you can call 24 hours a day, seven days per week.

**4. Southwest Airlines** -- Southwest's senior fares can make this already low-cost carrier an even better option for travelers age 65 or older. You can save on domestic and international flights when you make a reservation online, by contacting a Southwest Airlines Customer Representative or by going through a travel agent, according to the airline's website. When booking at [Southwest.com](https://www.southwest.com), indicate the number of seniors traveling in the "Seniors" box. Just note that for international flights, seniors who want to take advantage of the discount must book their seats separately from anyone under age 65 who is traveling with them, according to Southwest's website.

**5. United Airlines** -- This airline offers senior fares for select destinations to customers age 65 and older, according to United's website <https://www.united.com/ual/en/us/fly/travel/special-needs/seniors.html>. Ask for more details about these rates when making a reservation. Or, if you book through [United.com](https://www.united.com), select the number of "Seniors (65+)" under the "Travelers" drop-down menu to indicate how many people are eligible for any senior discounts that might be available for your itinerary.

[Source: MoneyTalksNews | Elizabeth Lotts | January 7, 2019 ++]

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## **Mortgage Update 10 ► Prospective House Hunters Window Of Opportunity**

The swings in the U.S. stock market have indirectly opened up a window of opportunity for prospective house hunters, but it may not last long. "Mortgage rates are down almost a half percentage point since mid-November, and given the strength of this economy, I don't think this is going to last," Greg McBride, chief financial analyst for Bankrate.com, said during an interview with FOX Business. The volatile stock market, which in 2018 produced the worst annual returns since 2008 amid recession fears that gathered steam in December, correlated with a decline in the 10-Year Treasury yield, which is now at 4.66 percent. The longer-term bond is viewed as a predictor of mortgage rates.

A 30-year fixed rate mortgage fell to 4.84 percent, the lowest since SEP 2018, as reported by the Mortgage Bankers Association on 5 JAN. McBride's advice to home buyers now: just do it. "If you're in the market for a home, I think now is a great time to take advantage and lock in," he said, adding the rates are likely to move above 5 percent in the near future. Plus, even though Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell has indicated policymakers at the U.S. central bank will likely slow their planned pace of short-term interest rate hikes in 2019, at least two increases are expected. According to MBA current rates are:

Mortgage Rate Snapshot

- 30-Year Fixed: 4.84%
- 15-Year Fixed: 4.25%
- 5/1 ARMs: 4.16%

The blockbuster December jobs report, which revealed that U.S. employers added 312,000 jobs, while annual wages jumped 3.2 percent – the most since 2008 – is evidence the U.S. economy is strong. While the unemployment rate ticked up to 3.9 percent, economists say that reflects more people coming off the sidelines to look for work. "It doesn't get any better than this," White House Economic Advisor Larry Kudlow said when describing the report and his view on the state of the U.S. economy to FOX Business. "There is no recession coming. There is no recession in sight," he stressed.

Although attractive mortgage rates are a bonus, house hunters are likely to experience some headwinds fueled by tight supply, which is contributing to higher home prices. U.S. home prices rose 5.1 percent in November, compared with the same period last year, according to CoreLogic. Experts expect they will rise another 4.8 percent throughout the coming year. [Source: [FOXBusiness.com](http://FOXBusiness.com) | Suzanne O'Halloran | January 5, 2018 ++]

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## **USAA CFPB Settlement ► Pay 66,240 Account Holders \$181.59 Each**

USAA Federal Savings Bank will pay more than \$12 million to 66,240 military, retiree and veteran account holders to resolve various allegations relating to members' accounts and resolving errors, in a settlement reached this week with the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau. The CFPB alleges that USAA failed to properly resolve errors; failed to honor members' requests to stop preauthorized payments through Electronic Fund Transfers; and that it reopened accounts without members' authorization and without notifying them. The bureau found the alleged violations during a review of the bank's practices.

Under the settlement, filed 3 JAN, USAA will pay \$181.59 each to the 66,240 members allegedly denied a reasonable investigation of the error they reported. USAA will also pay the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau a \$3.5 million fine. USAA neither admits nor denies the allegations, according to the consent order. The consent order notes that USAA has been addressing the issues, including changing some policies and procedures in 2015 and 2016. Information was not immediately available about when the CFPB review began. "USAA has been proactively addressing these issues for more than a year and most are resolved," said USAA spokesman Matt Hartwig in a statement provided to Military Times. In 2017, he said, "we began providing restitution payments to some affected members, and improved our procedures. "None of the issues reflect an intention to take advantage of our members. In fact, we believed our processes would help resolve matters faster. We take responsibility for this situation."

CFPB alleged that USAA refused to investigate errors in some cases. Until the policy changed in May 2015, the bank didn't investigate reported errors unless the consumer submitted a "written statement of unauthorized debit" within 10 days after USAA sent the form to the consumer. USAA also had a separate procedure for those disputing an error regarding a payday loan, requiring the consumer to contact the payday lender to dispute the transaction. "On numerous occasions, USAA representatives refused to investigate errors because they concerned payday loans," the consent order stated. The procedure also required the consumer to have the written report notarized if the error involved a payday lender. While the Military Lending Act concerning limitations on payday loans applies to active duty members and dependents, it doesn't apply to military retirees and veterans, who are also eligible to be members of USAA.

USAA also didn't have a procedure requiring that a reasonable investigation be conducted when a consumer notified them of a suspected error. CFPB noted that in numerous instances when the bank found no error, "a reasonable review of all relevant information within the bank's own records would have resulted in a determination in favor of the consumer." Thus, CFPB contends, these practices resulted in USAA's failure to adequately address the unauthorized or incorrect transactions, as is required by law. CFPB also alleged:

- USAA failed to properly honor customers' requests to stop payment on preauthorized Electronic Fund Transfer payments. In some of the instances, USAA required their members to contact the merchant who initiated the EFT payments before the bank would implement stop payment orders. In addition, USAA didn't stop some payments because the payments were made to payday lenders.
- Until January 2015, USAA lacked a system-wide mechanism to stop payment of preauthorized EFTs that were processed by a debit card, so the bank failed to block thousands of these transactions after consumers had asked them to do so, according to the consent order outlining the settlement. But since January 2015,

USAA has had a system in place that allows the bank to stop debit card preauthorized EFTs at the consumer's request when the debiting merchant has identified them as "recurring."

- In some instances, USAA required consumers to contact the merchants/creditors who initiated the EFTs before initiating stop payment orders. In some cases, USAA failed to enter stop payment orders because consumers requested stop payments to payday lenders.
- Between July 21, 2011, and Nov. 1, 2016, the bank reopened 16,980 previously closed accounts without getting consumers' authorization or providing them timely notice, when the bank received certain types of debits or credits to those accounts. This resulted in 5,118 accounts incurring fees estimated at more than \$269,365. Reopening those accounts caused some to be overdrawn and subject to fees. It also gave creditors the opportunity to initiate debits to the accounts and draw down the funds. That included entities related to previous disputes or stop payment requests. In July, 2017 USAA reimbursed those customers \$270,521 — the amount of the fees plus interest.

As part of the settlement, USAA must, among other things, grant stop payments to all consumers who contact the bank within three days of future preauthorized EFTs asking for that action; implement the requests without requiring consumers to contact the merchant first; honor the stop payment requests for EFTs free of charge for a period of two years from the settlement; conduct prompt, thorough and reasonable investigations of reported errors, whether or not consumers have submitted a written statement; and stop requiring customers to get their written statement notarized.

Also, once a customer has closed an account, USAA can't process any additional transactions to that account except for transactions originated before the account was closed, or when USAA has to accept the transaction under federal requirements. For those accounts that USAA reopened without authorization and notification, if the bank furnished any information to a credit reporting agency they must notify them to delete that information.

"At USAA, our mission is to facilitate the financial security of our members. One way we work to achieve that mission is operating in compliance with applicable laws and regulations, and ensuring that we have the systems, people and processes in place to be compliant," USAA's Hartwig said. "For 96 years, we have stood by our members. We continue to do so with a focus on making sure our operations adhere to our expectations and those of our members." [Source: MilitaryTimes | Karen Jowers | January 3, 2018 ++]

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## **IRAs Update 03 ► Why Convert to a Roth IRA?**

The difference between a traditional and Roth Individual Retirement Account (IRA) is when you pay taxes. Roth accounts require tax payment now. Traditional accounts delay the taxes until retirement. Why would you consider converting your traditional account to a Roth, especially after you've paid no tax on traditional account contributions so any untaxed money moved to a Roth account requires tax payment upfront? Consider:

- A Roth account does not have Required Minimum Distributions (RMDs) at age 70½ as a traditional account does. Maybe you don't need the RMDs or you want to pass assets to heirs. By the way, Roth 401(k)s and Roth Thrift Savings Plans do have RMDs.
- You want to lower your future income level thereby reducing the taxes on Social Security benefits or your Part B Medicare premiums. Distributions from a Roth are tax-free and do not count as income. Traditional account distributions count as taxable income in the year withdrawn.
- You might have a year with sizable itemized deductions, and the taxes from a conversion to a Roth account will be offset by the deductions. Maybe you have carry-over deductions or tax credits that will offset the conversion taxes.

- Some is better than none - you do not have to convert all your traditional account money. Partial conversions to a Roth over several years will reduce future taxable income by lessening your RMD amounts.
- Perhaps you want to take advantage of the lowered tax rates or higher standard deduction under the tax reforms before tax rates revert back to 2017 levels in 2026.

**For those thinking of a backdoor Roth IRA conversion:** A backdoor conversion is for people who have too much income to contribute to a Roth IRA. Instead, they contribute to a traditional IRA, and because they make too much money to deduct the contribution to the traditional IRA, the money in the traditional account is taxed. Then, they convert the traditional taxed IRA money to a Roth IRA - circumventing the Roth IRA up-front contribution limitation due to their higher income, and they don't usually owe taxes on the conversion.

