

RAO

BULLETIN

1 February 2019



PDF Edition

THIS RETIREE ACTIVITIES OFFICE BULLETIN CONTAINS THE FOLLOWING ARTICLES

Pg	Article	Subject
* DOD *		
05 ==	DoD Blended Retirement System [04] ----	(500K+ Now Enrolled)
05 ==	Pentagon Spending [01] ----	(\$4.7 Billion Saved In the Past 2 Years)
07 ==	Selective Service System [26] ----	(National Commission's Interim 2019 Report)
07 ==	Transgender Troops [20] ----	(Supreme Court Lifts Preliminary Injunctions on Ban)
08 ==	DoD Climate Change Impact ----	(Installations & Infrastructure)
09 ==	Exchange/DeCA Merger [02] ----	(Critics Question Where Any Cost Savings Would Go)
11 ==	Taiwan Straits ----	(China Urged to Follow International Rules At Sea)
12 ==	Toxic Exposure Lejeune [70] ----	(SECNAV Denies \$963 billion in Claims)
12 ==	DoD Fraud, Waste, & Abuse ----	(Reported 16 thru 31 JAN 2019)
14 ==	POW/MIA Recoveries & Burials ----	(Reported 16 thru 31 JAN 2019 Nine)
* VA *		
16 ==	VA Blue Water Claims [62] ----	(Stumbling Block is Pay-go which Needs to Go Opinion)
17 ==	VA Blue Water Claims [63] ----	(Federal Court Rules VA Cannot Deny Benefits)
18 ==	GI Bill [278] ----	(Audit Discloses \$585M in Improper Payments)
19 ==	VA Lawsuit Bradley Hammersley ----	(Podiatrist Negligent Care on 115 Vets)
21 ==	Emergency Medical Bill Claims [05] ----	(Unlawful VA Regulation Lawsuit)

- 23 == VA Appeals [33] ---- (A Long-Overdue Fix)
- 24 == VA Vision Care [07] ---- (Available to All Health Care Enrolled Vets)
- 24 == VA Agent Orange Benefits [05] ---- (VA Continues Opposition to Extending Benefits)
- 25 == VA Health Care Access [63] ---- (Notable Progress on Wait Times since 2014)
- 26 == VA Private Sector Care [02] ---- (VA Secretary says VA Privatization a Myth)
- 27 == VA Health Care Access Standards ---- (Proposed Under Mission Act Implementation)
- 28 == VA Mission Act [06] ---- (Secretary Wilkie: Revolutionizing VA Health Care)
- 29 == VA Medical Marijuana [58] ---- (Multiple Bills Submitted for Research & Access)
- 30 == VA Fraud, Waste & Abuse ---- (Reported 16 thru 31 JAN 2019)

*** VETS ***

- 31 == Burn Pit Toxic Exposure [61] ---- (Supreme Court Rejects Vets Appeal)
- 33 == Vet Surveys ---- (IAVA Results on Public Policy & Military Transition Issues)
- 33 == Vet Toxic Exposure | Water [16] ---- (Congressional Task Force Created)
- 34 == California Veterans Home [19] ---- (Audit Reveals Properties Mismanaged)
- 35 == Memorial Desecrations [01] ---- (Freeport Florida)
- 36 == MOH Awards [10] ---- (Bills Seek Medal of Honor for 102-Year-Old WWII Hero)
- 37 == Stolen Valor [114] ---- (Fake News | Tribal Elder Was Not A Vietnam Veteran)
- 38 == Vet Unemployment [18] ---- (2008 thru 2018)
- 39 == CBO Budget Recommendation [02] ---- (More 2019 TRICARE & VA Proposals)
- 41 == Government Shutdown Vet Impact [01] ---- (No Checks for 150K Vet Employees)
- 42 == Vet Fraud & Abuse ---- (Reported 16 thru 31 JAN 2019)
- 44 == WWII Vets 182 ---- (Louis E. Curdes | American Flying Ace)
- 46 == Vet Unclaimed Remains ---- (3 in Memphis TN + 21 More in FL | Jan/Feb 2019)
- 47 == Obit: Joe M. Jackson ---- (13 JAN 2018 | Battle of Kham Duc MOH Awardee)
- 48 == Obit: Richard Sherman ---- (09 JAN 2019 | WWII Flying Tiger)
- 49 == Obit: Charles Kettles --- (21 JAN 2019 | Nam MOH Army Helo Pilot)
- 50 == Vietnam Vets [32] 01 ---- (R. Lee Ermey | POG Staff Sgt. & Actor Burial)
- 51 == WWI Vets [03] ---- (Morris Weiner)
- 52 == Vet Hiring Fairs ---- (Scheduled As of 31 JAN 2019)
- 53 == Military Retirees & Veterans Events Schedule ---- (As of 31 JAN 2018)
- 53 == State Veteran's Benefits ---- (Idaho 2019)

*** VET LEGISLATION ***

- 54 == SBP DIC Offset [53] ---- (H.R.533 | Military Surviving Spouses Equity Act)
- 54 == VA Medical Marijuana [57] ---- (S.179 | VA Medicinal Cannabis Research Act)
- 55 == Burn Pit Toxic Exposure [62] ---- (H.R. 663/S.191 | Burn Pit Accountability Act)
- 55 == GI Bill [276] ---- (S.2248 | Veterans Benefits and Transition Act)
- 57 == GI Bill [277] ---- (S.3777 | Forever GI Bill Housing Payment Fulfillment Act)
- 57 == Military Spouse Deportation [07] ---- H.R. 557 | Protect Patriot Spouses Act)
- 58 == DoD/VA Concurrent Receipt ---- (H.R.303 | Retired Pay Restoration Act Reintroduced)

*** MILITARY ***

- 58 == Army Retention Program [01] ---- ('Up or Out' Is On Its Way Out)
- 59 == Navy Blue-Gold Model ---- (Projected Crewing on New FFG(X))
- 60 == PCS Moves [03] ---- (\$11,592 to Fly Two Pet Dogs to Guam)
- 62 == USS South Dakota ---- (SSN-790 to Be Commissioned 2 FEB 2019)

- 63 == Government Shutdown USCG Impact [06] ---- (Recent Accomplishments without Pay)
- 64 == Government Shutdown USCG Impact [07] ---- (Coast Guard City's Response)
- 65 == Government Shutdown USCG Impact [08] ---- (Wives Concerned About Reoccurrence)
- 66 == U.S.-Somalia Ops ---- (Our Military to Stop Giving Details on Strikes)
- 67 == Feres Doctrine [10] ---- (Potential New Rules Being Looked at by Congress)
- 67 == Nuclear Power Program ---- (Project Dilithium | Deployable Nuclear Reactors)
- 69 == Military Earplug Lawsuit ---- (Defective Dual-Ended Combat Arms Earplug Impact On Vets)
- 69 == M17/M18 Sidearm ---- (Army Fielding New Pistols w/Enhancers)
- 70 == U.S. Naval Academy [05] ---- (Audit Shows It Is Falling Apart)
- 71 == Military 3D Printing ---- (May Revolutionize Maintenance for Air Force F-22 Raptor)
- 72 == Payday Loans [05] ---- (CFBP Authority to Verify Lender's MLA Compliance)
- 73 == Airforce KC-46 ---- (Delivery accepted 10 JAN 2019)
- 73 == Robotic Targets ---- (Use Can Modernize any Range & Keep Marines, Soldiers Shooting Sharp)
- 74 == Nuclear Weapons [01] ---- (Work Completed on Navy's Upgraded Nuclear Warhead)
- 75 == Nuclear Weapons [02] ---- (U.S. Cost Projected to be \$494B Over the Next Decade)
- 76 == Weapons Testing ---- (Navy Builds Hypersonic Test Ground in California)
- 77 == USS Gerald A. Ford [11] ---- (Once Beleaguered by Critics, The Ford Gets A Lift)
- 78 == Warships That Will Change the Future ---- (TCG Heybeliada F-511)
- 79 == Navy Terminology, Jargon & Slang ---- (Banca Boat thru BB Stacker)

*** MILITARY HISTORY ***

- 80 == Battle of Kham Duc ---- (MOH Joe Jackson's Involvement)
- 82 == Leningrad Siege ---- (Tamara Chernykh's Survival)
- 84 == SADM Units ---- (Hand Carried Nukes Users)
- 85 == USS Pueblo [06] ---- (Held Hostage for 11 Months | Freed 2 days Before Xmas)
- 86 == War Memorials ---- (Liberty WWI Memorial, Kansas City, Missouri)
- 86 == WWII Bomber Nose Art [23] ---- (Whodunit? The 2nd)
- 87 == Post WWII Photos ---- (First U.S. Cemetery at Saint-Laurent-sur-Mer France)
- 87 == Every Picture Tells A Story ---- (Continuation War)
- 87 == Military History Anniversaries ---- (01 thru 14 FEB)
- 88 == Medal of Honor Citations ---- (Roy W. Harmon | WWII)

*** HEALTH CARE ***

- 89 == TRICARE Urgent/Emergency Care [03] ---- (Do You Know the Difference?)
- 90 == Hemochromatosis ---- (Research Reveals Genetic Condition More Serious Than Previously Thought)
- 91 == Medicare For All ---- (What It Is & What It Would Cost)
- 92 == Surprise Medical Bills [01] ---- (Trump Boosts Fight Against Unexpected Medical Bills)
- 93 == Prostate Cancer [17] ---- (New Biopsy Procedure More Accurate and Thorough)
- 94 == Prescription Filling Options [03] ---- (Online From Canada)
- 96 == Tricare/Medicare Fraud ---- (False Medical Bills)
- 96 == POCUS ---- (New Portable Ultrasound Device Produces Precise, High-Quality Results)
- 97 == Food Safety Myths ---- (Exposed)
- 98 == Medicaid Fraud [96] ---- (Disclosures 16-31 JAN 2019)
- 99 == Medicare Fraud [135] ---- (Disclosures 16-31 JAN 2019)
- 100 == Prescription Drug Costs [22] ---- (Inulin Prices Doubled Over 5 Years)
- 101 == Prescription Drug Costs [23] ---- (International Pricing Index Proposal)
- 102 == Prescription Drug Costs [24] ---- (Pharmaceutical Execs Decline to Testify Before Congress)

- 103 == TRICARE Podcast 485 ---- (Pharmacy Program - Shutdown & Allotments – Emergency/Urgent Care)
104 == TRICARE Podcast 486 ---- (2019 TRICARE Benefit Resources - Winter Safety Tips – ECHO)

* FINANCES *

- 105 == IRS 2018 Filing Season [05] ---- (Penalty Waiver for Underwithholding)
106 == IRS 2018 Filing Season [06] ---- (Credits & Deductions You Should Not Overlook)
107 == Social Security Taxation [11] ---- (What to Expect for Tax Year 2018)
108 == Bankruptcy [01] ---- (Chapter 13 vs. Chapter 7 Impact on Handicapped Vets)
108 == COLA FY 2019 [01] ---- (December's Numbers Show Downward Trend)
109 == Health Saving Account [02] ---- (401K for Medical Expenses)
110 == Military Travel Discounts & Offers 2 ---- (DoD/Priceline New Leisure Travel Site)
110 == Social Security Q & A ---- (190116 thru 190131)
111 == USPS COA Scam ---- (Moving Soon? Look Out for This Trick)
112 == Deployment Letter Scam ---- (Payment Solicitation to Contact Loved Ones Overseas)
113 == Shark Tank Scam ---- (Look Out for Phony Claims about TV Endorsements)
114 == Tax Burden for Missouri Retired Vets ---- (As of JAN 2019)

* GENERAL INTEREST *

- 116 == Notes of Interest ---- (16 thru 31 JAN 2019)
117 == DPRK Nuclear Weapons [26] ---- (Assessment | Unlikely To Dismantle Its Arsenal)
118 == Emergency Preparations ---- (Top 10 Steps to Take in Advance)
120 == Government Shutdown [23] ---- (The Stop STUPIDITY Act)
120 == Subic Bay Philippines [01] ---- (Philippines' Largest Shipyard Has Chinese Firms Interest)
121 == Border Wall [07] ---- (GoFundMe Campaign Change)
122 == Border Wall [08] ---- (Wall That Nobody Wants to Talk About)
123 == Trump Foreign Policy [01] ---- (America's Endless Wars Must Stop)
123 == Trump Foreign Policy [02] ---- (AP Poll Shows Low Marks)
125 == Trump NATO Policy [01] ---- (Credited For Obtaining \$100B More in Defense Spending)
125 == Iran Space Program ---- (Satellite Fails to Reach Orbit after Launch that Worried US)
126 == DPRK Biological Weapons ---- (Lesser Known Military Threat)
129 == Japan*China Dispute [02] ---- (New Weapons, Military Roles Surge to Meet China's Rise)
130 == China's Offensive Capability [07] ---- (Pentagon Intelligence Report)
131 == Iraq War Study ---- (Iran Was the Only Winner | Many Lessons for Future Wars)
133 == Interesting Ideas ---- (No Ice chest!)
134 == One Word Essays ---- (Security)
134 == Have You Heard? ---- (Stuff You Didn't Know You Didn't Know | Q&A's | What's Your Handicap)

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

* ATTACHMENTS *

- Attachment – Idaho Vet State Benefits
Attachment – Military History Anniversaries 01 thru 14 FEB (Updated)
Attachment – The Pueblo Incident



DoD Blended Retirement System Update 04 ► 500K+ Now Enrolled

More than 500,000 servicemembers are now enrolled in the Defense Department’s new Blended Retirement System, the largest change to the military’s retirement benefit since World War II, according to the Pentagon. More than 400,000 servicemembers opted in before the enrollment deadline Dec. 31, the Pentagon announced 14 JAN, and another roughly 150,000 new servicemembers have been automatically enrolled since the new system became available Jan. 1, 2018. Active-duty servicemembers had more than 33 percent of its eligible population who opted in to the retirement plan by 31 DEC, and the Reserve had 11.7 percent, according to Pentagon enrollment numbers. Defense Department personnel were given training on the new retirement benefits and encouraged to talk with their family as well as seek out financial counseling before making a decision on whether to stick with the old retirement plan or sign up for the new one.

The Blended Retirement System combines automatic and matching contributions to a servicemember’s Thrift Savings Plan, continuation pay and monthly pay upon retirement, according to the Defense Department. The Defense Department has already contributed more than \$300 million in the past year to Thrift Savings Plan accounts of servicemembers enrolled in the new retirement plan, according to the Pentagon. “We see [Blended Retirement System] as an important change that will set America’s servicemembers on the path toward greater financial flexibility, responsibility, and security,” said James Stewart, the acting undersecretary of defense for personnel and readiness. The new system will allow servicemembers to have government-provided retirement benefits regardless of whether they serve four years or 20 years, Jeri Busch, director of the Department of Defense’s Military Compensation Policy, told reporters in November.

People who joined the military on or before Dec. 31, 2017 and did not opt-in to the new retirement system had the old retirement system, which requires servicemembers to serve for 20 years before they are eligible for benefits. Only 19 percent of active-duty servicemembers and 14 percent of the Reserve force serve for at least 20 years to qualify for the old retirement benefit, according to the Blended Retirement System website. Under the new system, 85 percent of servicemembers will get retirement benefits after they serve at least two years. [Source: Stars & Stripes | Caitlin M. Kenney | January 14, 2018 ++]

Pentagon Spending Update 01 ► \$4.7 Billion Saved In the Past 2 Years

The Department of Defense has a reputation for spending extravagantly on big-budget programs, but an ongoing effort to cut costs and increase efficiency has led to \$4.7 billion saved over the last two years. The efforts are being led by Lisa Hershman, the department’s acting chief management officer (CMO) and its third-highest ranking civilian official, who told ABC News in an exclusive interview that she’s encouraged by the progress but knows more hard

work lies ahead. "Reform doesn't happen overnight," she said, particularly at a government agency whose annual budget would make it the 19th largest economy in the world if it was a country.