The backdoor traditional IRA-to-Roth IRA conversion only works if you have a traditional IRA with only nondeductible contributions. If you have traditional IRAs with deducted contributions, you have to aggregate the monies in all your traditional IRAs when you convert to a Roth IRA. Bottom line: You can't cherry-pick only the taxed traditional IRA monies for conversion to the Roth IRA. You will owe some taxes on the conversion.

[Source: MOAA Newsletter | Shane Ostrom | December 27, 2018 ++]

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## **Restaurant Menus ► Ways They Trick You Into spending More**

When you open a menu, you're looking at a marketing tool that's designed to steer you toward choices that increase profits for the restaurant you're visiting. Like all businesses, restaurants exist to make money. The goal of menu design is to draw attention to the items they are most eager to sell. Typically, these are the most costly choices. So, knowing the techniques of menu design will make you a wiser consumer — and likely save you some money the next time you dine out. What follows are eight ways menus can influence your choices.

**1. Creating food descriptions that make your mouth water** -- One technique that restaurants use to boost sales is making entrees sound too yummy to pass up, regardless of their cost, says Alison Pearlman, author of the recent book "May We Suggest: Restaurant Menus and the Art of Persuasion." For example, instead of simply listing "steaks," they may describe cuts of meat as tender and juicy. Instead of simply offering "fried chicken," menus often describe it as crispy and delicious. "If you just had a dish without the description, it wouldn't be nearly as effective," Pearlman tells Money Talks News. "Sales will go up about 27 percent when you add descriptive copy to the items."

**2. Using images that build expectations** -- Some restaurants use tempting images along with evocative descriptions to engage diners. Color photographs of appealing dishes can draw you to featured items. To meet guest expectations, kitchen staffs create meals that closely match the promise offered by the photographs, says Pearlman.

**3. Using price decoys** -- Consumers are often averse to choosing the most expensive items on menus. So, some restaurants place very expensive entrees next to slightly less expensive dishes to make them look cheap by comparison, says Gregg Rapp, a professional menu engineer based in Studio City, California. For example, seeing another entree listed for \$40 makes a \$30 entree seem more reasonable. The costlier items often are referred to as decoys. "If you have a higher-priced item, it will direct them to the lower-priced item, if they are shopping for price," Rapp says of restaurant patrons.

**4. Listing prices without dollar signs** -- Another psychological trick that restaurants often employ is leaving dollar signs off menu prices. A 2009 study by Cornell University found that guests who viewed numeral-only menus spent a great deal more than guests who viewed menus with prices that included dollar signs. Rapp tells Money Talks News that omitting dollar signs "softens the pricing."

**5. Making prices difficult to compare** -- Since customers tend to shop by price, many restaurants avoid creating menus that make it easy for patrons to compare the costs of meals. Rapp says he advises his clients not to line up the prices. If the menu lists its offerings in a long column, then people will find the cheapest items. The goal is to have people focus on the food that is offered, not the cost of each item.

**6. Highlighting expensive items** -- Restaurants use multiple techniques to draw the customer's eye to the menu items that they want to sell. For example, these techniques include:

- Describing dishes in larger letters
- Placing boxes around dishes
- Leaving more white space around dishes

The idea is to showcase the most profitable menu items. Meanwhile, restaurants often place items that they are less eager to sell at the back of their menus.

**7. Offering fewer choices** -- If a menu contains too many items, readers can become confused and fall back on familiar and inexpensive dishes. Some restaurants find they can increase sales simply by giving patrons fewer choices. They may include their best and most expensive items and omit the rest. When menus are divided into sections — such as “steaks,” “salads” and “seafood” — Rapp recommends that restaurants include no more than seven items in each section. Anything more tends to overwhelm customers.

**8. Building confidence through cleanliness** -- Restaurants use their cleanliness to attract customers and win their confidence — and it all begins with the menu, says Pearlman. If customers see dirt or stains on a menu, they are likely to walk out of the establishment. That's because they believe that menu cleanliness reflects the quality of the food that will come out of the kitchen. A clean menu helps put people in the mood to relax and open up their wallets.

[Source: MoneyTalksNews | Emmet Pierce | January 2, 2019 ++]

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## **Tax Deductions Update 04 ► Changes for Tax Year 2018**

It's been more than a year now since the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act became federal law, ushering in sweeping tax reform. But not until this spring will it hit home for many taxpayers. Most changes in the tax law enacted on Dec. 22, 2017, did not take effect until the 2018 tax year. So, your 2018 return — the one due in April — is the first you will file under a host of new rules. You will likely welcome some of these changes — like the five-figure standard deductions. At the same time, you might be surprised by the number of tax breaks that you won't be able to claim for 2018 due to tax reform. The following tax deductions are among those to which you can say farewell, at least as far as your next tax return is concerned.

**1. Personal exemptions** -- For 2017, eligible taxpayers could claim an exemption for themselves and a spouse as well as exemptions for dependents. Each such exemption reduced taxable income by \$4,050. For 2018, however, there are no personal exemptions. Tax reform suspended them, basically meaning it made them temporarily unavailable. Specifically, personal exemptions and many other tax breaks that were suspended by the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act will be unavailable for tax years 2018 through 2025.

**2. Moving expenses** -- You cannot deduct moving expenses from your 2018 taxable income, either. Tax reform suspended this deduction for everyone except active-duty members of the U.S. armed forces who are ordered to relocate. “During the suspension, no deduction is allowed for use of an automobile as part of a move,” states IRS Publication 5307, which outlines how tax reform impacts individuals and families in tax year 2018. Tax reform also suspended the exclusion for qualified moving expense reimbursements for everyone but active-duty military members. So, if your employer reimbursed you for moving expenses in 2018, that reimbursement will be considered taxable income.

**3. Casualty and theft losses** -- Tax reform modified the deduction for net casualty and theft losses, making it available only to taxpayers who suffered such losses that were attributed to a federally declared disaster. Other requirements for this deduction remain in place, however. “The loss must still exceed \$100 per casualty and the net total loss must exceed 10 percent of your [adjusted gross income],” states Publication 5307.

**4. Job-related expenses** -- Previously, folks who itemized their tax deductions could write off what the IRS refers to as miscellaneous deductions to the extent that they exceeded 2 percent of such taxpayers’ taxable income. But miscellaneous deductions are among those that have been suspended. Miscellaneous deductions include unreimbursed employee expenses, such as:

- Uniforms
- Union dues
- Business-related meals
- Business-related entertainment
- Business-related travel

So, if you paid for such expenses out of your own pocket in 2018 and were not reimbursed for them by your employer, you cannot write them off on your next tax return.

**5. Tax preparation fees** -- This is another miscellaneous deduction and thus has been suspended. It includes:

- The cost of tax preparation software programs
- The cost of tax publications
- Fees for filing tax returns electronically

So, if you paid any of these expenses in 2018, you can’t write them off on your next tax return.

[Source: MoneyTalksNews | Karla Bowsher | January 2, 2019 ++]

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## **Medicare Outpatient Charges ► Procedure Price Lookup Website**

Medicare’s latest resource for patients could save you money every time you need an outpatient procedure. The federal health care program that primarily serves folks ages 65 and older calls this new tool “[Procedure Price Lookup](https://www.medicare.gov/procedure-price-lookup)”. You can access it online for free at <https://www.medicare.gov/procedure-price-lookup>. The tool helps trim costs of outpatient procedures, which generally include services for which you do not need to be formally admitted to a health care facility. The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services launched the tool in response to a requirement of the 21st Century Cures Act, federal legislation that former President Barack Obama signed into law in December 2016.

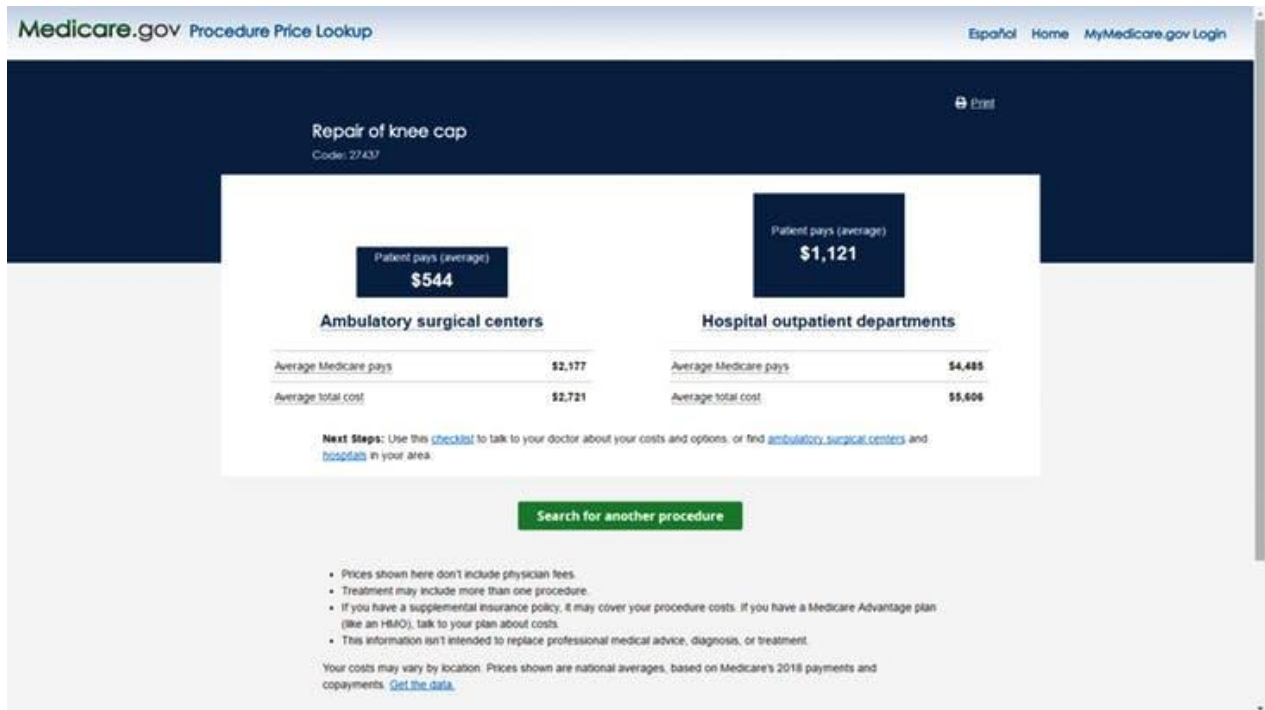
To use Medicare’s Procedure Price Lookup tool, type the name of an outpatient procedure into the search box. Or, select the procedure from a list of options that appear once you start typing. If you are unsure of the exact name of a procedure, ask your doctor. To be sure you have the right procedure, it helps also to ask your doctor for the corresponding billing code. Once you have the right procedure, the tool will show you various dollar amounts for the procedure. These amounts include the national average:

- Copayments that Medicare beneficiaries without supplemental insurance pay when having the procedure performed at ambulatory surgical centers and at hospitals’ outpatient departments.
- Amounts that Medicare pays to ambulatory surgical centers and hospitals at which the procedure is performed.

**Note:** Medicare defines ambulatory surgical centers as facilities at which certain surgeries can be performed for patients who aren’t expected to need more than 24 hours of care.



Say you need a kneecap repair. The screenshot below shows what the tool would tell you about the procedure:



**Why costs vary --** If you pull up a few procedures via the Procedure Price Lookup tool, you might notice a pattern of large price variation depending on whether the procedure occurs at a hospital or an ambulatory surgical center. Medicare regulations require separate payment systems for different types of health care facilities. Due to this, different facilities can charge the Medicare program and patients different amounts for the same procedure. Patients who are unaware of this might not realize how much more a procedure costs at one type of facility compared with another until they get a bill.

As Seema Verma, administrator of the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, writes in a recent blog post about the new tool: “Can you imagine going to the grocery store, getting the groceries you need for the week, but never knowing the price of your items until a week later when the store sends you a bill? Sadly, that’s how health care works every day.” Verma notes that it would take an act of Congress to change the ways different types of facilities charge for the same procedure. Until then, patients now have the Procedure Price Lookup tool. Using it before going in for a procedure can potentially save you hundreds if not thousands of dollars. [Source: MoneyTalksNews | Karla Bowsher | December 7, 2018++]

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## Social Security Q & A ► 190101 thru 190115

**(Q) Is there a quick way I can find out if I qualify for SSDI or SSI?**

**A:** The below quiz will give you some basic answers. Give each question as much thought as needed. Social Security will scrutinize each step in the process. Issues of severity, proof of impairments, and vocational issues are most important. This Information is Not Legal Advice and Is for General Use Only!

- Are you presently working up to 40 hours per week and/or earning over \$1170 per month? Yes\_\_ No\_\_. If you answered, “yes,” your application for disability benefits will probably be denied.

- Do you have a medical or mental condition that is expected to last at least one year or result in death? Does the condition limit or prevent you from working? Yes, to all\_\_ No, to any\_\_. If you answered, “yes” you meet one of the important requirements for disability benefits.
- Can you prove the severity of your medical or mental condition? Up-to-date, medical evidence including treatment, medications, diagnostic tests, or other supporting evidence is required. Yes\_\_ No\_\_. If you answered, “yes” you meet another important requirement for Social Security disability benefits. If the answer is, “no”, your claim probably will be unsuccessful. Social Security regulations do not allow payment of benefits based upon your allegations alone. Work on getting all the necessary medical treatment for your condition as possible.
- Are you still able to perform any of the jobs you performed during the last 15 years? Yes\_\_ No\_\_. If you answered, “yes” your claim will be denied.
- Even though you can’t to do any of your past work, can you do any kind of work? Including unskilled sit/down work, no matter how unrewarding, or at any pay level? Be realistic. Impairments must be physical or mental, not “nobody will hire me”. Yes\_\_ No\_\_. If you answered, “no,” you probably meet the requirements for Social Security disability benefits. Provided your impairments are substantiated. And, you are not working as described in the first question. Individuals age 50 or over, with limited past work experience, may be disabled even though, they can perform some jobs. Past work experience and age is so important! These issues affect qualifying for Social Security disability benefits. You are advised to seek the advice of a Social Security specialist about these issues.

[Source: Louisiana Social Security Lawyer | Hallman Woods | November 30, 2018 ++]

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## **Social Security Scam** ► Callers Pose as Social Security to Steal Your SSN

The New Year means the start of tax season. The Federal Trade Commission is warning people to be on the lookout for suspicious calls that claim to be from the Social Security Administration. Scammers are ramping up their efforts to steal Social Security numbers to use in filing fraudulent tax returns.

### **How the Scam Works**

- You answer the phone, and it's someone alleging to be from the Social Security Administration (SSA) or another government entity. The name on your caller ID may even back that up that claim. The caller says your social security number has been used to fraudulently apply for a credit card or commit another crime. In order to fix the situation, the caller needs you to confirm your SSN and other personal information. If you don't cooperate, the caller threatens to take you to court or have your Social Security number blocked or revoked.
- No matter the details, the stories are designed to induce fear. Scammers hope that under pressure you will tell them your SSN and other sensitive personal information. Scammers can use SSNs to commit identity theft and file tax returns in your name to steal your refund.

### **How to Avoid the Scam**

- Never give personal information to unsolicited callers. If someone contacts you without your permission, refuse to tell them any personal information.
- Remember, the SSA will never call you asking for your Social Security number. They will never ask you to pay anything, nor will they threaten your benefits.
- Don't trust your caller ID. The internet has made it possible for scammers to use fake IDs when they call your home. If you receive a suspicious call, don't make any important decisions based on what your caller ID says.

- Contact the Social Security Administration: If you are concerned about a call you received from someone who claims to be with the SSA, you can call the real SSA at 1-800-772-1213 (TTY 1-800-325-0778).

#### **For More Information**

To learn more about other kinds of scams, go to [www.BBB.org/ScamTips](http://www.BBB.org/ScamTips). If you've been targeted by this scam, help others avoid the same problem by reporting your experience at [FTC.gov/Complaint](http://FTC.gov/Complaint) and [BBB.org/ScamTracker](http://BBB.org/ScamTracker).

[Source: BBB Scam Alert | January 11, 2018 ++]

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## **Tax Burden for Minnesota Retired Vets ► As of JAN 2019**

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. Following are the taxes you can expect to pay if you retire in Minnesota:

### **Sales Taxes**

**State Sales Tax:** 6.875% (food, clothing, prescription and non-prescription drugs exempt); liquor has a tax of 9.875%, and beer has a tax of 10.075%. The sales tax rate does not apply to motor vehicles that are subject to the state excise tax on motor vehicles. A few cities and counties also add a sales tax which can be as high as 8.375%.

**Gasoline Tax:** 47.0 cents/gallon (Includes all taxes).

**Diesel Fuel Tax:** 53.0 cents/gallon (Includes all taxes).

**Cigarette Tax:** \$3.04/pack of 20.

### **Personal Income Taxes**

**Tax Rate Range:** Low – 5.35%; High – 9.85%.

**Income Brackets:** Four. Lowest – \$25,890; Highest – \$160,020.

**Personal Exemptions:** Single – \$4,150; Married – \$8,300; Dependents – \$4,150.

**Standard Deduction:** Single – \$6,500; Married filing jointly – \$13,000.

**Medical/Dental Deduction:** Federal amount.

**Federal Income Tax Deduction:** None.

**Retirement Income Taxes:** Social Security income is taxed by Minnesota to the same extent it is on your federal return. It is taxed at a rate between 5.35% and 9.85%, depending on a taxpayer's adjusted gross income (AGI). Pensions, including federal pensions, received while a Minnesota resident are taxable by Minnesota, regardless of where your pension was earned. Railroad Retirement benefits paid to you by the Railroad Retirement Board are not taxed by Minnesota. If these benefits are included in your federal taxable income, you may subtract them from your taxable income. Taxpayers 65 and older may subtract some income if federal adjusted gross income is under certain limits.

**Retired Military Pay:** Pensions are taxable.

**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**

There is a Senior Citizen Property Tax Deferral Program that allows people 65 years of age or older, whose household incomes are \$60,000 or less, to defer a portion of their property tax on their home. This deferral program has two primary advantages for senior citizens. It limits the maximum amount of property tax you pay to three percent of your total household income, and it provides predictability. The amount of tax you pay will not change for as long as you participate in this program. It is not a tax forgiveness program. It is a low interest loan from the state. The deferred tax is paid by the state to your county. Interest will be charged on this loan. The interest rate will be adjusted annually, but will never exceed five percent. A lien will attach to your property.

Minnesota has two property tax refund programs for homeowners: the regular property tax refund, and the special property tax refund. You may be eligible for one or both, depending on your income and the size of your property tax bill. For details refer to <http://www.revenue.state.mn.us/Pages/default.aspx>,

### **Inheritance and Estate Taxes**

Minnesota has an estate tax. The estate tax is a tax on all of the assets of a decedent before they are distributed to beneficiaries. If the estate meets the filing requirements, the estate pays this tax to the IRS and/or the state in which the decedent lived (prorated to any other states where the decedent had property). Many states have a threshold different from the federal level. Minnesota does not have an inheritance tax.

### **Military Tax Credit**

If you are a veteran of the U.S. military, including the National Guard and Reserves, you may qualify for a tax credit of up to \$750 for your past service. To qualify, you must have separated from military service before the end of the year and one of the following must be true:

- You served at least 20 years in the military,
- You have a service-connected disability rating of 100% total and permanent (as rated by the U.S. Department of Veterans' Affairs), or
- (Beginning with tax year 2013) You were honorably discharged and you receive a pension or other retirement pay for service in the military.

To determine the amount of your credit, complete the worksheet for [Schedule M1C, Other Nonrefundable Credits](#). If you are a part-year resident of Minnesota or a nonresident, you may still qualify for the credit. When completing the worksheet for Schedule M1C, use your percentage of Minnesota income from [Schedule M1NR, Nonresidents/Part-Year Residents](#).