Hershman started out in the deputy role last year, but stepped in as acting CMO after former Defense Secretary James Mattis effectively fired her predecessor in September, reportedly for a "lack of performance." Now the two-time former CEO is using her business experience to continue to create cost savings and improve man hours through an effort that is little-known outside of the nation's capital. The Pentagon's effort to streamline its business practices and programs began in 2017. Hershman told ABC News that through the fiscal year 2018, it has resulted in \$4.7 billion in savings, a number higher than previous estimates. Hershman said this year's effort is already "tracking" toward the goal of \$6 billion in planned savings for this fiscal year.

The CMO's effort has been helped by the Pentagon's first-ever audit, which identified areas that might need financial reform and have helped Hershman's office validate ongoing savings efforts. While last year's savings came from a review of more than 114 projects, this year, Hershman's office is focusing on creating efficiencies in key areas like information technologies, health care, the military's industrial supply chain, contract management and acquisitions. "We want to create a culture of thinking in terms of improvement in modernization and creating value," said Hershman. It's not as if those are the only four, we encourage folks to look within their own organizations and find areas where they can improve."

Hershman is encouraged by how some of the changes are resonating with DOD's workforce — approximately 26,000 of whom work in the Pentagon in northern Virginia each day. She has noticed a greater openness toward procedures that exist in private industry that can help improve processes that she acknowledged were broken'. "They want it to be better," she said, adding that "people fundamentally want to be heard." Some agencies are even stepping forward proactively, asking the CMO to review their practices ahead of schedule and presenting new ideas.

Some of the cost savings result from redundancies across the military services, from objects as basic as wooden two-by-fours. Across the department, there were 22 separate contracts for the purchase of two-by-fours, many by the same supplier. By reducing the number of those contracts to two, Hershman estimates DOD will save \$18 million per year. But it's not just about cost savings. "In addition to cost -- because I don't want to say it isn't important because it's very important, affordability -- but performance and how are we going to deliver to our customers," Hershman said. "That's internal, that's external to the war-fighter. How do we support the mission? So those are the types of metrics in addition to cost that we're looking at."

One area of improved efficiency has been freeing up DOD employees from tedious tasks, like booking travel. In January, the department began to phase in a new prototype to replace the cumbersome Defense Travel Service, used by all military personnel and DOD civilians. Planning for a trip required personnel adhering to 1,200 pages of requirements and cost the DOD 17 million man-hours. The new system has cut the manual down to 10 pages and is estimated to free up between five and seven million man hours every year.

Hershman said she's been struck by how all DOD employees at the Pentagon know that the warfighter is their most important customer. "I could randomly pick any person and ask them who the customer is and I'd get the same answer," said Hershman. "That blew my mind." She noted that, for some private-sector corporations, knowing their target audience can require a lot of effort and focus groups that ultimately may miss their mark, but that's not the case at the Pentagon. "To have that level of clarity and alignment is stunning to me," Hershman said, adding that the department also remains laser-focused on the National Defense Strategy announced last January — the third pillar of which is greater performance and affordability across DOD.

Asked if she would like to one day be nominated to the position she's currently filling on an acting basis Hershman responded, "I serve at the pleasure" of the president. She added that serving on an acting basis "doesn't change my focus and my mission." [Source: ABC News | Luis Martinez & Elizabeth McLaughlin | January 26, 2019 ++]

Selective Service System Update 26 ► National Commission's Interim 2019 Report

The Selective Service System could start including women in its lists for possible future military drafts in the next few years. Or it could also start using those lists to help fine-tune military recruitment by identifying highly-skilled high schoolers interested in public service. Or it could disband altogether, abandoning any procedure for involuntary military service in the future. Members of the National Commission on Military, National and Public Service charged with recommending potentially radical changes to the Selective Service System released their interim report on Wednesday, outlining a host of potentially dramatic overhauls they may recommend in coming years.

Along with including women in the draft rolls — a polarizing topic which lawmakers specifically formed the commission to explore — the report includes a number of proposals to expand the scope of national service opportunities for all Americans. Among the ideas: Include more local volunteer opportunities in high school, simplifying the process for applying to federal jobs, better promoting federal service organizations like the Peace Corps, and using the Selective Service System to better identify recruits for the military.

Commission Chairman Joe Heck, a former Nevada congressman who served in Iraq with the Army, said no decisions on any of the proposals have been made yet. The group's final recommendations are due to Congress and the White House in March 2020. But he said he expects the work to yield some significant changes in the end. "As Americans, we are ready to defend our country as needed," he said. "But for some of our younger Americans, the draft is just something you hear discussed on TV ... There is no widely held expectation for service in our country today, and we need to look at that." But while the commission has found broad support for some of those ideas encouraging more public service, the proposal to require women to register for a potential military draft remains controversial. Under current law, all men between 18 and 26 are required to register with Selective Service officials in the event of a national emergency requiring military conscription. The law remains in effect even though the country has not had a military draft in more than four decades.

As all military combat jobs have been opened to women in recent years, however, several lawmakers and advocacy groups have pushed to open the Selective Service requirement to women as well. Legislative proposals have stalled out in Congress, over both concerns with traditional family roles for women and the viability of the Selective Service System itself. The system costs about \$23 million a year to maintain. Commission Vice Chair Debra Wada said the group's research found it remains viable, even if the idea of a future military draft is widely unpopular. Wada said she is optimistic the commission can find a middle ground on the issue of registering women, but thus far has no formal position on the idea. The interim report is available on the [commission's web site](#). [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | January 23, 2019 ++]

Transgender Troops Update 20 ► Supreme Court Lifts Preliminary Injunctions on Ban

The Supreme Court is allowing the Trump administration to go ahead with its plan to restrict military service by transgender people while court challenges continue. The Trump administration had urged the justices to take up cases about the plan directly, but the court declined for now. Those cases will continue to move through lower courts. The court split 5-4 in allowing the plan to take effect, with the court's five conservatives greenlighting it and its four liberal members saying they would not have.

Until a few years ago service members could be discharged from the military for being transgender. That changed under President Barack Obama. The military announced in 2016 that transgender individuals already serving in the military would be allowed to serve openly. And the military set July 1, 2017 as the date when transgender individuals would be allowed to enlist. But after President Donald Trump took office, the administration delayed the enlistment

date, saying the issue needed further study. While that study was ongoing, the president tweeted in late July 2017 that the government would not allow “Transgender individuals to serve in any capacity in the U.S. Military.” He later directed the military to return to its policy before the Obama administration changes.

Groups representing transgender individuals sued, and the Trump administration lost early rounds in those cases, with courts issuing nationwide injunctions barring the administration from altering course. The Supreme Court on 22 JAN lifted those preliminary injunctions. In March 2018, the Trump administration announced that after studying the issue it was revising its policy. The new policy generally bars transgender individuals from serving unless they serve "in their biological sex" and do not seek to undergo a gender transition. The policy has an exception for transgender troops who relied on the Obama-era rules to begin the process of changing their gender, allowing them to continue to serve. The military said last year that over 900 men and women have done so. [Source: The Associated Press | January 22, 2019 ++]

DoD Climate Change Impact ► Installations & Infrastructure

More than two-thirds of the military’s operationally critical installations are threatened by climate change, according to a [new DoD report](#). The January 2019 report, “Report on Effects of a Changing Climate to the Department of Defense,” at https://partner-mco-archive.s3.amazonaws.com/client_files/1547826612.pdf was submitted to Congress 17 JAN without an official announcement of the report or a public release. Several environmental organizations made the report publicly available early 16 JAN.

The Pentagon did not assess all of its hundreds of installations, instead it selected “79 mission assurance priority installations based on their operational role,” the Pentagon said in its report. In its assessment of those 79 installations, which included Army, Air Force and Navy installations — and notably no Marine Corps bases — the services reported that 53 of the 79 faced current threats from flooding; 43 of the 79 face current threats from drought and 36 of the 79 faced current threats from wildfires. The Pentagon also looked at logistics sites and other support that it considered operation critical, including Washington Headquarters Services, which includes the Office of the Secretary of Defense and supporting offices. The Defense Logistics Agency, the Defense Finance and Accounting Service and the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency. “The effects of a changing climate are a national security issue with potential impacts to Department of Defense missions, operational plans, and installations,” the report found.

Critics said the report not only fell short of Congress' direction but also questioned why not a single Marine Corps Base was included. The report also did not mention last year’s massive storm damage to military installations. Tyndall Air Force Base sustained serious damage to almost all of its buildings by Hurricane Michael and the Marines' Camp Sen. Jack Reed (D-RI), the ranking member on the Senate Armed Services Committee, had a few choice words for it. “The report reads like a introductory primer and carries about as much value as a phonebook,” Reed said in a statement.

The NDAA language also required cost estimated to mitigate the risks at the bases, and a list of the top 10 most climate-vulnerable bases, which it did not, said John Conger, director of the Center on Climate Security. “It will be interesting to see how Congress views this sort of non-compliance of the law” with the report, Conger said. Conger previously served at the Pentagon as a deputy under secretary in the comptroller’s shop, and as the assistant secretary of defense for energy, installations and environment.

When asked why no Marine Corps installations were included, Pentagon spokeswoman Heather Babb said that “in developing the report, DOD focused on mission assurance.” “The report highlights the climate vulnerabilities of the top 79 mission assurance priority installations. By using this alternative approach, we are able to highlight where there are operational risks,” Babb said. The report, which was directed by the 2018 National Defense Authorization Act, required the Pentagon to produce an “assessment of the significant vulnerabilities from climate-related events in order

to identify high risks to mission effectiveness on installations and to operations.” [Source: MilitaryTimes | Tara Copp | January 18, 2019 ++]

Exchange/DeCA Merger Update 02 ► Critics Question Where Any Cost Savings Would Go

The Defense Department could “harvest significant savings” by consolidating commissary and exchange systems into one entity, and the benefits would “far exceed the costs,” according to new recommendations from a defense task force. But some service and exchange officials have pushed back hard on that finding, with a Navy position paper describing the analysis as “flawed beyond repair.” The draft report from the task force says its analysis supports merging the above-store functions of the exchange systems entirely, along with the above-store functions of the commissary agency, into a single organization, while keeping specific grocery functions separate. That would happen over five to seven years, if it goes forward.

The decision will rest in the hands of Lisa Hershman, acting chief management officer of the Department of Defense. In an interview with Military Times, Hershman said she is gathering feedback from customers and other stakeholders, task force members, lawmakers and others. “I just want to hear their version, and the points they hit that are important to them,” she said. “I want to get as much information and get a sense for where folks are.” She said she wants customers to know she’s listening. “We certainly don’t want to subtract from the customer experience,” she said.

The goal of any change is to maintain the benefit, and hopefully improve it, she said. The task force’s report was scheduled to go to Congress by 1 JAN, but that was delayed as officials awaited more responses from service officials. An interim report was submitted 1 JAN, but the formal report is expected to go to lawmakers within the next two to three weeks, said retired Maj. Gen. Keith Thurgood, who is the director of the task force, in an interview with Military Times. Lawmakers have required a report so they can be part of the process.

DoD could get a net savings of between \$700 million and \$1.3 billion over the first five years by consolidating the commissary system and the three exchange systems — Army and Air Force Exchange Service, Navy Exchange Service Command, and Marine Corps Exchange, according to a copy of the report obtained by Military Times. That’s after taking into consideration the costs of implementing the consolidation — estimated to be \$457 million to \$570 million over five years. In addition to improving operations, this consolidation “would also ensure the benefit for patrons of defense resale is maintained and would create no negative impact to the actual experience of shopping,” according to the task force analysis.

But it’s not clear how much the customer will benefit from any savings, according to critics. The report notes that “some portion of the savings” could be reinvested to improve the shopping experience for customers, either through more competitive pricing, enhanced store formatting, or other efforts. “In terms of specific savings numbers, there are several ways that we could benefit the patrons, which is why you need a unified governing structure to make these important decisions about the customer journey,” Thurgood said. “It’s very likely the patron could see, at the end of the day, a better shopping experience, an enhanced e-commerce experience, potentially lower prices if that’s what [the new organization decides] to do with that.” That governing structure will determine how the dollars saved will be used, he said. “By doing this correctly, with the right governance structure, we create options that we don’t have today,” he said. “We make the dividend bigger, which then allows [those in charge of the different entities] and the governance board, to make important decisions about how to invest those dollars.”

The customer won’t see changes that are proposed in back-office functions such as information technology, human resources and financing, with a reorganization that would include the loss of 1,109 full time positions across the commissary and exchange organizations, according to the report. The stores would still keep their branding, for

example as the NEX, AAFES or MCX. The savings over at least the first few years will also be used to pay for costs of consolidation, but a \$75 million fund would be needed to pay for the initial costs of implementation.

‘Flawed beyond repair’

Some military resale officials and others are concerned about the validity of the analysis and the potentially harmful long-term effects on the exchange and commissary benefits, stating that the task force’s focus is on cost reduction rather than customer savings and experience in an increasingly competitive retail environment. Questions are being raised about whether the cost savings are overstated, where the money from those savings would go, and whether the costs to implement the consolidation are being underestimated. And family advocates worry that changes might be made that would be difficult to reverse. “We believe the [business case analysis] is flawed beyond repair,” stated a position paper originally submitted by Navy officials, obtained by Military Times. “Rather than taking a detailed and objective look at the concept, the [analysis] appears to have been based on the assumption that there must be significant savings from consolidation,” and then analysts “(inadvertently or deliberately) used selective data to justify that presumption.”

In his 6 DEC response to the recommendations, Under Secretary of the Navy Thomas Modly stated, “I found this study to be less than convincing,” in submitting his non-concur position. Modly has since changed that position to concur with the consolidation, but included four pages of comments. “On a general level, [the Department of the Navy] continues to believe that the size of many of the estimated efficiencies was overstated and, consequently, the proposed changes would likely lead to an outcome that is less efficient than described in the analysis.” Modly wrote in his Jan. 15 letter. Some DoD officials reportedly put intense pressure on the Navy to change its position to agree with the task force report, according to sources familiar with the discussions.

Secretary of the Air Force Heather Wilson, Secretary of the Army Mark Esper and James Stewart, acting DoD undersecretary of defense for personnel and readiness, have concurred with the analysis, with some strong caveats. Thurgood said the argument about data inaccuracies and what some described as ill-defined methodology is “totally inaccurate. We were very thoughtful in how we approached this and the methodology we used to do this, including the benchmarks we used.” He noted that senior leaders from the commissary and exchange resale organizations were heavily involved in the task force, as well as other subject matter experts.

“The savings numbers and the costs associated with implementing this are not out of line by any stretch of the imagination with some of the more recent studies,” he said, including the similar recommendation from the Military Compensation and Retirement Modernization Commission in 2015. “Just because you don’t agree with the methodology doesn’t mean it’s wrong. This is a methodology we’ve used over and over again, and it was a very detailed work,” said Thurgood, who previously commanded the Army and Air Force Exchange Service and has been an executive for Walmart, Sam’s Club and Pepsi. He and Hershman also denied that the task force had used selective facts to reach a predetermined conclusion. “There’s nothing fundamentally preconceived about any of this. We used the data to inform our decisions,” he said.

In May 2018, then-Deputy Secretary of Defense Patrick Shanahan ordered a task force be formed to conduct a business case analysis and financial due diligence, and to begin planning for the consolidation of the defense resale system. Shanahan, who is now acting secretary of defense, noted that the defense resale enterprise had been studied repeatedly since 1990 with little or no implementation of recommendations for change. The DoD reform management group recommended consolidate the commissaries and exchanges.

Will this put the benefits at risk?

“I think the customers don’t necessarily care so much about the back-office operations or IT. There are certain ways to consolidate that aren’t very visible to the customer, and I think that’s not something military customers are concerned about,” said Eileen Huck, government relations deputy director of the National Military Family Association. “But I think they are concerned about the viability of the commissary and its ability to provide low-cost groceries. There are certain items military families depend on the exchange for as well, and they want assurances they’ll still be able to find those.

“I don’t have any problem with mergers per se, but I certainly am very hesitant about going down a path that might destabilize the military resale system, especially if that puts MWR dividends at risk,” she said. Service members and families have seen some cuts in morale, welfare and recreation programs over the last few years because of funding issues. The implementation will be done in a “very thoughtful, phased approach,” Thurgood said. “This is a journey we’re on over years, and we reserve the right to get smarter. So if we pull one lever and we see it’s not working, we’re going to change.” Huck said she hopes Congress “gets involved and pays attention to this. The exchange and commissary system is very important to military families, and I would worry that changes might be made that would be difficult to undo.”

[Source: NavyTimes | Karen Jowers | January 17, 2019 ++]

Taiwan Straits ► **China Urged to Follow International Rules At Sea**

The U.S. Navy’s top officer said he urged China to follow international rules at sea to avoid confrontations and insisted 18 JAN that ships should be able to pass safely though disputed areas of the South China Sea and Taiwan Strait. Chief of U.S. Naval Operations Adm. John Richardson told reporters in Tokyo that U.S. Navy ships will continue to operate freely in international waters, including the possibility of an aircraft carrier navigating through the Taiwan Strait. Richardson, who held meetings in China earlier this week, said he told Chinese officials that the U.S. is committed to a one-China policy and is opposed to any unilateral action “from either side of the strait” to change the status quo.



Chief of Naval Operations Adm. John Richardson talks to reporters on regional security issues in Tokyo on Friday.

Richardson said the U.S. considers the Taiwan Strait as international waters. “We don’t see any kind of limitation on whatever type of ship could pass through those waters,” he said. His comment follows new tensions between the U.S. and China over Taiwan that have already been frayed over military and trade issues. A report issued earlier this week by the U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency said China’s growing military capabilities could pose a threat to Taiwan, angering Beijing. Washington is concerned that China is opting to use military force to deter Taiwan’s possible independence.

A Chinese foreign ministry spokesman said “we use rules rather than weapons to safeguard and promote our own interests,” and that the U.S. should focus on cooperation with China instead of issuing such a report. In recent years the South China Sea — with rich fishing grounds, undersea resources and vital shipping lanes — has become a focus of contention. China claims virtually the entire waterway on historical grounds and has strengthened its hold over islands there. While five other governments have overlapping claims, the U.S. takes no formal position on sovereignty but insists on the right to freedom of navigation and overflight.

Richardson said China should not see the U.S. naval operations in the area as a threat. He urged China to “be consistent” with international rules to avoid risks and confrontations, and said he told Chinese officials that communication channels are important in de-escalating tensions. Richardson met with Vice Adm. Shen Jinlong and

leaders of China's Central Military Commission. Last year, a near-collision occurred when a Chinese warship approached the guided-missile destroyer Decatur, forcing it to change course. "As we manage these differences and continue to operate in each other's company in the South China Sea and increasingly around the world ... we've got to behave in ways that don't make this more of a tense situation," Richardson said. [Source: The Associated Press | Mari Yamaguchi | January 18, 2018 ++]

Toxic Exposure | Lejeune Update 70 ► SECNAV Denies \$963 billion in Claims

The U.S. Navy secretary says he is denying thousands of claims from veterans and their families who were exposed to contaminated drinking water decades ago at Camp Lejeune in North Carolina. Secretary Richard Spencer says at least 4,400 claims totaling \$963 billion are being denied because there is no legal basis for paying them. He says it was a difficult decision but suggested that claimants can go to Capitol Hill to seek legislation providing restitution. The Department of Veterans Affairs estimates that as many as 900,000 service members were potentially exposed to tainted water at the base between 1953 and 1987. The VA decided in 2017 that eligible veterans stationed at Lejeune during that time could receive government disability benefits. The agency estimated it would cost about \$2.2 billion over five years. [Source: The Associated Press | Lolita C. Baldor | January 24, 2018 ++]

DoD Fraud, Waste, & Abuse ► Reported 16 thru 31 JAN 2019

Ft. Bragg, NC -- A sergeant and a private at Fort Bragg sought to arrange sham marriages between soldiers and immigrants, offering cash, housing benefits and furniture as incentives for potential brides, according to federal court documents. Arrest warrants were issued this week for Sgt. **Edward Kumi Anguah**, described as "the facilitator" of the conspiracy, and Pvt. **Ahmid Mohammed-Murtada**, a recently naturalized citizen from Ghana serving in a Fort Bragg Army unit, court records show.

The investigation began in December when an agent for the Department of Homeland Security interviewed Pvt. Endasia East about having an affair with a single soldier while married to Sulemana Ibrahim, according to a criminal complaint filed in U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of North Carolina. During that interview, "she confirmed the marriage was in fact fraudulent," according to court records. On its website, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services says it does not recognize "relationships entered into for purposes of evading immigration laws."

Mohammed, as he is called in court records, served in the same unit with East and approached her about marrying Ibrahim, who wanted to gain lawful permanent residence, an affidavit said. Court records show Ibrahim was a citizen of Ghana living in New York on a tourist visa that expired in July 2018. As part of the deal, East was to receive a Basic Housing Allowance stipend, typically \$1,000 or more, two months' rent totaling \$1,250 and furniture for a new off-post apartment. East and Ibrahim married at the Cumberland County Courthouse in July, then East went to dinner with Anguah, who said he arranged many fraudulent marriages, the affidavit said. "She was told by Sgt. Anguah and Private Mohammed that she would need to stage photos with Ibrahim in order to make the marriage look legitimate," according to court documents.

The two soldiers also instructed East to place Ibrahim on her apartment lease to give the appearance he lived in Fayetteville rather than New York, records said. She also added him to servicemember life insurance documents. "Private East stated Sgt. Anguah had asked her if she was willing to find additional soldiers for him to arrange marriages to," the affidavit said. "She told Sgt. Anguah she would be on the lookout." East later called Anguah and mentioned a friend "interested in doing the same thing that I'm doing with Ibrahim," records said, to which Anguah answered, "Yeah." In January, an undercover officer met Anguah at a Starbucks in Fayetteville and told him she

wanted \$800 to marry an immigrant, and Anguah suggested \$2,000 instead. Later, the affidavit said, he told her he was going to get \$6,000 and take a cut. “Sgt. Anguah stated he would take care of the ring and ‘everything,’” the affidavit said.

On Monday, Anguah called the agent with a man who identified himself as Kwaphoom Eugene Hoomkwap on the line. On the phone, Hoomkwap said he wanted to get off work in New York to get married in Fayetteville, court records said. On Thursday, they met at the Fayetteville courthouse for the marriage license. Federal arrest warrants were issued 24 JAN for Hoomkwap, Ibrahim, Mohammed-Murtada and Anguah on charges of marriage fraud, misuse of visas and aiding and abetting. [Source: The News & Observer (Raleigh, N.C.) | Josh Shaffer | January 26, 2019 ++]

-o-o-O-o-o-

Parris Island, SC -- Three civilian workers have pleaded guilty in a scheme to sell \$1.5 million worth of shaving supplies stolen from a Marine Corps depot store and warehouse at Parris Island, South Carolina. The Post and Courier of Charleston reported 35-year-old **Orlando Byron**, 27-year-old **Tommie Harrison Jr.**, and 36-year-old **Sarah Brutus** pleaded guilty 25 JAN in U.S. District Court in Charleston to one count of conspiracy to defraud the United States. They face up to five years in prison and \$250,000 in fines when they're sentenced.



They told U.S. District Judge Bruce Howe Hendricks they worked with a Marine Corps noncommissioned officer to sell the razors and razor blades to people out of state. The Marine first sergeant, previously stationed at the Corps' recruit depot aboard Parris Island, South Carolina, was arraigned 3 JAN, according to Maj. Roger Hollenbeck, a spokesman with Marine Forces Reserve. The next court date for Marine 1st Sgt. **Lascelles Chambers** is 13 FEB. His trial is scheduled for the beginning of April at Parris Island, Hollenbeck said. [Source: The Associated Press | January 27, 2019 ++]

-o-o-O-o-o-

Pentagon -- The Pentagon's internal watchdog will investigate military refueling missions in the Middle East and Africa after the U.S. undercharged allies by \$331 million for its support in the Yemen civil war. The Department of Defense Inspector General announced 29 JAN it will audit the energy reimbursement process for the **Defense Logistics Agency**, which buys, stores and ships much of the U.S. military's supplies. The probe's focus will be on U.S. Central Command and U.S. Africa Command, which were both involved in Yemen refueling missions. Auditors plan to visit Manama, Bahrain; Stuttgart, Germany; and Tampa, Florida, according a DoD IG memo to defense officials dated Jan. 28, 2019.

After years of officials telling lawmakers the U.S. was being completely reimbursed, the audit is “a day late and a dollar short,” Sen. Chris Murphy (D-CT) said Tuesday. The Pentagon acknowledged in December that “errors in accounting” led it to undercharge Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates for U.S. aerial refueling of their aircraft in the Yemen civil war, and said it would bill Riyadh and Abu Dhabi \$36.8 million in fuel and \$294.3 million in flight hours. The DoD IG probe follows an inquiry from Senate Armed Services Committee ranking member Sen. Jack Reed (D-RI) which prompted the Pentagon to acknowledge that U.S. Central Command had improperly tracked the costs for U.S. aerial refueling services in the Yemen civil war.

“We pointed out to them that a large sum of money was owed by the Saudis and the Emiratis, and there was an acknowledgement that’s the case,” Reed said Tuesday, adding that he expects the DoD IG to confirm that. “It’s the law; that was the agreement they were operating under, and any other country would have to do the same thing,” Reed said. “It’s not being discriminatory toward them. We basically say: ‘We will fly you, and you will pay us.’ ” [Source: DefenseNews | Joe Gould | January 29, 2019 ++]

POW/MIA Recoveries & Burials ► **Reported 16 thru 31 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

-- **Naval Reserve Lt. Richard C. Lannom** was a bombardier-navigator aboard an A-6A Intruder assigned to Attack Squadron Three Five, USS Enterprise. On March 1, 1968, during a night strike mission over North Vietnam, contact with Lannom’s aircraft

was lost and his plane did not return to the ship. An extensive search was conducted with negative results. Based on this information, Lannom and his pilot were declared missing in action. Interment services are pending. [Read about Lannom.](#)

-- **Army Air Forces Sgt. John Kalausich** was a member of the 642nd Bombardment Squadron, 409th Bombardment Group, 9th Bombardment Division, 9th Air Force. On March 21, 1945, Kalausich was aboard an A-26B when it was hit by anti-aircraft fire and went missing during a combat mission from Couvron, France, to Dülmen, Germany. Kalausich's aircraft had been participating in the interdiction campaign to obstruct German troop movements in preparation for the Allied crossing of the Rhine River on March 23, 1945. Interment services are pending. [Read about Kalausich.](#)

-- **Army Air Forces Sgt. Vernon L. Hamilton** was a member of the 642nd Bombardment Squadron, 409th Bombardment Group, 9th Bombardment Division, 9th Air Force. On March 21, 1945, Hamilton was aboard an A-26B when it was hit by anti-aircraft fire and went missing during a combat mission from Couvron, France, to Dülmen, Germany. Hamilton's aircraft had been participating in the interdiction campaign to obstruct German troop movements in preparation for the Allied crossing of the Rhine River on March 23, 1945. Interment services are pending. [Read about Hamilton.](#)

-- **Navy Fireman 1st Class Grant C. Cook** 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 Cook. Interment services are pending. [Read about Cook.](#)

-- **Mr. Edward J. Weissenback** was an employee of Air America Incorporated, and a crewman aboard an Air America C-123K. On Dec. 27, 1971, his aircraft was on a routine resupply mission between Thailand and Laos when radio contact was lost northeast of Sayaboury, Laos. Search and rescue efforts continued through Dec. 31, 1971, but no sign of the aircraft or the four crewmembers were found, including Weissenback. Interment services are pending. [Read about Weissenback.](#)

-- **Mr. Roy F. Townley** was an employee of Air America Incorporated, and a co-pilot aboard an Air America C-123K. On Dec. 27, 1971, his aircraft was on a routine resupply mission between Thailand and Laos when radio contact was lost northeast of Sayaboury, Laos. Search and rescue efforts continued through Dec. 31, 1971, but no sign of the aircraft or the four crewmembers were found, including Townley. Interment services are pending. [Read about Townley.](#)

-- **Army Sgt. Frank J. Suliman** was a member of Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 9th Infantry Regiment, 2nd Infantry Division. On Dec. 1, 1950, the convoy of trucks Suliman was riding in was halted by a roadblock and the soldiers were commanded to dismount to get through the roadblock on foot. Fellow soldiers reported that Suliman was captured and taken to a prisoner of war camp at Pukchin-Tarigol, North Korea, where he reportedly died in March 1951. Interment services are pending. [Read about Suliman.](#)

-- **Army Pvt. Floyd A. Fulmer** was a member of Company A, 1st Battalion, 110th Infantry Regiment, 28th Infantry Division. He was reported missing in action on Nov. 14, 1944, after fierce combat in the Raffelsbrand sector of the Hürtgen Forest, near the village of Simonskall, in Germany. Due to ongoing enemy activity in the area, his remains could not be recovered. On Nov. 15, 1945, the War Department declared him deceased. Interment services are pending. [Read about Fulmer.](#)

-- **Baker 2nd Class David L. Kesler** 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 Kesler. Interment services are pending. [Read about Kes](#)

[Source: <http://www.dpaa.mil> | January 31, 2019 ++]

* VA *



VA Blue Water Claims Update 62 ► Stumbling Block is Pay-go Which Needs to Go | Opinion

Last year, the Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act bill was one of the few substantive legislative initiatives to pass the House of Representatives unanimously. Although the bill died in the Senate, 98 Senators were willing to allow unanimous consent. The stumbling block, as it has been in previous years was the offset requirements of the pay-as-you-go. Pay-go, enacted in 2010, requires increases in new benefits be offset by a corresponding decrease in other benefits. In other words, restoring the presumption of herbicide exposure to Navy veterans who served in the bays, harbors and territorial sea of Vietnam required a reduction of benefits or a corresponding funding increase.