**Note:** Refer to [www.revenue.state.mn.us/individuals/individ\\_income/Pages/Members\\_of\\_the\\_Military.aspx](http://www.revenue.state.mn.us/individuals/individ_income/Pages/Members_of_the_Military.aspx) for additional military tax credits or relief

### **Other State Tax Rates**

To compare the above sales, income, and property tax rates to those accessed in other states go to:

- Sales Tax: <http://www.tax-rates.org/taxtables/sales-tax-by-state>.
- Personal Income Tax: <http://www.tax-rates.org/taxtables/income-tax-by-state>.
- Property Tax: <http://www.tax-rates.org/taxtables/property-tax-by-state>.

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For further information on the state of Minnesota income tax requirements visit:

- Department of Revenue site <http://www.revenue.state.mn.us/Pages/default.aspx>, and
- [https://www.revenue.state.mn.us/Forms\\_and\\_Instructions/m1\\_inst\\_18.pdf](https://www.revenue.state.mn.us/Forms_and_Instructions/m1_inst_18.pdf)

If you have tax problems and have not been able to resolve them through normal channels, you may contact the Taxpayer Rights Advocate. Write to:

- Minnesota Department of Revenue
- Taxpayer Rights Advocate
- Mail Station 7102

- 600 North Robert Street
- St. Paul, MN 55146
- Call: 651-556-6013 or 855-452-0767
- Email: dor.tra@state.mn.us

[Source: <http://www.retirementliving.com/taxes-kansas-new-mexico#Minnesota> | JAN 2019 ++]

**\* General Interest \***



**Notes of Interest** ► 01 thru 15 JAN 2019

- **Norway's Cars.** Almost a third of new cars sold in Norway last year were pure electric, a new world record as the country strives to end sales of fossil-fueled vehicles by 2025.
- **Boogie Woogie.** To start the New Year on a lighter foot check out <https://youtu.be/IkKh4O1-F8k>. A compilation of old movie scene dances set to Boogie Woogie Country Girl.
- **Military Pay Charts.** Refer to <https://www.military.com/benefits/military-pay/charts> to verify your pay with the 2.6% pay raise for 2019 which should appear in your 15 JAN 2019 pay check
- **Weight Loss.** Check out the Dyson Vacuum Cleaner commercial at [https://youtu.be/t\\_3oIy5jAG0](https://youtu.be/t_3oIy5jAG0) and see how to suck those pounds off.
- **Ford Carriers.** The US Navy has announced its intention to block-buy two Ford-class aircraft carriers, US Senate Armed Services Committee member Tim Kaine has confirmed. The navy expects to spend around \$43bn to build the first three ships in the class.
- **Mexico.** President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador used his first news conference of 2019 to start recruitment of 50,000 personnel for his new National Guard, which will become the country's primary security force.
- **Recycling.** New means under development that will convert trash to hot water or oil in the kitchen. Check out <https://youtu.be/hAZBXxhqMD4> and <https://youtu.be/qPIHJRlpLRk>.
- **Comedy.** The ability to improvise and create comedy is one that very few comedians are truly gifted with and Jonathan Winters was one of the best. You can only imagine the laughs he provided for his fellow Marines that he served with in the Pacific during World War Two. I'm sure heaven just got a whole lot funnier as I have no doubt Jonathan talked his way past Saint Peter and the pearly gates. Here is one of his skits from the 1964 Jack Parr show: <https://youtu.be/wwWDa1xPTPA>
- **Lucky Escape.** Why a man should always let a woman speak first when discussing anything serious is exemplified at <https://youtu.be/E3pq0WAupc>.
- **Pearl Harbor.** At <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uD7dh6lCYpg> is a 45 minute clip titled, "Pearl Harbour The New Evidence Secret History" which allegedly recounts the truth about the attack.
- **Health Care Fraud.** The U.S. Department of Justice has announced that in the fiscal year ending September 30, 2018, it recovered \$2.5 billion in settlements and judgments in False Claim Act cases related to the health care industry, which includes drug and medical device manufacturers, managed care providers, hospitals, pharmacies, hospice organizations, laboratories, and physicians. This is the ninth consecutive year in which more than \$2 billion was recovered in health care fraud cases. Most of the recovery arose from whistleblower suits in which company insiders disclosed the wrongdoing.

- **Car Theft.** An amazing look at how car thieves were able to steal a car by intercepting the Key FOB signal at <http://newsletter.biggeekdad.com/t/i-l-nthkiz-bhukrhuhd-b>. Something to consider on how you are going to keep your car keys in your house.
- **VA is Hiring!** Looking for a new career in the new year? VA is hiring! Learn about VA’s career opportunities at [www.va.gov/jobs](http://www.va.gov/jobs). Go to USA Jobs website at <https://www.usajobs.gov/search?a=VALA> if you’re looking for Veterans Benefits Administration opportunities specifically.
- **Last Imperial Soldier.** At <https://youtu.be/ZzFxZwt-8zQ> is a 32 min video based on a true story. It tells a tale of a WWII Japanese soldier who refuses to surrender even after the war has ended but one day a man approaches him and from that day onwards his life changes forever. P.S. This short is a fictionalisation of a historical event.
- **USS Fitzgerald (DDG-62).** The owners of the massive merchant vessel that collided with the warship Fitzgerald in 2017, drowning seven sailors, have agreed to pay the U.S. government nearly \$27 million as part of a settlement agreement.
- **Niagara Falls.** Many people have visited Niagara Falls and enjoyed the view but when you see Niagara Falls from above <https://youtu.be/cfoLYTKObiU> you truly realize how spectacular it is.
- **Corvette Heaven.** At <https://vimeo.com/55461336> is a short video about a young boy who falls in love with a Corvette and spends the rest of his life pursuing his dream car.
- **Tiny Apartment.** At <https://vimeo.com/109832468> check out the 86 sq ft really functional and easy to live in Paris, France apartment. At <https://vimeo.com/99643183> is a renovation plan for a similar six room in your home.

[Source: Various | January 15, 2018 ++]

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## Government Shutdown Impact on Senate ► Democrats Blockade All Legislation

Senate Democrats on 10 JAN began a “blockade” of all legislation after Senate Republicans refused to consider two House-passed bills that would fund partially shut down government agencies without money for a border wall. Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) on 10 JAN blocked the two bills that were introduced by the two Democratic senators from Maryland, where thousands of federal government workers reside. Democrats made it clear afterward that they wouldn't agree to take up **ANY** bills other than those to reopen the government. “It’s my commitment to my federal workers and our country that the first order of business here should be the reopening of government,” said Sen. Ben Cardin (D-MD).

Democrats this week already blocked work on a pro-Israel bill, and Thursday afternoon, they blocked it again when Republicans called it up for a vote. That bill would have allowed states to stop doing business with companies that boycott Israel, a move aimed at fighting the global effort to boycott, divest and sanction Israel. Democrats have also suggested they will filibuster all bills other than spending bills for the nine federal agencies subject to the partial shutdown. They were preparing to block the Israel-related bill again this week if Republicans bring it up, even though Democrats, including Cardin, are co-sponsors of that bill. McConnell called the move “a blockade” and said it was “rather unprecedented” for Democrats to block all floor legislation. “There are two shutdowns going on here,” McConnell said. “The Senate itself is being shut down because our Senate colleagues refuse to do business during this period. There is no precedent for that, no reason for that.”

McConnell said there is no purpose to voting on the Senate-authored appropriations measures to reopen the government because President Trump will not sign them. Cardin suggested there may be the votes to override a veto, which would require two-thirds majority support of both chambers. But Republicans have signaled so far they are standing behind Trump’s insistence on funding for a border wall. Democrats believe Republicans will begin to abandon Trump beginning 11 JAN, when paychecks lapse for 800,000 federal workers impacted by the partial

shutdown. "Your phones will all be ringing off the hook tomorrow when federal employees begin to miss that federal paycheck," Sen. Chris Van Hollen (D-MD), said. [Source: Washington Examiner | Susan Ferrechio | January 10, 2019 ++]

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## God Bless America ► The Song That Galvanized The American Spirit

The United States Senators sang it on the steps of the Capitol that fateful day, September 11, 2001, another "day that will live in infamy." It was sung at the reopening of the stock market the following Monday, and Canadian soprano Celine Dion sang it at the two-hour fundraiser "America: A Tribute to Heroes" on 21 SEP. The song was God Bless America, and on NBC's Saturday Today show, after mentioning the national anthem and Willie Nelson's rendition of America the Beautiful, it was reported that Ms. Dion sang "the song that galvanized the American spirit." In the days and weeks that followed the horrendous events of September 11, it was indeed God Bless America that was on the lips of Americans everywhere. Baseball officials decreed that the anthem would be sung at the seventh inning stretch of all major league ballgames. Flags were quickly printed, containing the title at the bottom. And it appeared on marquees of eating establishments, tire stores, and car washes from coast to coast.



Today's younger generations may not be familiar with the origin and history of the song Irving Berlin considered his most important composition. It was written during the First World War, for an army camp show where Berlin was stationed as a private: Camp Yaphank on Long Island. The show's producers rejected it as too jingoistic, so Berlin placed it in a trunk of rejected manuscripts. There it lay for twenty years, until Ted Collins, manager of popular singer Kate Smith, approached Irving Berlin for a new patriotic song for Kate to introduce to mark the twentieth anniversary of the Armistice that ended World War I. Berlin had recently returned from a trip to England, during which he was saddened to see signs of another war in the making. He was more thankful than ever to come back to his peaceful adopted homeland (his family had come to America from Russia when Irving was a small boy), so he was motivated to answer Collins' request, on Kate's behalf.

After several days of futile attempts to write a new patriotic song, Berlin remembered the one he had written in 1918. He asked his secretary to retrieve it from the trunk, and he made a few changes to the lyrics. One was from "Stand beside her and guide her ... To the right with a light from above" to "through the night," since "right wing" and "left wing" had taken on political connotations in the interim. The line "From the mountains to the prairies, To the oceans white with foam" had originally been "From the green fields of Virginia to the gold fields out in Nome", a decided improvement!