In 2015 Military-Veterans Advocacy proposed financing the bill with cost of living round downs. This would require annual cost of living increases to be rounded down to the nearest dollar. The most it would cost any one veteran would be \$11.88 per year but would raise \$1.8 billion to cover 90,000 additional veterans. Led by Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-VT), with support from the Veterans of Foreign War (VFW) and Disabled American Veterans (DAV), the effort was defeated. A similar attempt to use this offset in 2017 again drew the ire of the VFW and DAV and was crushed by then House Ranking Member Tim Walz (D-MN).

In 2016 Military-Veterans Advocacy worked closely with Sen. Chuck Grassley (R-IA) and the Judiciary Committee to forge an offset using a surcharge for foreign student visa fees. Sen. Patrick Leahy (D-VT), then Ranking Member of the Judiciary Committee torpedoed that idea and the Blue Water Navy bill with it. More recently, pay-go sank another Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act. Staff members of the House Veterans Affairs Committee cobbled together an offset by increasing some veterans home loan fees. In a show of bipartisan support the bill passed the House 382-0. In the Senate, however, anti-veteran elements struck back.

The VA reversed their previous support of the bill, repeating the often-refuted allegations that the science did not support the exposure. Then several VSOs attacked the PAYGO offset that they had previously approved. In a Sept. 19, 2018 letter to Senate Veterans Committee Chairman Johnny Isakson, the VFW and DAV, joined by the American Legion and the Paralyzed Veterans of America withdrew their support from the jumbo loan fee provisions of the pay-go offset. After ten weeks of opposition, these groups agreed to support the bill but only if the jumbo loan fee provisions were removed in the 116th Congress. During this VSO forced hiatus, the VA was able to convince CBO to add another \$1.3 billion to their score — thrusting the cost above the bills pay-go offset. This led to holds by Senators Enzi of Wyoming and Lee of Utah. Despite many efforts to force the bills passage, including belated lip service from the VFW, the bill died in the Senate.

Unfortunately, the fate of the "Blue Water Navy" bill is typical of veteran's legislation. Hobbled by the draconian pay-go rules, legislation to cover the victims of military toxic exposure languishes in committee. As a result, casualties of herbicides, burn pits, radiation, contaminated water supplies, PCBs and other self-inflicted wounds go without compensation or medical benefits. The change in control of the House of Representatives has brought no relief. The new Speaker of the House, Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) reenacted the pay-go provisions. Rep. Pramila Jayapal (D-WA) has introduced legislation to repeal the rule. The Jayapal bill, H.R.242, has 32 Democrat supporters and zero Republican support. It is not expected to pass.

What could pass, and perhaps generate some GOP support, is an exception for veterans. Veterans believe that they have bought and paid for their disabilities by their service to the nation. Here, unlike other entitlements or other mandatory benefits, disabilities were caused by the government and flowed directly from government service. The VSOs are singularly unhelpful in this regard. The VFW, and others tout that they will oppose taking money from one veteran to pay for another's benefits. On the face of it, their position is noble, but it ignores the realities of pay-go.

The VSOs tell Congress it is their job to come up with funding then grandstand and criticize congressional funding efforts. As a result, toxic exposure victims continue to sicken and die without relief. Veterans slide into bankruptcy while trying to pay for their own medical costs as their declining years come early. This is a national disgrace. We need to keep our promise to veterans. Under current law that will not happen. [Source: The Hill | John B. Wells | January 24, 2019 ++]

VA Blue Water Claims Update 63 ► **Federal Court Rules VA Cannot Deny Benefits**

A federal court ruled 29 JAN that the Department of Veterans Affairs cannot deny disability benefits to thousands of Vietnam veterans who claim exposure to cancer-causing chemical defoliants simply because those vets served in the waters off the country's coastline, and not inland. The ruling in favor of Alfred Procopio, Jr., 73, who served on the USS Intrepid during the Vietnam War marks a major victory for so-called "blue water" Navy veterans who have fought the department for years over the denials. VA officials have said the existing scientific evidence doesn't justify the presumption of toxic exposure for the group and have strongly opposed legislative efforts to overturn their decision. But the 9-2 decision by the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit overturns past court opinions backing up VA, saying that Congress never intended to exclude servicemembers in the seas around Vietnam when they awarded presumptive benefits for certain illnesses related to Agent Orange exposure.

Under current department rules, the blue water veterans can receive medical care for their illnesses through VA. But to receive disability benefits — worth up to several thousand dollars a month — they must prove that their ailments are directly connected to toxic exposure while on duty. That's not the case for other Vietnam veterans, who are presumed to have been exposed to Agent Orange and other defoliants known to cause serious and rare cancers. So while a veteran who served on the shoreline could receive disability payouts after contracting Parkinson's Disease or prostate cancer, another vet who served on a ship a few miles away would have to provide evidence of direct contact with hazardous chemicals.

Advocates have said that, given the time that has passed since the war, obtaining such proof is impossible and unfair. In their ruling, the federal judges agreed. "These statutes cast no doubt on our conclusion that, by using the formal term 'Republic of Vietnam,' Congress unambiguously referred, consistent with uniform international law, to both its landmass and its 12-nautical-mile territorial sea," the ruling states. If VA officials opt not to appeal the decision to the Supreme Court in the next 90 days — or if the court decides not to hear the case — the result means that up to 90,000 blue water veterans could see disability payouts as early as this year.

In a statement, VA spokesman Curt Cashour said the department is reviewing this decision and "will determine an appropriate response." Advocates hailed the news as a major step ahead in their effort to win benefits for the aging veterans. "This is a big win," said John Wells, retired Navy commander and the executive director of Military-Veterans Advocacy, which helped file the lawsuit. "We want to work with VA on how to implement this as painlessly as possible, but making sure these veterans get all they deserve." Bart Stichman, executive director of the National Veterans Legal Services Program, said the decision "unequivocally rights a wrong that is a terrible injustice to all veterans who were exposed to Agent Orange in the waters of Vietnam."

Legislation that would have awarded presumptive status to the blue water veterans was blocked by a small group of senators at the end of last year, disappointing advocates who saw the legislative momentum as their best chance for a victory in years. Now, instead of granting the benefits to veterans, lawmakers may be forced to scramble new bills to cover the cost of the court-ordered awards. Congressional Budget Office officials had estimated that awarding the benefits to the blue water veterans could total about \$1.1 billion over 10 years, but VA officials have insisted the total is closer to \$5.5 billion. Disagreements over whether to use new home loan fees to pay for the costs stalled the previous legislation.

If the court order stands, VA will be forced to cover the costs regardless of whether an offset is agreed upon, a potential drain on the department's annual budget. Several new bills on the issue are already pending before Congress, and the chairmen of both the House and Senate Veterans' Affairs Committees have promised to deal with the topic quickly this year. In a statement, Senate chairman Johnny Isakson (R-GA) said that he was pleased with the court decision and would work closely with VA on the next steps. The full decision is available at the appeals court's web

site <http://www.ca9.uscourts.gov/sites/default/files/opinions-orders/17-1821.Opinion.1-29-2019.pdf>. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | January 29, 2019 ++]

GI Bill Update 278 ▶ Audit Discloses \$585M in Improper Payments

Millions of dollars have gone toward educating student veterans at ineligible, delinquent schools, due to inadequate oversight by state-based agencies in charge of approving school programs for GI Bill funds, a recent audit by the Department of Veterans Affairs Office of Inspector General found. Because of a lack of “effective controls to ensure the proper review, approval and monitoring of programs” at these agencies and the VA, investigators write that the VA “could not provide reasonable assurance” that students using the Post-9/11 GI Bill to pay for school received a quality education. Infractions by schools listed in the report include misleading claims about accreditation status or student outcomes that violated Federal Trade Commission advertising guidelines.

Auditors estimate more than 11,000 students using the GI Bill to pay for school were enrolled in these and other wayward programs during the inspector general’s year-long investigation, costing the VA about \$585 million in improper payments. If these problems persist, auditors estimate those numbers could climb to 17,000 students and \$2.3 billion over the next five years. Tanya Ang, vice president of the nonprofit Veterans Education Success, said oversight from both state approving agencies and the VA is critical to ensure schools are not deceiving military students.

“It is imperative that military-connected students are able to pursue a post-secondary education with the utmost confidence that their program will indeed help them accomplish their academic and career goals and that they will be equipped to be strong contributors to the American workforce,” she said in an email. “VA’s approval of a program to accept education benefits communicates to potential students that the school is deemed a quality school.” The VA Veterans Benefits Administration, tasked with overseeing state approving agencies, or SAAs, technically complied with the law, the report states. But it “generally took a hands-off approach” in this role and did not ensure SAAs were meeting legal requirements and preventing schools’ possible abuse of education benefits. Thus, the VA “did not ensure the adequate protection of students and taxpayers,” according to the report.

In its recorded response to the findings, the VA objected to the inspector general’s characterization that it had taken a “hands-off” approach and requested that this be stricken from the report — an objection the Office of Inspector General said had no merit. The VA also said that while it acknowledged several areas for improvement, the report “demonstrates a lack of understanding or appreciation of the complexities of the VA and SAA relationship.” VA spokesman Curt Cashour said in an email that federal law dictates SAAs have “almost exclusive authority to approve, suspend, withdraw and monitor most programs approved for GI Bill students.” The VA as a federal agency is generally prohibited “from exercising supervision or control over SAAs.” When asked how the VA ensures the quality of programs educating student veterans, Cashour said the department will not contract with poor-performing SAAs, and the VA also has the authority to suspend payments to schools approved by SAAs without sufficient legal basis.

What state approving agencies (SAAs) do

Joe Wescott, national legislative director for the National Association of State Approving Agencies, describes the role of SAAs as “gatekeepers of quality.” SAAs have contracts with the VA to assess and approve school programs seeking to enroll students using the GI Bill. To be considered, Wescott said, programs must have a brick-and-mortar presence in the state, be financially stable and either be accredited or have a proven record of successfully teaching that program in the state. Other parts of the evaluation cover a program’s curriculum, tuition costs and advertising practices. SAA representatives also visit campuses to observe classes and interview administrators and instructors.

In addition, SAAs are now responsible for compliance surveys, which are federal financial audits unrelated to the approval process. This responsibility formerly fell under the VA but is now split between staff at VA regional offices

and SAAs. But while the list of SAA responsibilities has grown in recent years, the funding remained stagnant for more than a decade, until a slight increase in fiscal 2018. Another recent report focused on SAAs — this one from the Government Accountability Office — found that limited funding had impacted their ability to provide appropriate training to staff, travel to geographically dispersed schools, and provide technical assistance and training to schools. Funding for SAA contracts, now at \$21 million, is approved by Congress and allocated through the VA.

The New Mexico and Alaska state approving agencies pulled out of their contracts with the VA all together, leaving VA to do the groundwork for approvals in those states. SAA officials in California, the state with the largest number of student veterans, almost did not renew, citing lack of funds. Though the Alaska SAA started its contract with VA again in 2017, its director said the addition of compliance surveys was the main reason the agency pulled out for five and a half years. It lacked sufficient funding to conduct them. “I know that we are the gatekeepers of quality. But our attention has been diverted from the gate too much in the past several years,” Wescott said. “When we go out to schools, we shouldn’t be looking for the missing \$50 from a payment. I’m not making light of that; we want veterans to be paid correctly, and we want them to be paid in approved programs. But we should be looking to see that programs are properly licensed and are properly accredited.”

Problematic practices

In their investigation, auditors drilled down on 175 programs at 70 schools approved by SAAs in California, Mississippi, Nebraska, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York and Oregon in 2015 and early 2016. Of these, 35 programs, approved by six of the seven SAAs, had unsupported or improper approvals, unreported or delayed reports of changes to programs, or potentially erroneous, deceptive or misleading advertisements. For example, one school in New Jersey claimed in its catalog that its placement services division helps find jobs for more than 90 percent of students within one month of graduation, yet the school was unable to provide data to support this. Another school in Mississippi used the VA’s official seal on its website, potentially making it appear as though the school was part of the federal agency.

The large majority of schools with infractions, 83 percent, were for-profit institutions, though the VA and Wescott noted that these types of institutions were disproportionately represented in the sample size. (Investigators explain in the report that they weighted the sample to ensure any differences in the proportions did not bias the results.) Wescott also took issue with the way investigators drew broad conclusions about SAAs from their study of only seven. They also did not take into account the financial constraints these agencies have experienced in recent years, he said. Part of the challenge listed in the report is a lack of “effective, sufficient controls, to continually review and evaluate programs after they have been approved.”

Wescott said that ideally SAAs would be able to rely on schools, or even accreditors, to alert the agencies whenever changes are made to an approved program. “We just don’t have the resources and staffing to go out there every quarter and say, ‘OK, what’d you guys change this quarter?’” he said. However, he said, SAAs can still learn from the findings and take this opportunity to reevaluate the role of these agencies across the nation. “I think the major takeaway is that SAAs need to give more attention to their original mission, which is their most important mission, and that is the approval and oversight of quality programs for our veterans,” he said. “Can we do a better job in the approval area? Yes. Given the time to devote to it, yes we can.”

[Source: MilitaryTimes | Natalie Gross | January 25, 2019 ++]

VA Lawsuit | Bradley Hammersley ► Podiatrist Negligent Care On 115 Vets

A class-action complaint has been filed on behalf of about a dozen veterans in Northeast Indiana who were victims of medical malpractice after receiving treatment at the VA Northern Indiana Health Care System. The lawsuit, which includes more than 100 pages of documents detailing the alleged malpractice, states government officials admitted

the doctor's mistakes but denied claims from victims for disability benefits because they were not filed within a two-year statute of limitations. According to court documents, the patients received podiatric care from Dr. Bradley Hammersley between 2009 and 2016. Hammersley started working in 2006 as a VA fee-based provider and a full time VA employee in September 2014, according to Tom Blackburn, a Public Affairs Officer at the VA Northern Indiana Healthcare System. The complaint, which was filed Jan. 11, lists the names of 13 veterans who claim staff at the VA knew about Hammersley's botched surgeries but covered it up.

Billy McGuire, a 70-year-old Vietnam veteran, had surgery on his foot in 2012. "[Dr. Hammersley] reported to me that a blown tendon needed to be removed and he was going to replace it with a new one," said McGuire. Six years later, in 2018, he was called into the VA office, where administrators told him the surgery performed by Hammersley was not necessary and that therapy would have corrected the problem. "My mind got awful scary," he said. "I got emotional. The doctors showed me pictures of x-rays and MRIs of what my ankle looks like today and what it looked like back then. They stated to me that the ruptured tendon did not get replaced. Dr. Hammersley went in there and cut my ankle and made the tendon damaged himself. Then sewed it back together."

His story echoes that of about a dozen other area veterans, including Robert Swisher. Swisher enlisted in the Army in 1984 and served his country for nearly 20 years. Hammersley operated on his foot in 2015. "[Hammersley] did an MRI, x-rays and said I needed surgery like yesterday," he said. "After surgery it was three times worse. I couldn't walk across the yard. There was no stability on the outside and there was a sharp pain going through to the bottom of the arch." Swisher said the investigation into Hammersley began after a serious illness forced him to take a leave of absence from work. "It kind of hit deep," said Swisher. "Because when you get out of the service you expect to be taken care of to an extent." McGuire and Swisher are trying to seek damages for medical malpractice. Attorney David Farnbauch is representing them.

"A lot of the surgeries were unnecessary and they were performed improperly," said Farnbauch. "There were some very inappropriate medical procedures that were done on some patients. We believe the VA knew that Dr. Hammersley was committing malpractices on a widespread basis and they waited years to tell these patients."