Now Kate Smith was the No. 1 popular songstress in America in 1938, and her weekly Kate Smith Hour was heard by many millions of radio listeners that Thursday, 10 NOV. The shy composer was invited to attend the show, but he declined, opting to listen with a few friends in his office at his music publishing company in New York. Kate sang it as her closing number, after which Berlin's phone began to ring, as people began to ask, "Where can we get that song that Kate Smith just sang?" Berlin was so touched by those calls that he decided to attend the rebroadcast three hours

later for the west coast audience. At the conclusion of the broadcast, Kate called Irving to the stage and gave him a bear hug that swept him off his feet!

The new anthem electrified the nation and Kate sang it on nearly every broadcast through December 1940, after which there was a ban on public performances of ASCAP songs. She had exclusive performance rights for a time. She recorded it for RCA Victor on March 21, 1939, and that version has been reissued countless times over the years.

The lyrics were inserted into the Congressional Record, and there was a movement to make the song our national anthem. Kate addressed Congress, imploring its members not to do that. She argued that the Star Spangled Banner was written during a battle (Francis Scott Key wrote it during the War of 1812). In fact, she recorded it on the flip side of God Bless America.

God Bless America was sung at both the Democratic and Republican national conventions in 1940, and again at the Republican national convention in Philadelphia July 31, 2000, the convention that nominated George W. Bush as our 43rd President. At the latter a videotape of Kate singing it on the Ed Sullivan Show in 1957 was played. Although it was recorded by Bing Crosby, Barry Wood, Gene Autry, and Horace Heidt's orchestra at the time, it was destined to be associated with Kate Smith forever, giving her a certain immortality, as well as a guaranteed standing ovation at all of her concerts.

In 1940 Irving Berlin established the God Bless America Foundation, with all royalties from its performance earned by either Berlin or Miss Smith going to the Boy and Girl Scouts of America. That arrangement exists to this day. These organizations were chosen, to quote the contract, because "the completely nonsectarian work of the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts is calculated to best promote unity of mind and patriotism, two sentiments that are inherent in the song itself." When Warner Brothers made "This Is The Army" into a technicolor motion picture in 1943, Berlin insisted that there be a scene in which Kate herself re-created her radio introduction of God Bless America. She sang it complete with the seldom-heard verse. When she died in 1986, that clip was played as part of nearly every television obituary.

An interesting chapter was added to the Kate Smith- God Bless America story in the twilight of her 50-year career. Officials noted that when the national anthem was played at the opening of Philadelphia Flyers' hockey games, the fans were not properly respectful, while they listened more quietly to Kate's record of God Bless America. Furthermore, a statistician noted that they won most games when the latter was played. Fans were given a surprise on October 11, 1973, at the season opener, when Kate Smith walked across the red carpet on the ice to sing her anthem in person. They beat the Toronto Maple Leafs 2-0. Announcer Gene Hart commented that Kate "brought chills and a standing ovation of three minutes. It fully met the ultimate definition of the word triumph." At critical games Kate was driven down from New York to repeat the favor. When the Flyers clinched the championship and won the Stanley Cup by defeating the Boston Bruins 1-0, even the Bruins skated over to shake Kate's hand. She was called their talisman and good luck charm; she loved the free publicity! She repeated the role the next season, and the Flyers defeated the Buffalo Sabres to retain the Stanley Cup. (Thanks to Steve for the correction to the name of the defeated team!) In 1987 they erected a bronze statue in memory of their "rabbit's foot" or "secret ice weapon," who had died the previous year.

In one of the few positive results of the unspeakable events of September 11, God Bless America has played an essential part in rekindling a tremendous burst of patriotism at a time when it is needed more than ever in our great nation's history. At <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Eq2h-J63moo> you can listen to Kate sing her rendition.

[Source: <http://katesmith.org> | Richard K. Hayes | January 6, 2019 ++]

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## **Personal Security Update 01 ► Your Old Tweets Give Away More Than You Think**

An international group of researchers has developed an algorithmic tool that uses Twitter to automatically predict exactly where you live in a matter of minutes, with more than 90 percent accuracy. It can also predict where you work,



where you pray, and other information you might rather keep private, like, say, whether you've frequented a certain strip club or gone to rehab. The tool, called **LPAuditor** (short for Location Privacy Auditor), exploits what the researchers call an "invasive policy" Twitter deployed after it introduced the ability to tag tweets with a location in 2009. For years, users who chose to geotag tweets with any location, even something as geographically broad as "New York City," also automatically gave their precise GPS coordinates. Users wouldn't see the coordinates displayed on Twitter. Nor would their followers. But the GPS information would still be included in the tweet's metadata and accessible through Twitter's API.

Twitter didn't change this policy across its apps until April of 2015. Now, users must opt-in to share their precise location—and, according to a Twitter spokesperson, a very small percentage of people do. But the GPS data people shared before the update remains available through the API to this day. The researchers developed LPAuditor to analyze those geotagged tweets and infer detailed information about people's most sensitive locations. They outline this process in a new, peer-reviewed paper that will be presented at the Network and Distributed System Security Symposium next month. By analyzing clusters of coordinates, as well as timestamps on the tweets, LPAuditor was able to figure out where tens of thousands of people lived, worked, and spent their private time.

A member of Twitter's site integrity team told WIRED that sharing location data on Twitter has always been voluntary and that the company has always given users a way to delete that data in its help section. "We recognized in 2015 that we could be even clearer with people about that, but our overarching perspective on location sharing has always been that it's voluntary and that users can choose what they do and don't want to share," the Twitter employee said. It's true that it's always been up to users to geotag their tweets or not. But there's a big difference between choosing to share that you're in Paris and choosing to share exactly where you live in Paris. And yet, for years, regardless of the square mileage of the locations users chose to share, Twitter was choosing to share their locations down to the GPS coordinates. The fact that these details were spelled out in Twitter's help section wouldn't do much good to users who didn't know they needed help in the first place.

"If you're not aware of the problem, you're never going to go remove that data," says Jason Polakis, a co-author of the study and an assistant professor of computer science at the University of Illinois at Chicago specializing in privacy and security. And according to the study, that data can reveal a lot. In November of 2016, well after Twitter changed its settings, Polakis and researchers at the Foundation for Research and Technology in Crete began pulling Twitter metadata from the company's API. They were building on prior research that showed it was possible to infer private information from geotagged tweets, but they wanted to see if they could do it at scale and with more precision, using automation.

The researchers analyzed a pool of about 15 million geotagged tweets from about 87,000 users. Some of the location data attached to those tweets may have come from users who wanted to share their exact locations, like, say, a museum or music venue. But there were also plenty of users who shared nothing more than a city or general vicinity, only to have their GPS location shared anyway. From there, LPAuditor set to work assigning each tweet to a physical spot on a map, and locating it by time zone. That generated clusters of tweets around the map, some busier than others, indicating locations where a given user spends a lot of time—or at least, a lot of time tweeting.

The fact that Twitter changed its policies is a good thing. The problem is, so much of that pre-2015 location data is still available through the API. Asked why Twitter didn't scrub it after changing the policy, the Twitter site integrity employee said, "We didn't feel it would be appropriate for us to go back and unilaterally make the decision to change people's tweets without their consent." It is argued that Twitter is of relatively small concern compared to other apps that continue to use invasive location data practices today.

Government officials in Los Angeles recently filed a lawsuit against the IBM-owned Weather Channel app for allegedly collecting and selling users' geolocation data under the guise of helping users "personalize local weather data, alerts, and forecasts." And just this week, Motherboard reported that bounty hunters are using location data purchased from T-Mobile, Sprint, and AT&T to track individuals using their phones. That's despite the companies'

public promises to stop selling such data. Then, of course, there are apps that get infected with malware and gobble up location data.

For now, Polakis says, the most people can do is delete their location data today—and think twice before sharing it in the future. [Source: WIRED | Issie Lapowsky | January 10, 2019 ++]

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## Dishwasher Tips Update 01 ► Non-Dish Uses

It may be called a “dishwasher,” but the handy kitchen appliance can clean a lot more than dishes. Think creatively when you’re on a cleaning spree, and you might be able to combine a number of washing tasks all thanks to that one handy machine. In fact, your dishwasher not only saves you time, but it uses hotter water than your poor dishpan hands can stand. Of course, there are limits to what your dishwasher should handle. Be careful, too, when loading items. Most dishwashers feature heating elements on the bottom. So, lightweight plastic items could warp or melt if you load them on the bottom level. Small items can often fit in your silverware caddy. A top-rack-only [Munchkin dishwasher basket](#) (about \$7) is good for anything you fear might jump around inside the machine.



Here are some surprising items you might not have realized you can clean in your dishwasher:

- 1. Some Instant Pot parts** -- The Company states that the following parts are dishwasher-safe: Lid, sealing ring, inner pot, and steaming rack
- 2. Oven mitts** -- Oven mitts take a beating, with everything from gravy to hot caramel accidentally decorating them with new, unwanted designs. Silicone mitts can go in the dishwasher, while cloth ones can be tossed in your washing machine.
- 3. Dish scrubbers and sponges** -- Don’t forget to clean the items you clean with. Stash sponges on the top rack, while long-handled brushes can go in your utensil holder.
- 4. Trivets** -- Stoneware and earthenware trivets and spoon rests are often top-rack dishwasher safe. But use common sense — as you should for many items in this list. Grandma’s gift with the hand-painted sunflowers is too gorgeous to gamble with.
- 5. Microwave turntables** -- Glass turntables can generally go in the dishwasher. If you’re nervous about it, first check your microwave owner’s manual.
- 6. Refrigerator shelves and bins** -- You may have to run that load by itself, as these items can be bulky.
- 7. Trash can lids and wastebaskets** -- Do you have one of those plastic trash cans with a swinging lid? Swing the lid in the dishwasher. Do you have wastebaskets that are small enough to fit in your dishwasher and are from a dishwasher-safe material like hard plastic? Toss them in, too.
- 8. Toothbrush and soap holders** -- When soap and toothpaste drip and dry on bathroom accessories, they leave an unsightly and sometimes germ-ridden mess. Give them a good shower on the dishwasher’s top shelf.