In 2018, letters from the VA went out to more than a 100 veterans, informing them that they were victims of medical malpractice. VA Administrators directed them to take legal action, however those patients learned their claims would be denied because they were outside of the two year statute of limitations. "These patients kept going back to the VA," said Farnbauch. "They kept going back to Dr. Hamersley or a PA in the VA system and even though they weren't getting better after the surgery... no one was informing them that the reason they were getting worse is because they were the victim of malpractice. We are asking the judge to declare or issue an order that the federal government cannot bar the claims of these veterans based on the statute of limitations."

In a letter dated February 2018 Congressman Jim Banks asked Michael Missal, Inspector General at the Department of Veteran Affairs, to conduct a thorough review of all 415 cases involving Hammersley. At that time the letter noted 44 veterans had been "identified as negatively impacted." Banks released the following statement:

"From the moment I was notified about malpractice at the VA Northern Indiana Health Care System (NIHCS) podiatry clinics, I requested the VA Office of Inspector General to review "the circumstances surrounding allegations of improper surgeries within the Podiatry Clinic at VA NIHCS." Indeed the findings in VA OIG's report, released this month, are troubling and completely unacceptable. Indiana veterans deserve the best care possible, with no exceptions. While reforms and actions have been made within the VA to prevent a similar circumstance, much more is required. Vigilance and rigorous oversight must be at the core of the VA's mission to serve our Nation's veterans."

WANE-TV 15 'Finds Out' has learned that the Inspector General's investigation revealed that 115 veterans were negatively impacted. As of Dec. 2018, the VA reached out to all but 10 victims of the medical malpractice. Investigators recommended that the chief of surgery be suspended from his duties for not taking action in a timely

manner, and the VA has also made changes to some policies and procedures to ensure this does not happen again. Blackburn of the VA declined to be interviewed, however he released the following statement:

"VA always strives to provide Veterans with the very best health care possible. When we don't meet that standard, we work quickly to identify problems, fix them and hold those responsible accountable. In this case, VA Northern Indiana Health Care System completed an internal review in 2017 of all surgical podiatry cases performed by Dr. Hammersley after VANIHCS staff raised concerns. The review determined that a small percentage of Dr. Hammersley's patients received substandard care. VANIHCS leaders have contacted all affected Veterans to apologize personally, offer additional medical care and inform them of their options moving forward."

McGuire and Swisher are faced with deciding if they want to move forward with corrective surgery offered to them by the VA. "Knowing that I'll have to go through another operation... is that going to cripple me?" said McGuire. "We want him to be able to walk and do those things that a normal person is age would do," said McGuire's wife Rachel. "But it's a little different to approach this situation now because it's so different than it was six years ago. It's kind of devastating you just you hear about these things happening all the time, but when it happens to you it's very different."

"It did a big dent for a lot of us," said Swisher. "Looking back at the VA, do we really want to go back to it? Do we really trust it anymore? Money is not the biggest issue. It was how you got overlooked. The pain and suffering you had to go through to suck it up and drive on." Following the review of Hammersley's surgical podiatry cases, VA terminated his employment in May 2017 and reported him to the Indiana Board of Podiatry. [Source: WANE.com | Angelica Robinson | January 15, 2019 ++]

Emergency Medical Bill Claims Update 05 ► Unlawful VA Regulation Lawsuit

Veterans who flooded the Department of Veterans Affairs with reimbursement claims for private-sector emergency care, in the wake of their appeals court victory in the Staab case, have been getting misinformation from the VA that likely discourages them from appealing wrongly denied claims or from supplying the VA with follow-up documents to complete their claims. That's the contention of a new lawsuit filed 1 JAN by attorneys led by the non-profit National Veterans Legal Services Program (NVLSP), which is trying to force the VA to heed the Staab decision and reimburse tens of thousands of veterans for non-VA emergency care that their own health insurance covered only in part.

As reported by Military.com in November, an initial lawsuit filed by the NVLSP, which is still pending, alleges VA wrongdoing on another issue related to Staab claimants. It contends that the VA wrote an implementing regulation for Staab last year in a way that still denies thousands of veterans non-VA emergency care reimbursements, and saves the VA billions of dollars, on precisely the type claim the U.S. Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims ruled that Congress has wanted the VA to pay since 2010. The new lawsuit charges that letters sent the past year to thousands of veterans, denying a Staab-related claim or seeking more information to reach a claim decision, have contained "an incorrect statement of law," language that contradicts what the appeals court concluded in Staab.

"It's beyond my comprehension how they could do such a clearly lawless act," said Barton F. Stichman, NVLSP's executive director and the lead attorney in both lawsuits. The NVLSP has petitioned a three-judge panel on the appeals court to consider arguments and grant relief simultaneously on the two lawsuits because the classes of veterans impacted -- by the unlawful regulation and the inaccurate VA mailings -- are nearly identical. Government attorneys are challenging that joint class petition and asking the appeals court for more time to prepare their response brief to the first lawsuit, which is due by 4 FEB. Until then, the government's arguments are not known.

The VA for decades has reimbursed for outside emergency care for VA-enrolled veterans only if they have no other health insurance. The VA interpreted the law on non-VA emergency care as requiring it to deny claims for

outside emergency care if a veteran had alternative health insurance -- through an employer or their spouse's employer or even with Medicare -- to cover part of the cost. Because this left many thousands of veterans every year with large out-of-pocket costs, Congress modified the statute nine years ago. The VA, however, wrote implementing regulations in 2012 that continued to direct claim processors to deny reimbursement if veterans had insurance to cover part of their emergency costs.

Three years ago, in *Staab*, the appeals court ruled that the VA was ignoring the plain meaning of the 2010 law change, which was intended to bring financial relief to veterans stuck with out-of-pocket costs for private-sector emergency care. The VA pondered an appeal of *Staab* to the U.S. Supreme Court but, given that the appeals court ruled unanimously and that the legislative history was clear, a reversal seemed unlikely. In 2017, then-VA Secretary David Shulkin conceded as much and assured Congress that the VA would rewrite regulations to comply with *Staab* even though, he noted, it would expose the department to billions of dollars in additional medical costs, both on claims re-filed by veterans and in payment of future claims.

The VA released a new interim regulation last January, and veterans seeking reimbursement for *Staab*-related claims began to see again they routinely were denied. The NVLSP investigated and determined the regulations, which became final in March, still prohibited reimbursement for the bulk of out-of-pocket emergency medical expenses veterans paid if they had alternative health insurance plans. The 2010 law stated that veterans with other insurance are responsible for "co-payments and similar payments." The revised regulation, however, took that phrase and expanded it with devastating effect to "co-payments, deductibles, co-insurance and similar payments." The practical effect is veterans with insurance remain responsible for almost every emergency cost their insurance won't cover. Stichman called the maneuver "outrageous," adding, "That can't be what Congress intended." The phrase "co-payment and similar payments" means fixed and modest charges, he said. The VA changed that meaning to ensure veterans, and not the VA, still got stuck with almost every cost their insurance plan won't cover.

The plaintiff in that initial lawsuit is Coast Guard veteran Amanda Jane Wolfe, who needed an emergency appendectomy but the nearest VA hospital was a three-hour drive. Because of the way the VA wrote its 2018 regulation, Wolfe had to pay nearly \$2,600 in medical costs that her own health insurance didn't cover. Her lawsuit seeks to represent thousands of other veterans who also have seen *Staab*-related claims denied since the revised regulation took effect.

The plaintiff in the second lawsuit is disabled Navy veteran Peter Boerschinger, 79, who suffered pneumonia and congestive heart failure last April. The closest VA hospital had closed its emergency room and directed patients to seek outside care. Because Boerschinger had other health insurance, the VA refused to pay \$1,340 in charges that his own insurance also wouldn't cover. The VA letter denying his claim, which was identical to letters sent to thousands of veterans with *Staab*-related claims over the last year, left Boerschinger confused as to whether it was worthwhile to appeal. The letter misled him by listing among criteria that must be met to qualify for reimbursement that the "veteran have no coverage under a health plan contract."

Though the *Staab* ruling had directed the VA no longer to use alternative insurance "as a reason to turn people down," Stichman said, it continues to share that "incorrect statement of law ... whenever they send veterans a letter about their claim." This practice "creates a disincentive for veterans to obtain third-party health insurance [and] runs directly counter to the *Staab* case ruling." The lawsuits, now combined, urges the appeals court to regard both Wolfe and Boerschinger as representing classes of similarly situated individuals. All those represented by Wolfe have been or will be harmed by an unlawful regulation. All those Boerschinger represents have been or will be harmed by correspondence with the incorrect statement that a criterion for reimbursement of non-VA emergency costs is "no coverage under a health plan contract."

The lawsuit urges the court to declare the 2018 regulation "invalid to the extent it forbids the VA from reimbursing veterans for co-insurance and deductible payments incurred while visiting non-VA hospitals for emergency treatment." Also, it asks the court to invalidate all decisions in the past year denying "reimbursement of medical expenses deemed to be part of the veteran's deductible or co-insurance," or denying expenses because the veteran was

covered under a health contract. The lawsuit further asks that the court to order the VA secretary to re-adjudicate all of these reimbursement claims, this time using a proper interpretation of the 2010 law as the court first required with its Staab decision.

[Source: Military.com | Tom Philpott | January 24, 2019 ++]

VA Appeals Update 33 ► A Long-Overdue Fix

Veterans rejected for disability benefits will have a new slate of appeals options starting next month, when federal officials will put in place an overhaul of the review process with hopes of dramatically cutting down on wait times for the complicated cases. Last week, Department of Veterans Affairs officials announced they will implement new appeals modernization rules starting Feb. 19. Work on the effort has been underway for more than 18 months, since lawmakers passed sweeping reform legislation on the topic in August 2017. Under the new rules, veterans will be given three options for their benefits appeals. All three are designed to streamline the complicated existing process for cases, which can languish for years as new evidence and arguments are introduced throughout the timeline.

Now, VA leaders are hoping the most difficult reviews can still be completed in under a year in the vast majority of cases. Their target for cases which don't go before the Board of Veterans Appeals is an average of about four months for a final decision. A successful appeal can mean potentially thousands of dollars in monthly benefits payouts for veterans who have previously been turned down for what they believe are service-connected injuries and illnesses. VA and Capitol Hill leaders hailed the changes as a long-overdue fix. "(This) is the most significant reform in veterans' appeals processing in a generation and promises to improve the timeliness and accuracy of decisions for our nation's veterans," said House Veterans' Affairs Committee Chairman Mark Takano (D-CA). He promised close oversight of the work ahead, but also hope about the potential rewards for veterans.

Committee ranking member Rep. Phil Roe (R-TN) last week visited a regional office in his home state that will be involved in the new appeals process and left feeling confident in its success. "The VA staff feel really good about this," he said. "They're worked out the hiccups they've had, and are ready to move ahead. Getting all the training and experience is going to take time, but I walked away optimistic." Veterans groups largely supported the appeals overhaul, although a few groups have expressed concerns about the new system limiting veterans options for future reviews in favor of getting faster answers.

Under the first of the three new appeals processes, veterans can file a supplemental claim where they introduce new evidence backing their case. The appeal is handled by specialists at a regional office, who render a final decision on it. In the second option, veterans can request their case be reviewed by a senior claims adjudicator instead of the regional office. Those experts will review cases for clear errors or mistaken interpretations of statute. If they find mistakes, they can mandate corrections for the cases. Finally, veterans will also be able to appeal directly to the Board of Veterans' Appeals. Those cases are expected to take the longest to process, because of the legal prep work involved. Veterans can get a direct decision or request a hearing before the board.

Portions of the new process have been implemented as pilot programs at select sites in recent months. Previously, cases involved a combination of all three options, with cases reset and repeating steps with every new submission of case evidence. Veterans with cases currently pending in the system can opt-into the revamped processes starting next month, or remain in the current system if they believe it will better benefit them. More information on the changes is available through the [Veterans Affairs benefits website](#). [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | January 22, 2019 ++]

VA Vision Care Update 07 ► Available to All Health Care Enrolled Vets

Veterans enrolled in VA health care are eligible for diagnostic, preventive and therapeutic eye care services. Veterans in all Priority Groups may be eligible to receive eyeglasses and/or medically necessary contact lenses. The need for an updated eyeglass prescription at VA expense will be determined by the VA eye care provider (optometrist or ophthalmologist) for eligible Veterans. [Click here for a detailed look at VA's eye care services.](#)



VA eye care is the third busiest service in VHA, behind primary care and mental health. Ophthalmology is the second busiest surgical service, behind general surgery, with over 76,000 cases in FY18. The most common surgical procedure performed in VHA is cataract surgery. Over 30,000 laser surgery procedures were performed in VA clinics in FY18. VA's Ophthalmology workforce consists of over 1200 physicians located at 115 clinics.

In fiscal year 2018, VHA's Office of Specialty Care Services provided Eye Care ([Optometry and Ophthalmology](#)) Services for a record number of over 1.81 million Veterans at about 381 VA medical facility sites located in urban, suburban, rural, and highly rural areas. VA eye care providers (optometrists and ophthalmologists) prescribed nearly 1.7 million pairs of eyeglasses that were provided to Veterans by VA [Prosthetic and Sensory Aids Services](#).

Every VA Eye (Optometry and/or Ophthalmology) Clinic provides basic low vision rehabilitation care. More intensive vision rehabilitation services are available within the VA [Blind Rehabilitation Services](#) program. VA eye care providers perform essential eye and vision examinations within the VA [Polytrauma/Traumatic Brain Injury \(TBI\) System of Care](#) as well as provide brain injury vision rehabilitation services at select VA medical facilities. [Source: Vantage Point | Hans Petersen | January 22, 2018 ++]

VA Agent Orange Benefits Update 05 ► VA Continues Opposition to Extending Benefits

The Department of Veterans Affairs shows no signs of backing off opposition to extending Agent Orange health care and benefits to "Blue Water Navy" Vietnam veterans, setting up another major battle this year with veterans groups and overwhelming majorities in the House and Senate. The VA still lacks "sufficient evidence" to prove a presumptive link between service off the coast of Vietnam and the illnesses caused by the widespread use of the defoliant Agent Orange, Paul Lawrence, the VA's under secretary and head of the Veterans Benefits Administration, said 17 JAN. "In terms of presumptives, they come with a real requirement of sufficient evidence to indicate it's warranted," he said in a panel discussion on a VA Town Hall webcast.

Veterans who served on the ground or on the inland waterways of Vietnam are now eligible for Agent Orange health care and benefits. But existing studies do not show definitive causation between the illnesses suffered by the estimated 90,000 Blue Water Navy veterans and the use of Agent Orange, Lawrence said. "We understand the situation," he said. "We talked about having more studies in 2019 that would give us more insight into what the causation was and the definitive conclusions behind it." He gave no indication of when the studies might be completed. Blue Water veterans can file a claim, which will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis, Lawrence said, but they "must be supported by science."

He took a similar position on claims by veterans that they suffered illnesses from the toxic fumes of the burn pits used in Iraq and Afghanistan, saying those claims also must be supported by scientific evidence. On 14 JAN, the U.S. Supreme Court rejected an appeal by veterans for damages against companies that managed the open-air burn pits.

Last August, Lawrence and VA Secretary Robert Wilkie stunned Congress by announcing their opposition to a bill extending Agent Orange benefits to Blue Water sailors that had overwhelming bipartisan support in the House and Senate. The bill had passed 382-0 in the House and appeared headed to easy passage in the Senate with the support of Sen. Johnny Isakson, R-Georgia, chairman of the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee. However, Lawrence, at a Senate Veterans Affairs Committee hearing, said, "It's difficult to hear from veterans who are ill," but "there is no conclusive science" from a report by the Institute of Medicine to show a service connection. Major veterans service organizations (VSOs) disputed Lawrence on the evidence, but the bill failed in December when Sen. Mike Enzi, R-Wyoming, citing the costs, blocked a Senate vote.

The Congressional Budget Office had estimated that about 90,000 sailors could be covered by the bill, which would likely cost about \$1.1 billion over 10 years. Last week, House Democrats reintroduced the "Blue Water Navy" bill, setting up another lengthy battle with the VA on extending Agent Orange benefits. In a statement, Rep. Mark Takano, (D-CA), the new chairman of the House Veterans Affairs Committee, said, "We must get to work and finally secure the benefits our Blue Water Navy veterans earned over 40 years ago."

On 17 JAN, three VSOs -- the Paralyzed Veterans of America, Disabled American Veterans and the Veterans of Foreign Wars -- said that passage of the Blue Water Navy bill would be at the top of their legislative agenda for 2019. "One of our key legislative concerns is ensuring that veterans who were exposed to dangerous toxic chemicals and other environment hazards during their service receive full compensation and other earned benefits," DAV National Commander Dennis Nixon said in a statement. [Source: Military.com | Richard Sisk | January 18, 2019 ++]

VA Health Care Access Update 63 ► Notable Progress on Wait Times Since 2014

A study published 18 JAN in the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA) shows VA significantly reduced wait times for Veteran patients in primary care and three specialty care services between 2014 and 2017. The study, titled "Comparison of Wait Times for New Patients Between the Private Sector and United States Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Centers," compared wait times between VA and private-sector clinicians in 15 major metropolitan areas for appointments in primary care, dermatology, cardiology and orthopedics. For all specialties except orthopedics, VA wait times were similar to private-sector wait times in 2014, and were shorter in 2017.

"Since 2014, VA has made a concerted, transparent effort to improve access to care," said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. "This study affirms that VA has made notable progress in improving access in primary care, and other key specialty care areas. "This progress represents another reason Veterans Choose VA for their health care, following on a recent Dartmouth study that found VA medical centers 'outperform private hospitals in most health care markets throughout the country,' and the Partnership for Public Service ranking VA as one of the top 6 Best Places to Work in the federal government."

According to the JAMA study, average wait time in 2014 for a VA appointment in one of these specialties was 22.5 days, compared with 18.7 days for private-sector physicians. In 2017, the average VA wait time was 17.7 days, while the private-sector average was 29.8 days. That translates to a shorter average wait time of 12 days in VA, compared with the private sector. Primary care, dermatology and cardiology wait times were all shorter than in the private sector in 2017. While orthopedic wait times were longer for VA in both 2014 and 2017, they did decrease during the study period. According to the study, the number of patients seen yearly in VA increased slightly between

2014 and 2017, to around 5.1 million. VA patient satisfaction has also risen, according to patient surveys cited in the study. For more information about VA access to health care, visit <https://www.va.gov/health-care/about-va-health-benefits>. [Source: VA News Release | January 18, 2019 ++]

VA Private Sector Care Update 02 ► VA Secretary says VA Privatization a Myth

The Department of Veterans Affairs pushed back 14 JAN at a New York Times report suggesting that expanded community-care options under the VA Mission Act would lead to the "privatization" of VA health care and the eventual shutdown of some VA medical centers. "Privatization is a myth and to suggest otherwise is completely false and a red herring designed to distract and avoid honest debate on the real issues surrounding veterans' health care," Curt Cashour, a VA spokesman, said in a statement.

The Mission Act, passed last year by Congress and signed into law by President Donald Trump with the support of veterans service organizations (VSOs), was intended to overhaul and continue funding for the VA Choice program on private-care options. That program was riddled with inefficiencies, both for veterans and the community-care providers. Under the act, about \$5.2 billion in mandatory funding was appropriated for the Veterans Choice Fund. The new Veterans Community Care Program was designed to include new standards for access to care. Cashour said that the Mission Act now "gives the VA secretary the authority to set access standards that provide veterans the best and most timely care possible -- whether at VA or with community providers -- and the department is committed to doing just that."

The statement was in response to a New York Times report 13 JAN that said billions of dollars could be diverted under the Mission Act from the VA's hospitals and clinics -- the nation's largest health care system -- into the private sector, and could eventually lead to the closure of some VA medical centers. VA Secretary Robert Wilkie has repeatedly given assurances that he has no intention of "privatizing" the VA, but he has yet to give public guidance on the new access standards on expanding community care. Rep. Julia Brownley (D-CA), a member of the House Veterans Affairs Committee, said, "Congress provided clear guidance to the VA when it passed the bipartisan Mission Act" to protect the VA's existing health care system while making it "simpler for veterans to access the care they need." In a statement to Military.com, Brownley said she is concerned about "White House insistence that private medical care be 'paid for' through cuts to VA programs." "The administration should know that I will hold them accountable to pursue the best care for our veterans, not inferior care driven by political ideology," Brownley said.

Major veterans service organizations said they expect Wilkie to honor his pledge against privatization, but also said they are waiting on the new access standards before making a final judgment. "There are no indications that the VA is going to be privatized," said Chanin Nuntavong, director of the American Legion's National Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation Division, but "we're waiting for the president to decide what the access standards are going to look like." Carlos Fuentes, director of National Legislative Services for the Veterans of Foreign Wars said, "We don't believe privatization is the intent here" under the reforms of the Mission Act. But "specifically, we want to see the access standards."

In a statement, Randy Reese, executive director of the Washington headquarters of Disabled American Veterans, said the organization remains "optimistic that Secretary Wilkie will honor his commitment to improve care for our nation's veterans not just by expanding access, but also by focusing on long overdue modernization of the VA health care system, filling employee vacancies and rebuilding infrastructure." "We've learned from the experience of Choice that providing additional access outside of VA actually leads to increased demand for health care inside VA as well," Reese said. "We also know that the private sector has neither the expertise nor the capacity to absorb such a large and complex patient population."

Late last month, the VA began awarding the first of several regional contracts under the Mission Act for the new Community Care Network that will replace various private-sector care programs for veterans. The contracts could cost a total of \$55.2 billion through 2026, if all the options are exercised, the department said. 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 United Healthcare. [Source: Military.com | Richard Sisk | January 15, 2019 ++]

VA Health Care Access Standards ► Proposed Under Mission Act Implementation

On 30 JAN the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced its proposed access standards for community care and urgent care provisions that will take effect in June 2019 and guide when Veterans can seek care to meet their needs under the MISSION Act – be it with VA or with community providers. Under the MISSION Act, signed by President Trump in June 2018, there are six different eligibility criteria for community care:

- Services unavailable
- Residence in a State without a full-service VA medical facility
- 40-mile legacy/grandfathered from the Choice program
- Access standards
- Best medical interest
- Needing care from a VA medical service line that VA determines is not providing care that complies with VA’s standards for quality

ACCESS STANDARDS

VA is proposing new access standards, effective when the final regulations publish (expected in June 2019), to ensure Veterans have greater choice in receiving care. Eligibility criteria and final standards as follows were based on VA’s analysis of all of the best practices both in government and in the private sector and tailored to the needs of our Veteran patients:

- Access standards will be based on average drive time and appointment wait times.
- For primary care, mental health, and non-institutional extended care services, VA is proposing a 30-minute average drive time standard.
- For specialty care, VA is proposing a 60-minute average drive time standard.
- VA is proposing appointment wait-time standards of 20 days for primary care, mental health care, and non-institutional extended care services, and 28 days for specialty care from the date of request with certain exceptions.

Eligible Veterans who cannot access care within those standards would be able to choose between eligible community providers and care at a VA medical facility.

URGENT CARE

Eligible Veterans will have access to urgent (walk-in) care that gives them the choice to receive certain services when and where they need it. To access this new benefit, Veterans will select a provider in VA’s community care network and may be charged a copayment. VA Secretary Robert Wilkie said, “Our medical services must meet our Veterans’ needs and reinforce the trust that forms the basis for every interaction with VA. Our new access standards are a vital part of this effort. “Most Americans can already choose the health care providers that they trust, and President Trump promised that Veterans would be able to do the same. With VA’s new access standards, the future of the VA health care system will lie in the hands of Veterans – exactly where it should be.” Secretary Wilkie’s full statement is available at <https://www.va.gov/opa/pressrel/pressrelease.cfm?id=5186>

VA encourages the public to comment on the proposed access standards and urgent care benefit during the public comment period once these proposed regulations (RIN 2900-AQ46 and RIN 2900-AQ47, respectively) publish in the Federal Register; we look forward to receiving this feedback.

[Source: VA News Release | January 30, 2019 ++]

VA Mission Act Update 06 ► Secretary Wilkie: Revolutionizing VA Health Care

On 28 JAN Secretary of Veterans Affairs Robert Wilkie released the following statement:

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The past two years have been an exciting time for Veterans and for the Department of Veterans Affairs. Under President Trump’s leadership, VA has enacted more reforms across the organization than at any other time since the 1990s, with key advances in the areas of transparency, accountability and customer service. VA will soon build on this progress by rolling out a plan that will revolutionize VA health care as we know it.

This week, as part of VA’s implementation of the MISSION Act, the department will introduce long-awaited access standards on community care and urgent care that will take effect in June and guide when Veterans can seek care to meet their needs – be it with VA or with community providers. VA’s current patchwork of seven separate community care programs is a bureaucratic maze that’s hard to navigate for Veterans, their families and VA employees. Our new access standards will form the basis of a federal regulation that will consolidate VA’s community care efforts into a single, simple-to-use program that puts Veterans at the center of their VA health care decisions. Strict and confusing qualification criteria like driving distances and proximity to VA facilities that don’t offer needed services will be replaced by eligibility guidelines based on what matters most: the convenience of our Veteran customers.

Although these new standards represent an important win for America’s Veterans, they will not be without controversy. Some will claim falsely and predictably that they represent a first step toward privatizing the department. Here are the facts: under President Trump, VA is giving Veterans the power to choose the care they trust, and more Veterans are choosing VA for their health care than ever before. Since 2014, the number of annual appointments for VA care is up by 3.4 million, with over 58 million appointments in fiscal year 2018. Simply put, more Veterans are choosing to receive their health care at VA. Patients’ trust in VA care has skyrocketed – currently at 87.7 percent – and VA wait times are shorter than those in the private sector in primary care and two of three specialty care areas.

In other words, VA is seeing more patients than ever before, more quickly than ever before, and Veterans are more satisfied with their care than they have been previously. And why should we be surprised? A 2018 Rand study found that the VA health care system “generally delivers higher-quality care than other health providers.” A 2018 Dartmouth study found that “Veterans Health Administration hospitals outperform non-Veterans Health Administration hospitals in most health care markets.” A 2019 study in the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA) shows that VA wait times are shorter than those in the private sector in primary care and two of three specialty care areas.

These studies provide verification of the fact that VA has made great strides since 2014, and now compares favorably to the private sector for access and quality of care – and in many cases exceeds it. And VA employees are noticing improvements as well. VA ranked sixth out of 17 federal government agencies in the Partnership for Public Service’s annual “Best Places to Work” tabulation, up from 17th last year. We know that to keep the trust of our Veterans we must continue to deliver. Our medical services must meet our Veterans’ needs and reinforce the trust that forms the basis for every interaction with VA. We will constantly innovate, upgrade, and pursue ways to serve our nation’s heroes as best we can. Our new access standards are a vital part of this effort.

Most Americans can already choose the health care providers that they trust, and President Trump promised that Veterans would be able to do the same. With VA's new access standards, the future of the VA health care system will lie in the hands of Veterans – exactly where it should be. [Source: VA News Release | January 28, 2019 ++]

VA Medical Marijuana Update 58 ► **Multiple Bills Submitted for Research & Access**

Less than a month into the 116th Congress, lawmakers on both sides of the aisle in the House and Senate have introduced four bills that, if signed into law, would require the VA to conduct research on medical marijuana.

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Tennessee Republican Rep. Phil Roe, a medical doctor and ranking member of the House Veterans Affairs Committee, introduced legislation 24 JAN that would require VA to conduct research on medicinal cannabis, to include marijuana and cannabidiol -- a component extract of marijuana - for post-traumatic stress disorder, pain and other conditions. The bill, **H.R. 747**, is similar to one introduced 23 JAN by Rep. Lou Correa (D-CA) **H.R. 601**.

In the Senate, Sens. Jon Tester (D-MT) and Dan Sullivan (R-AK) introduced a bill, **S.179**, on 17 JAN, directing the VA to carry out clinical trials on the effects of medical marijuana for certain health conditions. And on 16 JAN, Rep. Matt Gaetz (R-FL) introduced legislation that would create a pathway for VA to obtain the marijuana needed for research. Gaetz's bill, **H.R.601**, would increase the number of manufacturers registered under the Controlled Substances Act to grow cannabis for research purposes. It also would authorize VA health care providers to provide information to veterans on any federally approved clinical trials.

"For too long, Congress has faced a dilemma with cannabis-related legislation: we cannot reform cannabis law without researching its safety, its efficacy, and its medical uses -- but we cannot perform this critical research without first reforming cannabis law," Gaetz said in a statement. "The VA needs to listen to the growing number of veterans who have already found success in medicinal cannabis in easing their pain and other symptoms," said Tester, ranking member of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee, in introducing his bill.

Lawmakers have tried for years to influence the debate on medical marijuana, offering numerous proposals on veterans' access to marijuana and its derivatives. Marijuana remains classified as a Schedule 1 drug under federal legislation, meaning they have a high potential for addiction and "no currently accepted medical use." In 2018, bills were introduced that would have required the VA to conduct research on medical marijuana, allowed VA providers to complete the paperwork patients need to obtain medical marijuana in states where it has been legalized and decriminalized the drug for veterans regardless of where they live. None made it into law.

In August 2018, Tester, Roe, Sullivan and former Democrat Rep. Tim Walz, now governor of Minnesota, wrote VA Secretary Robert Wilkie urging him to support "rigorous clinical trials" on medical marijuana. They pointed out that VA is currently conducting two small-scale studies, adding that veterans "deserve to have full knowledge of the potential benefits and side effects of this alternative therapy." "The pervasive lack of research makes [providers'] jobs even more difficult, leaving VA clinicians flying blind without concrete recommendations to veterans," they wrote. To date, 33 states, the District of Columbia, Guam and Puerto Rico have made marijuana legal for medical purposes.

Gov. Roe said that, as a doctor, he believes medical research is needed to determine whether treatments are safe and effective. "While data remains limited, surveys have shown that some veterans already use medicinal cannabis as a means to help with PTSD. ... I would never prescribe to my patients a substance unless I was confident in its proven efficacy and safety and we need to hold medicinal cannabis to the same standards ... if research on the usage of medicinal cannabis is favorable, I am confident that it could become another option to help improve the lives of veterans and other Americans," he said.