**9. Hairbrushes and hair accessories** -- First, strip as much hair from the brush as you can. Then, pop the brush into your silverware holder. Keep ponytail holders, barrettes and similar hair accessories pristine by washing them in the dishwasher, too. Be sure to secure small items so they don't fall through the shelf.

#### **10. Shower poofs**

#### **11. Contact-lens cases and pill boxes**

**12. Vent covers** -- Cleaning the dust out of all the little nooks and crannies of ceiling and floor air vent covers is time-consuming drudgery. To prevent metal covers from rusting, run them through a short dishwasher cycle and promptly dry them by hand.

**13. Dustpans, broom heads and vacuum attachments** -- Use the top rack and a low-heat cycle if they have rubber rings or other parts inside, or if you're just unsure.

#### **14. Pet bowls and toys**

**15. Flower or plant pots** -- Run terracotta and hard plastic planters through the dishwasher after brushing off any clumps of dirt that could clog pipes. The superheated water will help kill any plant diseases that might linger.

**16. Hubcaps** -- First, gently hose off your hubcaps if they're especially muddy or grimy. You might also want to pour a cup of white vinegar into your dishwasher's rinse-aid compartment before you start, and make sure they ride through the dishwasher alone.

**17. Golf balls** -- Putt them into the utensil holder or a mesh lingerie bag,

[Source: MoneyTalksNews | Gael F. Cooper | January 9, 2019 ++]

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## **China's Pacific Expansion Update 01 ► Chinese Domination Key Is Inflicting Mass Casualties**

Another Beijing official has sounded off about the communist nation's perceived dominance of the South China Sea region, this time coming as an alarming threat of inflicting mass casualties on the U.S. Navy. During a 20 DEC speech to the 2018 Military Industry List summit, China's Rear Adm. Luo Yuan, the deputy head of the Chinese Academy of Military Sciences, added fuel to the South China Sea fire when he stated the key for Chinese domination in those hotly contested waters could lie in the sinking of two U.S. aircraft carriers, according to a report by Australia's news.com.

"What the United States fears the most is taking casualties," the admiral said, before adding that such an attack on two of the U.S. Navy's steel behemoths would claim upwards of 10,000 lives. Luo went on to call America's military, money, talent, voting system and fear of adversaries the five U.S. weaknesses that can be easily exploited, according to the report. "We'll see how frightened America is," he said.

China's ongoing insistence on expanding its territory into the Spratly archipelago has agitated neighboring nations and continuously challenged international law, an assertiveness the U.S. attempts to check through routine freedom of navigation operations, or FONOPs. "There are consequences that will continue to come home to roost, so to speak, with China if they don't find a way to work more collaboratively with all of the nations who have interests," former Defense Secretary Jim Mattis said in November. "International law allows us to operate here, allows us to fly here, allows us to train here, allows us to sail here, and that's what we're doing and we're going to continue to do that," Lt. Cmdr. Tim Hawkins, spokesman for the aircraft carrier Carl Vinson, said last February.

The Vinson made history last March when it became the first U.S. carrier to visit a Vietnamese port in more than four decades, a port call that added even more tension to the already-strained U.S.-China relationship. "The Chinese side made it clear to the United States that it should stop sending its vessels and military aircraft close to Chinese

islands and reefs and stop actions that undermine Chinese authority and security interests,” Yang Jiechi, director of China’s Central Foreign Affairs Commission said in November. Jiechi’s stance was dangerously emphasized last September when a Chinese warship nearly collided with the American guided-missile destroyer Decatur in what the U.S. Navy called an “unsafe and unprofessional maneuver.” “They were positioning in to close on our port side, were trying to push us out of the way,” a Decatur sailor said in a video documenting the encounter.

China’s other primary point of contention with the U.S. has been its friendship with Taiwan, a self-ruled democratic island that Beijing sees as a breakaway province. Arms deals between the U.S. and Taiwan have drawn the China’s ire and when the 2018 National Defense Authorization Act floated the possibility of future visits by American warships to Taiwanese ports, Chinese officials responded by issuing threats, with one such warning coming from Adm. Luo. “If the US naval fleet dares to stop in Taiwan, it is time for the People’s Liberation Army to deploy troops to promote national unity on (invade) the island,” he said. “Those who are trying to stir up trouble in the South China Sea and Taiwan should be careful about their future.”

Wang Hongguang, a retired lieutenant general of the People’s Liberation Army, emphasized Luo’s proclamations. “The PLA is capable of taking over Taiwan within 100 hours with only a few dozen casualties,” he said in the report. “A possible military conflict may take place in Taiwan soon. (But) As long as the US doesn’t attack China-built islands and reefs in the South China Sea, no war will take place in the area.” Frequent military drills directly over or adjacent to Taiwan, meanwhile, have cut off access to the island’s dwindling list of partner nations and stirred concern among Taipei’s defense officials.

“The Chinese military’s strength continues to grow rapidly,” Taiwan’s Ministry of National Defense said in a late 2017 report obtained by Reuters. “There have been massive developments in military reforms, combined operations, weapons development and production, the building of overseas military bases and military exercises, and the military threat towards us grows daily.” Ongoing invasion threats have been openly disputed by Taiwan’s mainland affairs minister, Chang Hsiao-Yueh, who issued a warning of her own last year. “If they invade Taiwan militarily they will pay a very very high price,” she said. “And so far I believe that’s the last resort if all the other means [of unification] are failed then finally they will do that.” [Source: NavyTimes | J.D. Simkins | January 5, 2019 ++]

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## China’s Offensive Capability Update 06 ► Anti-Ship Ballistic Missiles Deployment

State broadcaster CCTV reported on 10 JAN that their far-reaching anti-ship ballistic missiles were being used in active training in the country’s northwestern plateau and desert areas. The DF-26 can carry a nuclear or conventional warhead and strike medium to large vessels as far as 4,000km (2,500 miles) away. On 11 JAN, nationalistic tabloid Global Times highlighted the timing, with the mobilization coinciding with US warship the USS McCampbell (DDG-85) “trespassing” in China’s territorial waters near the disputed Paracel Islands in the South China Sea that are claimed by Beijing.



But Song Zhongping, a Hong Kong-based military commentator, said it would not be necessary to resort to a long-range missile like the DF-26 if China wanted to take action over such “intrusions”. “You don’t kill a tiny chick with a cleaver you would use on a bull,” Song said. “Mentioning the DF-26 is more about muscle-flexing in response to provocations generally.” Song added that China had already deployed anti-ship missiles to both the Paracels and the

Spratly Islands, which would be far more effective in dealing with any potential conflict. “US warships in the South China Sea will fall within the firing range of these artilleries in the event of any incidents,” he said. The mobilization was seen as a measure to strengthen training of China’s missile force.

The PLA Rocket Force has set up training grounds and target ranges in the vast plateau and deserts of the northwest and carries out test firing in the sparsely populated region. The ranges are equipped with monitoring facilities and electronic jamming to simulate a battlefield, and they are also outside the range of detection of US radars such as the THAAD – or Terminal High Altitude Area Defense – system deployed in South Korea. The CCTV report showed seven military trucks (above left) carrying DF-26 missiles travelling along a road amid rough terrain and sand dunes but did not say when the mobilization took place. “Over the past few years, we have trained and held drills everywhere from the east coast to the northeast, and the desert in the northwest,” brigade commander Yao Wenshan told the broadcaster. “Our special mission is to kill at one strike from thousands of kilometers away.”

The DF-26 missile was first seen in public at a military parade in 2015 (above right) and it was confirmed to have entered into service in April last year. This week was the first time the missile has been shown to be in operation, including close-up footage and shots from its launch panel. China has another anti-ship ballistic missile, the DF-21D, which is also believed to be able to strike an aircraft carrier, but with a shorter range of about 1,450km. [Source: South China Morning Post | January 14, 2019 ++]

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## **Iranian Navy Update 04 ► Plans to Deploy Warships into the Atlantic Ocean**

The Iranian navy plans to deploy warships into the Atlantic Ocean, a senior Iranian commander announced 4 JAN. Iranian warships will set sail for the Atlantic in March, Rear Adm. Touraj Hassani, Iran's naval deputy commander, told state media IRNA, adding that Iran's new stealth destroyer — the Sahand — could be a part of the naval flotilla deployed to the Atlantic for a five-month operation. Iran launched the domestically produced destroyer at the start of December. At that time, Hassani suggested that Iran may send two to three warships to Venezuela.

The announcement comes as Iran bristles at the presence of a US Navy aircraft carrier in the Persian Gulf. The USS John C. Stennis aircraft carrier is currently operating in the Persian Gulf, its presence specifically intended as a deterrent for hostile Iranian activities. And Iran's not pleased. "We will not allow Nimitz-class aircraft carrier USS John C. Stennis to come near our territorial waters in the Persian Gulf," Iranian Rear Adm. Habibollah Sayyari warned in December.

Iran has long desired to counter American activities in its home region by showing the flag near American waters and elsewhere, Reuters reported. "By their continuous presence in international waters, Iranian naval forces aim to implement the orders of commander-in-chief of the armed forces (Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei), wave the flag of the Islamic Republic of Iran, thwart the Iran-ophobia plots, and secure shipping routes," Hassani explained. Tensions between Washington and Tehran have been on the rise since President Donald Trump decided to withdraw from the Iran nuclear deal, as well as reimpose sanctions, last year. Whether or not Iran will, or even can, send warships into the Atlantic remains debatable. [Source: Business Insider | Ryan Pickrell | January 4, 2019 ++]

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## **Trump Afghanistan Strategy Update 02 ► Don't Tell The Enemy What We're Doing**

At the White House on 2 JAN, President Donald Trump expressed intense dismay about ongoing oversight provided by the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR), the US government's main watchdog for the 17-year-long effort to rebuild the country. Asked about reported efforts to withdraw US troops from Syria and

Afghanistan, Trump, seated next to new acting Secretary of Defense Patrick Shanahan, criticized the transparency provided by SIGAR reports. "One of the things I've told the secretary and other people, we do these reports on our military, some [inspector general] goes over there — who [are] mostly appointed by President Obama, but we'll have ours too — and he goes over there, and they do a report telling every single thing that's happening, and they release it to the public. What kind of stuff is this?" Trump said.