In 2017, the American Legion, the largest veterans organization with nearly 2 million members, urged the federal government for marijuana to be removed from the list of controlled substances. The organization also adopted a resolution urging passage of laws that would allow VA doctors to recommend medical marijuana. [Source: Military.com| Patricia Kime | January 24, 2019 ++]

VA Fraud, Waste & Abuse ► Reported 16 thru 31 JAN 2019

Raleigh, NC -- A military widow has been sentenced to 14 months in prison for falsely claiming to have a son so she could collect more than \$100,000 in veterans and Social Security benefits, federal prosecutors say. The News & Observer of Raleigh reports a federal indictment accused 61-year-old **Elizabeth Hayes Cox** of stealing more than \$68,000 in Social Security money and another \$44,000 from the Department of Veterans Affairs between 2000 and 2017 on behalf of a fictitious son. Prosecutors said 16 JAN that Cox had married a disabled veteran while he was in prison and presented a fraudulent birth certificate to receive payments for their made-up dependent child named Oliver.

Cox's attorney, Kevin Marcilliat, asked for a more lenient sentence that would let Cox spend half the time at home with her daughter Aimee Newman, a retired Army captain. But U.S. District Court Judge Terrence Boyle focused his questions on Cox's relationship history, which includes a husband who was slain and a boyfriend lost to suicide. Her husband, Randall Cox, was shot in the head at home in High Point in 2006, according to testimony. The case remains unsolved. Cox said her boyfriend killed himself in the home they shared in 2014. Cox told Boyle she found him in the kitchen but did not know where he got the gun or what type he used. Boyle ordered Cox to report to federal prison by the end of February and pay \$113,000 restitution. [Source: The Associated Press | January 16, 2019 ++]

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Columbia Falls, MT -- A 46-year-old man has admitted overstating his disabilities to receive government payments for nine years. The U.S. Attorney's Office says it will seek \$830,000 in restitution from **John Cicero Hughes**, a Navy veteran who pleaded guilty 12 DEC to theft of government money and Social Security disability fraud. Sentencing is set for 12 APR. Prosecutors say the VA found Hughes was 100 percent disabled in 2009 after confirming his multiple sclerosis diagnosis. He said he could walk only a few steps, had no feeling in his left arm and leg and couldn't care for himself. He received about \$8,400 in benefits each month. Investigators discovered Hughes drove himself to the VA in Helena in January 2018, walked around a grocery store using a cane and used both hands while gambling at a Helena casino. [Source: The Associated Press | December 17, 2018 ++]

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Temple, TX -- One of three Bell County residents was sentenced 22 JAN to her role in a scheme to defraud the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. **Melissa Sebek**, 55, of Temple, who pleaded guilty in federal court to theft of government property, was sentenced to five years federal probation and \$50,189 restitution, according to the U.S. District Court, Western District of Texas. Sebek is owner and operator of MS Bookkeeping Services. Sebek's attorney, Chris K. Gober of San Antonio, said she is also required to do 240 hours of community service and has other probationary terms. She pleaded guilty to a misdemeanor offense in Judge Jeffrey C. Manske's courtroom and, on 16 OCT, waived her right to a trial by jury.

She joined her husband, **Christopher Sebek**, 55, and **Jeffrey Pearson**, 55, of Killeen, in their conspiracy to divert government property and money so it could be used for personal gain. The trio was charged for defrauding the Temple VA of about \$250,000. Christopher Sebek pleaded guilty 23 OCT to one count of conspiracy to defraud the government and one count of theft of government property, as did Pearson. Both will be sentenced 13 MAR in Manske's court.

The trio was discovered through a VA investigation that found a scheme at the motor pool to secretly profit from VA purchase orders. Christopher Sebek used his position as operations supervisor for the Department of Engineering for Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Temple to reroute government property and money so he could use it for his own gain, including paying his personal bills, loans, college tuition and personal credit card bills, the federal complaint said. Business was funneled to a Killeen firm, Whitetail Industrial Parts and Service, which made at least \$400,000 by padding purchases with 30 percent surcharges. More than \$1.3 million was funneled through Whitetail.

Court records showed the scheme began in February 2012. Christopher Sebek and Pearson agreed to steal money from the Temple VA and, over a five-year period, they sent fraudulent invoices for payment — for goods and services designated for the VA medical center. Christopher Sebek sent bogus invoices to the VA from his wife’s company. However, the invoices were used to pay for personal items and to cover Pearson’s 30 percent commission on each invoice. Records show Christopher Sebek stole two VAMC credit cards and used them to pay for his personal expenses. Central Texas VA Health Care System Director Christopher Sandles previously said an employee came forward and reported concerns that led to the uncovering of the criminal activity.

[Source: Temple Daily Telegram | Deborah Mckeon | January 23, 2019 ++]

*** Vets ***



Burn Pit Toxic Exposure Update 61 ► Supreme Court Rejects Vets Appeal

The U.S. Supreme Court has rejected an appeal in which veterans sought to hold private companies responsible for their use of open-air burn pits that have been linked to scores of often fatal illnesses, from cancers to neurological damage. The high court let stand an appellate court ruling that decided more than 60 separate lawsuits could not move forward. Plaintiffs allege that KBR, formerly owned by Halliburton Corporation, and other companies dumped tires, batteries, medical waste and other materials into the burn pits downrange. The smoke from those pits caused health issues in more than 800 veterans in the lawsuits, attorneys claim. At least a dozen affected have since died.

Judges with the Virginia-based 4th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, who issued the ruling in last year’s appeal, said that KBR had little discretion in how to dispose of the waste, as they were under military control and the use of the burn pits was a military decision. They said the lawsuits amounted to a “political question” that Congress and the president should resolve, not the courts. The law firm Motley Rice, LLC, representing plaintiffs in the case, issued the following statement to Military Times 14 JAN.

“For nearly a decade, we have been working in the court system to secure justice for our veterans who have come home and suffered from debilitating diseases as a result of their exposure to burn pits in Iraq and Afghanistan,” the statement said. “Over and over, KBR, a military contractor with the duty to handle waste on bases, did not do so with care. KBR operated burn pits that burned everything from plastics and human waste to car parts. We are disappointed that the Supreme Court declined to hear this case. We encourage all

of those impacted and those who care about our veterans to contact their local representatives to push for change.”

Motley Rice attorney and Army veteran James Ledlie told Military Times that KBR’s defense argued that the only way to control actions by contractors was through military oversight. But, Ledlie said, that would put an enormous burden on the limited number of military staff available to oversee sometimes complicated contractor work in combat zones. The high court decision ends this litigation but, more importantly, it could give contractors an argument on which to lean in future cases regarding negligence or harming troops, he said. However, Ledlie remained optimistic for future cases that might raise this same question. “The decision in this case is limited to the facts of this case, and in this country there has been a long history of access to the courts to address acts of negligence, even those that touch on the military, and I would hope that the courts would remain open to that history,” Ledlie said.

An advocacy group that continues to work in helping veterans and service members and their families who’ve been affected by burn pits challenged President Donald Trump and Congress to do more to help: “It’s been nearly a decade since we began advocating for those service men, women and widows plagued by this generation’s Agent Orange. We are living proof of the damage already done. We demand accountability. As Americans it is our moral obligation to care for the war heroes and contractors affected, many of whom were veterans,” wrote Rosie Torres, spokeswoman for the nonprofit [Burn Pits 360](#). “While veterans endure illnesses such as brain tumors, lung diseases, toxic brain injury and cancer, our government has decided to leave our fate at the hands of Congress. While families bury their loved ones as a result of tax payers dollars poisoning our troops, we are now left to fend for ourselves,” Torres wrote. The advocacy group has the following initiatives as part of its goals:

- Improving the registry so that it can be an effective tool for research, monitoring and identifying the health consequences of these exposures, to include mortality.
- Conducting more and better research into the health consequences of these exposures and to develop effective treatments to improve veterans’ health and lives.
- Establishing evidence-based clinical practice guidelines and a specialized care program for respiratory and co-morbid conditions, including pre- and post-deployment pulmonary function testing.
- Creating a scientific federal advisory committee related to these exposures and health outcomes.
- Improving VA disability compensation claims for afflicted veterans, including establishing presumption of service-connection for debilitating symptoms and diseases that have been linked to these exposures.

KBR and Halliburton attempted to have the case dismissed but failed. The Supreme Court declined to hear the case in 2015, before the most recent ruling was issued last year. Though burn pits were in use as early as during the invasion of Iraq and continued to be used in both Iraq and Afghanistan through most of the duration of the wars, guidance that such pits should be placed far from areas near troops wasn’t published until 2011. The Department of Veterans Affairs estimates that 3.7 million veterans and service members were exposed to the toxic fumes from burn pits in both theaters. And links remain elusive because burn pit sites, and what was burned in them, have not been made readily available or such information has not been recorded accurately.

The Protection for Veterans’ Burn Pit Exposure Act of 2018 remains in subcommittee. It would have the VA presume service connection for veterans with illnesses related to open burn pit exposure. The following list includes some, but not all, of the symptoms, diseases or disorders associated with burn pit exposure:

Asthma, breathing restrictions, cancers, chronic bronchitis, recurring infections, cramps and severe abdominal pain, diarrhea, leukemia, lung cancer, nose bleeds, pulmonary injuries, bronchiolitis, severe heart conditions, severe headache, skin infection, sleep apnea, throat infections, ulcers, unexpected weight loss, vomiting, and weeping lesions on extremities.

[Source: MilitaryTimes | Todd South | January 14, 2019 ++]

Vet Surveys ► IAVA Results on Public Policy & Military Transition Issues

Veterans who fought in recent wars hold conflicting views over the value of that fight, according to the latest membership survey from Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America. About 47 percent said U.S. involvement in the Iraq War was “worth it,” against 43 percent who said it was not. Opinions of the Afghanistan War were slightly higher, with 62 percent in favor and 28 percent opposed. The survey, which drew responses from roughly 4,600 group members on a host of public policy and military transition issues, doesn’t serve as a full public poll of the opinions of the youngest generation of veterans in America today. But it does offer a snapshot of the challenges many younger veterans face and the leanings of some of the more civically engaged members of the group.

More than two-thirds of veterans surveyed said the American public supports veterans. Almost the same number said civilians don’t really understand the sacrifices that military members and veterans have had to make in their personal and professional lives, and nearly one-third said they believe most employers do not see value in hiring veterans. President Donald Trump got higher marks than Congress in trying to help veterans through public policy. In the survey, 46 percent of veterans said he acts in the group’s best interest, compared to only 25 percent for Capitol Hill lawmakers. And 77 percent of those surveyed said that the country as a whole has not made much progress in solving one of the top veterans challenges: suicide. Consistent with past surveys from the group, about 65 percent of IAVA members know a fellow post-9/11 veteran who has attempted suicide and nearly 60 percent know one who has lost their life.

The stigma of getting care also remains a major stumbling block for group members struggling with mental health issues. In the survey, 84 percent of veterans said they do not believe most veterans in the community are receiving the mental health care they need. But 75 percent of IAVA members said they are actively seeking that care, mostly from specialists at Veterans Affairs facilities. On a more positive note, the number of group members who have signed up for the Department of Veterans Affairs burn pit registry has increased steadily over the years, peaking at 47 percent in the latest survey.

Nearly 60 percent of the survey group offered support for the Department of Defense’s decision to open all combat jobs to women (as did 80 percent of the women surveyed), and 44 percent said they support the president’s push to expand private health care options for veterans currently in the VA system. An overwhelming majority of the younger veterans — 83 percent — believe that cannabis should be legal for medicinal purposes. The issue is one of several hot-button topics in Congress to be influenced heavily by veterans policy, as lawmakers are looking to push VA officials to better study the value of the drug.

More than two-thirds of the veterans in the survey own a personal firearm, but 86 percent of the group favors universal background checks for individuals purchasing guns. But than half opposed legislation that would ban assault-style firearms or require safe storage of weapons outside of their homes. The full survey results are available on the IAVA web site <https://cultureondemand.com/iava-2019>. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | January 30, 2019 ++]

Vet Toxic Exposure | Water Update 16 ► Congressional Task Force Created

Hoping to push for clean-up and to hold polluters accountable, members of Congress created a task force on 23 JAN to help constituents nationwide who have contended with drinking water contaminated by chemicals used on military bases. The House members forming the task force have dealt with the problem individually in their districts, from Pennsylvania to Michigan. Rep. Brian Fitzpatrick (R-Bucks) is a co-chair and Rep. Madeleine Dean (D-Montgomery)

is a member; The two represent Bucks and Montgomery County towns where tens of thousands have been affected by tainted drinking water.

The group wants the Environmental Protection Agency to designate per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances, or PFAS, as hazardous substances and regulate how much of the chemicals can be present in drinking water. "We're all going to collectively put the pressure on the EPA to make a decision," said Fitzpatrick, who said he believes the manufacturers of PFAS should bear the burden of the cost of remediation. PFAS were used in firefighting foams used at military bases, airports, and private companies nationwide but are also present in many modern-day products and have been linked to cancer, fertility problems, liver damage, high cholesterol, and other health problems.

In Horsham, Warrington, and Warminster, where levels of the chemicals found in drinking water exceeded the Environmental Protection Agency's health advisory, the military has helped address contamination but more extensive clean-up is still in early stages. Residents have clamored for a faster and more thorough federal response. Blood tests of Horsham, Warrington, and Warminster residents released last year found that residents who drank the tainted water have levels of PFAS in their blood above the national average. Residents in at least 22 other towns in Bucks and Montgomery Counties also have PFAS in their drinking water. The military and other federal agencies get involved only when PFAS exceed 70 parts per trillion, but some states, including New Jersey, have proposed their own levels that are lower. Vermont has the strictest advisory level at 20 parts per trillion.

In New Jersey, the military has tested private wells near Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst and provided bottled water to residents with wells that tested over the EPA advisory level. The military is in the process of testing more than 400 bases nationwide for similar contamination. The process will take years and cost millions of dollars. Members of Congress from Pennsylvania and other states affected by PFAS have been pushing for more funding and studies for years, but by creating a task force Wednesday they hope to form a stronger coalition to pressure the federal agencies involved. "Rather than dealing with these things individually when it comes to (funding and remediation)... we figured it was a good idea to get all the members of Congress who are dealing with similar issues in their communities together in one task force, so we can kind of speak with one voice and get the problem addressed," Fitzpatrick said.

If the EPA designated PFAS as a hazardous substance, it would create a maximum contaminant level (MCL), which would apply nationwide: It is "a way to avoid the patchwork of different standards and have one uniform standard," Fitzpatrick said. EPA regulation would also alleviate problems caused by the current lack of federal regulation, Fitzpatrick said; it would give residents recourse for civil lawsuits, allow criminal charges to be brought against polluters, and help value properties affected by contamination, such as the former navy base in Willow Grove. The congressional task force will also push for more studies on PFAS health effects from the Centers for Disease Control and examine funding and clean-up, from drinking water filters to groundwater remediation. [Source: Task & Purpose | Justine McDaniel & Laura McCrystal | January 24, 2019 ++]

California Veterans Home Update 19 ► Audit Reveals Properties Mismanaged

California has "mismanaged" properties where its state-run veterans homes are located, failing to charge market rents to private users and shortchanging programs that should benefit from the leases, a state audit concluded Tuesday. The head of the California Department of Veterans Affairs agreed with the findings and said changes would be made, while a leading state lawmaker said Tuesday she was pursuing legislation to make sure the properties were handled properly.

The department oversees eight residential facilities in the state that provide rehabilitative and medical care to California military veterans, and the surrounding acres are managed by the state Department of General Services. Property at the veterans homes has been leased for private uses including a theater, museum and a golf course, according to state Auditor Elaine Howle. The two agencies "entered into agreements with third parties that are

inconsistent with the homes' best interests and that violate state law by allowing the third parties to lease property for decades," Howle wrote in a letter to Gov. Gavin Newsom and the Legislature. State law requires the funds from leases to go back to the veterans facilities, but the two agencies "failed to ensure that \$610,000 was appropriately directed to the homes" over three years, Howle told state elected officials.