"We're fighting wars, and they're doing reports and releasing it to the public. **Now the public means the enemy.** The enemy reads those reports. They study every line of it," Trump added. "Those reports should be private reports. Let them do a report, but they should be private reports and be locked up, and if a member of Congress wants to see it he can go in and read." "For these reports to [released], to [be given out] essentially, forget about [the public], given out to the enemy is insane," Trump said. "And I don't want it to happen anymore, Mr. Secretary. You understand that?" Trump then said that "nobody" had been more critical of the US-led war in Afghanistan. "Hey, it's not my fault. I didn't put us there," he said. "But we're getting out and we're getting out smart, and we're winning."

Trump's sudden announcement last month that he would pull US forces from Syria was greeted with concern even by opponents of a protected US presence there, many of whom viewed Trump's move as hasty. The move also led Jim Mattis to resign as defense secretary. Trump's announcement about withdrawing from Syria was followed by reports that the White House planned to start withdrawing from Afghanistan, pulling out half of the roughly 14,000 US troops there. Those reports also caused concern, especially among countries bordering Afghanistan, who fear the US withdraw could trigger new waves of migration. Trump stressed Wednesday that withdrawals would come "over a period of time." "I never said I'm getting out tomorrow. I said we're pulling our soldiers out, and they will be pulled back in Syria," he said. "We're getting out of Syria, yeah, absolutely, but we're getting out very powerfully."

SIGAR was created by Congress in 2008 to "conduct robust, independent, and objective oversight of the US reconstruction investment in Afghanistan." Since 2002, approximately \$126.3 billion has been appropriated for relief and reconstruction in the country, which the US invaded in late 2001 after the September 11 terrorist attacks. That money has been used to develop Afghan security forces, promote good governance, assist development, and support counter-narcotics and anti-corruption efforts. SIGAR has revealed a wide array of waste and abuse, however:

- Its findings include \$86 million spent over seven years to develop a counter-narcotics plane that "missed every delivery deadline and remained inoperable," \$3 million spent on a cancelled request for boats to patrol rivers in the landlocked country, \$6.5 million spent on six communications towers that were never used, and that an "unacceptably high" number of Afghan soldiers and police brought to the US for training go absent without leave.
- SIGAR probes found that the US Army refused to bar individuals and groups with alleged ties to terrorist groups from getting US contracts and that USAID and the State and Defense departments had "not adequately assessed their efforts to support education in Afghanistan" despite spending \$760 million on them between 2002 and 2014.
- SIGAR reported at the end of 2016 that there had been increases in poverty, unemployment and underemployment, violence, outmigration, internal displacement, and the education-gender gap, and that services and private investment had fallen, while the share of the country controlled by the Afghan government also declined.

[Source: Business Insider | Christopher Woody | January 2, 2019 ++]

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## **AP VoteCast Results** ► **Poll Shows High Job Approval for Trump from Veterans**

Nearly 6 in 10 military veterans voted for Republican candidates in the November midterm elections, and a similar majority had positive views of President Donald Trump's leadership. But women, the fastest growing demographic

group in the military, are defying that vote trend. That's according to AP VoteCast, a nationwide survey of more than 115,000 midterm voters — including more than 4,000 current and former service members — conducted for The Associated Press by NORC at the University of Chicago. It found that veterans overall approved of Trump's job performance, showing high support for the president's handling of border security and his efforts to make the U.S. safer from terrorism.

Male veterans were much more likely to approve of Trump than those who haven't served, 58 percent to 46 percent. But 58 percent of female veterans disapproved of Trump, which is similar to the share of women overall (61 percent). Some takeaways on veterans:

### **TRUMP APPROVAL**

Overall, 56 percent of veterans — both current and former service members — said they approve of the job Trump is doing as president, while 43 percent disapproved. Voters who have not served in the military were more likely to disapprove (58 percent) than approve (42 percent) of the president's job performance. The survey found that differences in support for Trump between veterans and nonveterans extended across racial and ethnic groups, including among whites (62 percent of veterans approve versus 49 percent of nonveterans), Latinos (53 percent vs. 28 percent) and African-Americans (22 percent vs. 10 percent).

### **TRUMP'S LEADERSHIP**

The poll showed veterans more likely than nonveterans to say Trump has the right temperament to serve as president (48 percent to 32 percent) and that he's a strong leader (59 percent to 49 percent). They were slightly more likely to say Trump cares about "people like you" (46 percent to 40 percent). On the issues, veterans were significantly more likely than those who have not served to approve of Trump's handling of border security, 62 percent to 48 percent, and to think the Trump administration has made the U.S. safer from terrorism, 51 percent to 35 percent.

### **DRAIN THE SWAMP?**

Veterans had good success running for Congress compared to previous years. Eighteen new veterans were elected to the House, seven of whom are Democrats. That's the largest number of new veterans elected to the House since 2010, and the biggest influx of Democratic vets since 1996, according to Seth Lynn, a University of San Francisco professor who runs Veterans Campaign, a group that prepares veterans for careers in politics. One fresh veteran face — Republican Rick Scott of Florida — will join the Senate. In all, more than 170 veterans were on November's congressional ballot as major-party candidates. Some vets, such as Kentucky Democrat Amy McGrath, a former Marine fighter pilot, ran close House races but ultimately fell short on Election Day. A total of 96 military veterans will serve as lawmakers next year, 66 Republicans and 30 Democrats.

Lynn said veterans in previous elections had often chosen to run for office due to concerns over U.S. military policy, such as President George W. Bush's war in Iraq. But he said veteran candidates this election cycle seemed moved by general voter dissatisfaction with government. "The military is the institution where many Americans have the most confidence, but that isn't the case with Congress," Lynn said. "For many of the Democratic women veterans who chose to run, it was basically a response to how they felt the Trump administration was doing and a call to service."

### **SEXUAL MISCONDUCT**

The poll shows significant concerns among men who have served in the military about accusations of sexual misconduct: 40 percent said they are very concerned about men not being given the opportunity to defend themselves when they're accused. That's compared with 28 percent who said they are very concerned about women not being believed when they make allegations.

[Source: The Associated Press and Hannah Fingerhut | Emily Swanson | December 30, 2018 ++]

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## **DPRK Nuclear Weapons Update 25 ► Kim Says Ready to Meet Trump Anytime**

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un said on 2 JAN he is ready to meet U.S. President Donald Trump again anytime to achieve their common goal of denuclearizing the Korean Peninsula, but warned he may have to take an alternative path if U.S. sanctions and pressure against the country continued. In a nationally televised New Year address, Kim said denuclearization was his “firm will” and North Korea had “declared at home and abroad that we would neither make and test nuclear weapons any longer nor use and proliferate them.” Kim added that Pyongyang had “taken various practical measures” and if Washington responded “with trustworthy measures and corresponding practical actions ... bilateral relations will develop wonderfully at a fast pace.”

“I am always ready to sit together with the U.S. president anytime in the future, and will work hard to produce results welcomed by the international community without fail,” Kim said. However, he warned that North Korea might be “compelled to explore a new path” to defend its sovereignty if the United States “seeks to force something upon us unilaterally ... and remains unchanged in its sanctions and pressure.” It was not clear what Kim meant by “a new path,” but his comments are likely to further fuel scepticism over whether North Korea intends to give up a nuclear weapons program that it has long considered essential to its security.

In response to the news, Trump wrote on Twitter, “I also look forward to meeting with Chairman Kim who realizes so well that North Korea possesses great economic potential!” There was no immediate comment from the White House. Asked for a reaction, a U.S. State Department official said: “We decline the opportunity to comment.” South Korea’s presidential office, however, welcomed Kim’s speech, saying it carried his “firm will” to advance relations with Seoul and Washington. Kim and Trump vowed to work toward denuclearization and build “lasting and stable” peace at their landmark summit in Singapore in June, but little progress has been made since. Trump has said a second summit with Kim is likely in January or February, though he wrote on Twitter last month that he was “in no hurry.”

U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo made several trips to Pyongyang last year but the two sides have yet to reschedule a meeting between him and senior North Korean official Kim Yong Chol after an abrupt cancellation in November. Pyongyang has demanded Washington lift sanctions and declare an official end to the 1950-1953 Korean War in response to its initial, unilateral steps toward denuclearization, including dismantling its only known nuclear testing site and a key missile engine facility. U.S. officials have said the extent of initial North Korean steps were not confirmed and could be easily reversed. Washington has halted some large-scale military exercises with Seoul to aid negotiations, but has called for strict global sanctions enforcement on impoverished North Korea until its full, verifiable denuclearization.

Kim’s reference to pledges not to make nuclear weapons could indicate a first moratorium on such weapons production, although it was not clear if this was conditional. While Pyongyang conducted no nuclear or missile tests last year, satellite images have pointed to continued activity at related facilities. The U.S. special representative for North Korea, Stephen Biegun, reiterated last month that Washington had no intention of easing sanctions but had agreed to help South Korea send flu medication to North Korea, saying such cooperation could help advance nuclear diplomacy.

Analysts said Kim’s message sent clear signals that North Korea was willing to stay in talks with Washington and Seoul this year - but on its own terms. “North Korea seems determined in 2019 to receive some sort of sanctions relief ... The challenge, however, is will Team Trump be willing to back away from its position of zero sanctions relief?” said Harry Kazianis of the Washington-based Centre for the National Interest. “Kim’s remarks seem to suggest his patience with America is wearing thin.”

After racing toward the goal of developing a nuclear-tipped missile capable of hitting the United States in 2017, Kim used last year’s New Year speech to warn that “a nuclear button is always on the desk of my office” and order mass production of nuclear bombs and ballistic missiles. But he also offered to send a delegation to the 2018 Winter Olympics in the South in February, setting off a flurry of diplomacy that included three summits with South Korean President Moon Jae-in, and the meeting with Trump in June. This year, Kim said inter-Korean relations had entered a



“completely new phase,” and offered to resume key inter-Korean economic projects banned under international and South Korean sanctions, without conditions.

On 2 JAN President Donald Trump acknowledged that he has received a letter from North Korean leader Kim Jong Un and will be setting up a meeting with Kim "in the not-too-distant future" to restart talks about the North's nuclear programs. [Source: Reuters | Hyonhee Shin & Soyoung Kim | January 2, 2018 ++]

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**Interesting Ideas** ▶ **Virus Alert**



it's a virus

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**One Word Essays** ▶ **Excitement**



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**Mexican Border Tunnels** ▶ **Unfinished Tunnel Running Under California Discovered**

Mexican and U.S. law enforcement agencies discovered a highly sophisticated underground tunnel—featuring a rail system and solar-powered lighting—running underneath the border between Mexico and California. The San Diego sector of U.S. Customs and Border Protection are investigating an unfinished tunnel they believe drug smugglers and human traffickers were building that was found starting at a residence in Jacume, in the Mexican state of Baja

California. On 19 SEP, Mexico State Police, Policia Estatal Preventiva (PEP), and Mexican military forces found the tunnel opening approximately 221 feet south of the border. The tunnel continued north, running underneath the border between the two countries, according to a U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CPB) report released 8 JAN.



**A motorcyle is adapted to a rail that was used by Mexican drug trafficker Joaquin ‘El Chapo’ Guzman to move through a tunnel that, according to authorities, he used to escape from El Altiplano, a Mexican maximum-security prison, in Mexico City, on July 15, 2015.**

Those building the tunnel had not yet created an exit point at a U.S. location yet, but the underground passage did feature two sump pumps, a solar-powered lighting system and comfortable ventilation. Additionally, a rail system ran the entire length of the tunnel into the United States. U.S. Homeland Security, the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration and Border Patrol agents determined the tunnel had an entry point shaft that went approximately 31 feet down into the soil. The tunnel was 627 feet in length and an exit under the U.S. side went about 15 feet toward the surface but did not break the topsoil. Tunnels are commonly used by drug traffickers and others looking to cross the border illegally, with law enforcement officials from both Mexico and U.S. routinely finding new but often incomplete tunnels running under the border wall. [Source: Newsweek | Benjamin Fearnow | January 10, 2019 ++]

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## **Have You Heard? ► Mexican Book Store | Mother's Dictionary | Immigration Laws**

### **Mexican Book Store**

I was walking through a local mall and came upon a “Mexican Book Store.”

Never having seen one before, I went in.

As I was wandering around, a clerk asked if he could help me find something.

I asked, “Do you have a copy of Donald Trump’s book about his proposed immigration policy regarding Mexicans?”

The Mexican clerk said, “F--- You, Get Out And Stay Out!”

I said, “Yes, that's the one . . . Do you have it in paperback?”

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### **A Mother's Dictionary**

1. ADULT: A person who has stopped growing at both ends and is now growing in the middle.
2. BATHROOM: A room used by the entire family, believed by all except Mom to be self-cleaning.
3. COMMITTEE: A body that keeps minutes and wastes hours.
4. DATE: Infrequent outings with Dad where Mom can enjoy worrying about the kids in a different setting.
5. EMPTY NEST: See "WISHFUL THINKING."
6. FABLE: A story told by a teenager arriving home after curfew.
7. GUM: Adhesive for the hair.

8. HINDSIGHT: What Mom experiences from changing too many diapers.
9. INFLATION: Cutting money in half without damaging the paper.
10. JUNK: Dad's stuff.
11. KISS: Mom's medicine.
12. LEMONADE STAND: Complicated business venture where Mom buys powdered mix, sugar, lemons, and paper cups, and sets up a table, chairs, pitchers and ice for kids who sit there for three to six minutes and net a profit of 15 cents.
13. MAYBE: No.
14. NAIL POLISH: part of an assortment of make-up items such as lipstick, eyeliner, blush etc. which ironically make Mom look better while making her young daughter look "like a tramp."
15. OVERSTUFFED RECLINER: Mom's nickname for Dad.
16. PANIC: What a mother goes through when the darn wind-up swing stops.
17. QUIET: A state of household serenity which occurs before the birth of the first child and occurs again after the last child has left for college.
18. REFRIGERATOR: Combination art gallery and air-conditioner for the kitchen.
19. SPOILED ROTTEN: What the kids become after as little as 15 minutes with Grandma.
20. TOWELS: See "FLOOR COVERINGS".
21. UNDERWEAR: An article of clothing, the cleanliness of which ensures the wearer will never have an accident.
22. VACATION: Where you take the family to get away from it all, only to find it there, too.
23. WALLS: Complete set of drawing paper for kids that comes with every room.
24. XOXOXOXOXO: Mom salutation guaranteed to make the already embarrassing note in a kid's lunch box even more mortifying.
25. "YIPPEE!": What mother's shout the first day of school.
26. ZUCCHINI: Vegetable which can be baked, boiled, fried or steamed before kids refuse to eat it.

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### **Immigration Laws**

1. There will be no special bilingual programs in the schools.
2. All ballots will be in this nation's language.
3. All government business will be conducted in our language.
4. Non-residents will NOT have the right to vote no matter how long they are here.
5. Non-citizens will NEVER be able to hold political office.
6. Foreigners will not be a burden to the taxpayers. No welfare, no food stamps, no health care, or any other government assistance programs. Any who are a burden will be deported.
7. Foreigners can invest in this country, but it must be an amount at least equal to 40,000 times the daily minimum wage.
8. If foreigners come here and buy land, their options will be restricted. Certain parcels including waterfront property are reserved for citizens naturally born into this country.
9. Foreigners may have NO protests; NO demonstrations, NO waving of a foreign flag, no political organizing, NO bad-mouthing our president or his policies. These will lead to deportation.
10. If you do come to this country illegally, you will be actively hunted and, when caught, sent to jail until your deportation can be arranged. All assets will be taken from you.

Too strict.? The above laws are the current immigration laws of MEXICO.! If it's good for American's to obey Mexican laws, then it's good vice versa.!!!

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**DEAR VEGANS:  
I killed this  
cow because  
it was eating  
your food.**



**You're welcome.**



Since 1972, the government has built over 3,000 miles of "sound walls" along our highways to "protect" nearby homeowners from traffic sounds.

These walls cost about \$2 million per mile. The government has spent over \$6 billion on them.

If the government can spend \$6 billion on walls to protect homeowners from traffic noise why can't it spend \$5 billion to protect our lives?

You don't make the poor richer by making the rich poorer.

— Winston Churchill —

AZ QUOTES

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**Note: The above websites are blocked by some, if not all, USAF & USCG military commands for security purposes. To gain access you may need to open them using a non “...@us.af.mil” / “...@uscg.mil” source. Contact [raoemo@sbcglobal.net](mailto:raoemo@sbcglobal.net) if you are unable to do this.**

## Notes:

1. The Bulletin is provided as a website accessed document vice direct access. This was necessitated by SPAMHAUS who alleged the Bulletin's size and large subscriber base were choking the airways interfering with other internet user's capability to send email. SPAMHAUS told us to stop sending the Bulletin in its entirety to individual subscribers and to validate the subscriber base with the threat of removing all our outgoing email capability if we did not. To avoid this we notified all subscribers of the action required to continue their subscription. This Bulletin notice was sent to the 19782 subscribers who responded to that notice and/or have since subscribed. All others were deleted from the active mailing list.

2. Bulletin recipients with interest in the Philippines, whether or not they live there, can request to be added to the RAO's Philippine directory for receipt of notices on Clark Field Space 'A', U.S. Embassy Manila, and TRICARE in the RP.

3. New subscribers and those who submit a change of address should receive a message that verifies their addition or address change being entered in the mailing list. If you do not receive a message within 3 days it indicates that either I never received your request, I made an error in processing your request, or your server will not allow me to send to the email addressee you provided. Anyone who cannot reach me by email can call (858) 842-1111 to ask questions or confirm info needed to add them to the directory.

4. If you have another email addressee at work or home and would like to receive Bulletin notices there also, just provide the appropriate addressee to [raoemo@sbcglobal.net](mailto:raoemo@sbcglobal.net).

5. Past Bulletin articles as well as an index of all previously published article titles are available on request to [raoemo@sbcglobal.net](mailto:raoemo@sbcglobal.net). Bear in mind that the articles listed on this 200 page plus index were valid at the time they were written and may have since been updated or become outdated.

6. The Bulletin is normally published on the 1st and 15th of each month. To aid in continued receipt of Bulletin availability notices, recommend enter the email addressee [raoemo@sbcglobal.net](mailto:raoemo@sbcglobal.net) into your address book. If you do not receive a Bulletin check either [www.nhc-ul.org/rao.html](http://www.nhc-ul.org/rao.html) (PDF Edition), [www.veteransresources.org](http://www.veteransresources.org) (PDF & HTML Editions), <http://veteraninformationlinksasa.com/emos-rao.html> (PDF & HTML Editions), or <http://frabr245.org> (PDF & HTML Editions) before sending me an email asking if one was published. If you can access the Bulletin at any of the aforementioned sites it indicates that something is preventing you from receiving my email. Either your server considers it to be spam or I have somehow incorrectly entered or removed your addressee from the mailing list. Send me an email so I can verify your entry on the validated mailing list. If you are unable to access the Bulletin at any of these sites let me know.

7. Articles within the Bulletin are editorialized information obtained from over 100 sources. At the end of each article is provided the primary source from which it was obtained. The ++ indicates that that the information was reformatted from the original source and/or editorialized from more than one source. Because of the number of articles contained in each Bulletin there is no way that I can attest to their validity other than they have all been taken from previously reliable sources. My staff consist of only one person (myself) and it is a 7/10-12 endeavor to prepare and publish. Readers who question the validity of content are encouraged to go to the source provided to have their questions answered. I am always open to comments but, as a policy, shy away from anything political. Too controversial and time consuming.

8. Recipients of the Bulletin are authorized and encouraged to forward the Bulletin to other vets or veteran organizations.

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