The audit said officials could not explain how they had established the rental rates for most leases reviewed and that rents for two leases were far below market rates. The same problem existed with employee housing at the Yountville Veterans Home. The facility was in the news last March when a combat veteran shot to death three mental health workers there before killing himself. At Yountville, the audit said, the state undercharged for rents by \$152,000 in 2018. The audit also found state officials allowed cycling events and fun runs on the properties without written agreements to protect the state from liability. In another case, a leasee allowed hot-air balloons to launch daily from a state property in violation of lease terms.

In a letter to Howle released Tuesday, CalVet Secretary Vito Imbasciani said he had already started taking action to fix problems. He said his agency was revisiting existing leases, had taken steps to update rents charged to employees and was reviewing arrangements in which private groups were using property without a lease. "CalVet will no longer permit arrangements that do not further our mission," Imbasciani wrote.

The audit findings concerned Assemblywoman Jacqui Irwin (D-Thousand Oaks), the chair of the Assembly Committee on Veterans Affairs, who requested the review and said she had introduced a bill to reform the agency's property management and finances. "Through inattention and neglect, the residents of California's veterans homes have been shortchanged in a process that has allowed these properties, which are supposed to be exclusively for the benefit of veterans, to be exploited," Irwin said. [Source: Los Angeles Times | Patrick McGreevy | January 29, 2019 ++]

Memorial Desecrations Update 01 ► Freeport Florida

A bronze rifle has been ripped from a veterans memorial park in Freeport and now the Walton County Sheriff's Office is asking for assistance in identifying the culprit. On 21 JAN, a resident called deputies after finding a bronze M16A2 rifle replica in a wooded area on his property. The gun was from the Veterans of War Memorial located at Freeport City Hall. Deputies later visited the park and found that the rifle replica had been forcibly removed from a statue located at the rear of the park. Two separate places on the statue of three service members were damaged. The replica had been welded onto the statue. The statue was donated to the park in November of 2018. There is no specific timeline of when the vandalism may have occurred.



The rifle replica was returned to the Chairman of the Veterans of War Memorial Committee and arrangements are in the process for having the statue repaired. Anyone with information on a possible suspect is asked to contact the Walton County Sheriff's Office at (850) 892-8111 or you can remain anonymous by calling Emerald Coast Crime Stoppers at (850) 863-TIPS. Submit a web tip at <http://www.emeraldcoastcrimestoppers.com> or send a mobile tip using the P3 Tips Mobile Application. [Source: NWFDailyNews.com | January 22, 2019 ++]

MOH Awards Update 10 ► Bills Seek Medal of Honor for 102-Year-Old WWII Hero

More than seven decades after World War II veteran James “Maggie” Megellas single-handedly wiped out a German tank with grenades during the Battle of the Bulge, efforts are being renewed to present him with the Medal of Honor. Legislation introduced early in the new session in both houses of Congress would authorize President Donald Trump to present the nation's highest military honor to Megellas, a 102-year-old Life Member of MOAA and retired Army lieutenant colonel. Already known as the most decorated officer in the history of the 82nd Airborne Division, Megellas has received the Distinguished Service Cross, two Silver Stars, two Bronze Stars, and two Purple Hearts.

The Medal of Honor was recommended for Megellas in 1945, shortly after his actions during the Battle of the Bulge, but documentation from the battle was not considered, leaving the honor in limbo. Nevertheless, Megellas said the most important recognition he received is the respect of his colleagues. “I have all my buddies - and thousands of them - that still recognize what I did,” Megellas told MOAA via telephone from his home in Texas. “In one sense, I’ve received many of the benefits of the medal, which is the approval of my buddies that I fought with.” Megellas said he is honored and flattered to again be considered for the medal. Previous legislative attempts to secure the award, dating back more than a decade, have not been successful.

An Act of Valor

The snow was waist-deep in Belgium on Jan. 28, 1945, when Megellas, a young lieutenant in the Army, was ordered to rush his platoon into the Battle of the Bulge. The platoon advanced toward Herresbach, Belgium, surprising about 200 Germans who were moving out of the town. A German tank took aim at the Americans, according to reports. Megellas ran toward the tank, disabling it with a single grenade, according to reports. He climbed on top of the tank and dropped another grenade inside. Megellas led the platoon as they cleared the town. “Town in our hands; Approximately 100 dead Krauts and about 100 PW's [Prisoners of War]. PW's still coming in. We have no casualties,” according to a 1945 after-action report from Megellas's unit, the 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment.



Chief of Staff Gen. Mark A. Milley, USA, right, hosts Lt. Col. James “Maggie” Megellas, USA (Ret), center, at the Pentagon to mark the World War II veteran’s 100th birthday on March 10, 2017.

As Megellas reflects on his service, he said he feels proud to be part of a mission that had a greater purpose than his own being. He remembers liberating a concentration camp and hearing heavy machine gun fire as he crossed the Waal River in the Netherlands. “We knew we were fighting for a cause greater than ourselves,” Megellas said. “Now all of us in the service fight for a cause, but we volunteer. The paratroopers, you’re volunteering because you believe in a cause. Our mission was, after we had seen the concentration camp, we realized that our mission was to eradicate the Nazi effort.” That’s advice Megellas continues to pass on to military officers: Remember you are part of a bigger mission.

In March, Megellas will celebrate his 103rd birthday. Some aches have come with age, but Megellas continues to speak to people about his experiences. He doesn't have any secrets for his long life; rather, he believes he's been called to accomplish a greater mission - sharing his experiences with troops and other people. He's been to Afghanistan to speak with troops, and recently returned to Fort Bragg to visit members of 82nd Airborne. "I believe the Lord placed you and me on this Earth for a purpose," he said.

Rep. Glenn Grothman, a Republican from Megellas' former home state of Wisconsin, introduced House legislation 3 JAN to upgrade Megellas' Distinguished Service Cross to the Medal of Honor. Sen. Ron Johnson (R-WI) introduced similar legislation 10 JAN in the Senate. Grothman told MOAA that he hopes people will understand and appreciate Megellas' heroic actions. "We live very well in America today and I think it's important for people to realize what other people went through," Grothman said. "I think his behavior was instrumental in the U.S. and allies winning the Battle of the Bulge. Obviously, so much bravery." [Source: The MOAA Newsletter | Amanda Dolasinski | January 18, 2019 ++]

Stolen Valor Update 114 ► Fake News | Tribal Elder Was Not A Vietnam Veteran

The Native American tribal elder who became the focus of a viral social media controversy over the weekend is not a Vietnam veteran, the U.S. Marine Corps confirmed 22 JAN. **Nathan Phillips**, 64, spent four years in the Marine Corps Reserve and left in 1976 with the rank of private, or E-1, the Marines said in a statement providing his personal releasable information. Previously identified as Nathaniel R. Stanard, Phillips was thrust into the national spotlight after images emerged of what appeared to be a standoff at the Lincoln Memorial between him and a group of students from Covington Catholic High School in Kentucky. He never deployed, but served as a refrigerator technician and anti-tank missileman; he was awarded the National Defense Service Medal and was discharged as an E-1 the records show.



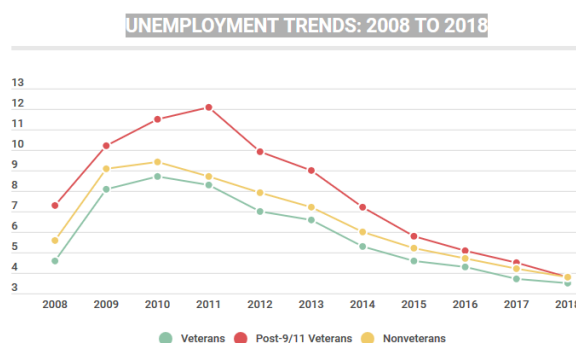
In this Feb. 22, 2017, file photo (left), a large crowd representing a majority of the remaining Dakota Access Pipeline protesters, including Nathan Phillips, center with glasses, march out of the Oceti Sakowin camp before the deadline set for evacuation of the camp near Cannon Ball, N.D. Phillips says he felt compelled to get between a group of black religious activists and largely white students (right) with his ceremonial drum to defuse a potentially dangerous situation at a rally in Washington.

Over the weekend, images of the standoff generated immediate public outcry, with many media outlets, including this one, citing reports that Phillips was a Vietnam veteran. As fuller versions of the video of the standoff between Phillips, the high school students and a group of activists from the Black Hebrew Israelites surfaced, new questions arose about whether Phillips was a Vietnam veteran. Military Times sent a request to the Marine Corps for Phillips service record on 18 JAN. In past media interviews he has been described as a veteran of the Vietnam War and he had previously described himself as a "Recon ranger" who had served during "Vietnam times." [Source: MilitaryTimes | Tara Copp | January 23, 2019 ++]

Vet Unemployment Update 18 ► 2008 thru 2018

Eight years ago, in the wake of the Great Recession, unemployment rates for the latest generation of veterans had spiked to crisis levels. Leaders across federal and state governments, some of America’s most well-known companies and veterans service organizations sprang into action. They formed veteran hiring coalitions, marshaled resources to help post-9/11 veterans, conducted academic research, passed new rules and legislation, and instituted vet recruiting quotas and goals.

Eight years later, unemployment among post-9/11 veterans is the lowest it’s ever been. For the first time ever, the unemployment rate for the latest generation of veterans dropped below 4 percent in 2018, according to data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics. The 3.8-percent annual unemployment rate for 2018 continues a seven-year trend of declines since 2011, when post-9/11 veteran unemployment peaked at 12.1 percent – more than triple the 2018 rate. For veterans of all generations, the unemployment rate was similarly low, dropping to 3.5 percent from 3.7 percent last year.



These figures are below what economists have traditionally considered “full employment,” and some would say it’s worth celebrating — especially since the 3.8-percent rate was on par with nonveterans in 2018. And nationally, the economy is looking up, with the U.S. hitting three consecutive months of a 3.7 percent unemployment rate last year, a low the country hadn’t seen since the 1960s. “Right now, I would say it’s a massively good time to look and find something,” said Robert Lerman, a labor economist at the Urban Institute. The declining veteran unemployment rate, in particular, “calls for a big celebration.” “It’s also something that we want to try to sustain, which is the harder part, but you know for now, jobs are plentiful, and that’s a lot better than jobs not being plentiful,” he said. But what the data doesn’t show, Lerman and others point out, is whether those jobs represent meaningful, gainful employment — and whether they fully utilize veterans’ skill sets. That, advocates say, is where we should focus next.

“The conversations and focuses of employers, as well as those who serve veterans in this space, are shifting from, ‘Let’s make sure you get a job’ to ‘Let’s make sure the job is a good fit,’” said Nick Armstrong, senior director of research and policy at the Institute for Veterans and Military Families at Syracuse University. Armstrong said he looks at the federal unemployment rate as a good “high-level indicator.” But it doesn’t tell the full story. “I’d be hesitant to call victory by any stretch of the imagination,” he said. The unemployment rate captured by the Bureau of Labor Statistics is based on responses to the Current Population Survey. Veterans and others who are considered “employed” by the government include those working part-time, as well as full-time. The data also don’t capture those who have given up on finding work.

It’s really just a small piece of the puzzle, said Eric Eversole, president of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation’s Hiring Our Heroes initiative and a Navy reservist. His organization is currently working on a survey intended to give more insight into veterans’ job outcomes, such as salaries and other measures of success. It will also measure how well companies are retaining their veteran employees. A 2016 Hiring Our Heroes study found that 44 percent of veterans leave their first post-military job within the first year. Part of the explanation there could be

underemployment, or settling for a job below your skill level just to keep a paycheck coming in. Armstrong said underemployment is a common complaint among veterans who transition into the civilian workforce.

Army veteran and military spouse Maureen Elias knows about this all too well. At face value, the low unemployment rate “looks and sounds like America is taking care of her veterans,” she said in an email. But her own experiences finding employment in the civilian workforce haven’t been easy. Before getting out of the military, she said, “I was told over and over, ‘They will be knocking on your door to give you a job. You served your country and employers want to give back to their country by hiring veterans’ and that as a former counterintelligence agent, I would be able to make a good wage, and my skills were highly in demand. That was so not what happened.” For a year, she struggled to find a job and was told her military skills best suited her for work as a secretary. Eventually, she ended up working part-time as a gift wrapper at a department store. “What a change, going from a high speed counterintelligence agent, who spoke fluent Korean, to a gift wrapper,” she said. “And what an underutilization of my skills.”

Elias eventually used her Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits to attend college and now works as an advocate in the mental health field. But she’s still shocked at how little the Army prepared her for finding employment as a civilian, she said. Bridging that gap by boosting military and civilian partnerships could be the key to getting veterans into meaningful jobs, said Eversole, whose organization has helped drive many companies’ efforts to recruit veteran employees over the last several years. “There’s no doubt that we have helped the country, especially the business community, understand the tremendous skillset that service members bring to their business,” he said.

As part of the Defense Department’s SkillBridge Program, Hiring Our Heroes runs the Corporate Fellowship Program, which has placed hundreds of transitioning service members in partner companies to get on-the-job training for 12 weeks before they leave the military. IVMF also runs a technology training program on 18 installations. “I think the real next step is really fine-tuning how we help create economic pathways for young men and women prior to joining the military and making sure they have the skillsets throughout their military service to achieve their long-term economic dreams,” Eversole said.

Ideally, this would mean integrating information about future employment prospects into the recruitment process, he said. “I still think we have a ways to go to help underscore that military service is not only about serving your country — and that’s certainly a noble pursuit — but we also have to think about military service as a long-term pathway to economic stability for you and your family,” Eversole said. Armstrong said it’s good to see veteran unemployment is not the “dire situation” that it once was. But he hopes people won’t stop being concerned about it. You never know when the economy could take a turn for the worse, he said, so it’s important to keep up the support for veterans and the successful employment partnerships that have come out of the last decade. Now, he said, the focus should be more on keeping the unemployment rate low “and what can we do to ... advance the long-term employment situation,” he said.

[Source: MilitaryTimes | Natalie Gross | January 11, 2019 ++]

CBO Budget Recommendation Update 02 ► More 2019 TRICARE & VA Proposals

With the federal deficit expected to top \$984 billion this year, the Congressional Budget Office in December published a list of options for reducing the imbalance over the next 10 years, including three suggestions on Tricare and six that address veterans benefits. In its Options for Reducing the Deficit: 2019 to 2028, the CBO laid out 121 opportunities for curtailing spending and raising revenue. These include raising Tricare enrollment fees for military retirees, instituting enrollment fees for Tricare for Life and reducing veterans benefits.

The publication marks the fourth time in five years that the CBO has suggested raising Tricare enrollment fees for working-age retirees and introducing minimum out-of-pocket expenses for those using Tricare for Life. The CBO suggested that increasing Tricare enrollment fees for working-age retirees -- those under age 65 -- could help slash

the deficit by \$12.6 billion. To obtain this, it said, the Defense Department should more than double annual enrollment fees for individuals and families enrolled in Tricare Prime and institute annual fees of \$485 for an individual and \$970 for a family for Tricare Select. Most working-age retirees currently pay no enrollment fees for Tricare Select.

The CBO also suggested instituting enrollment fees for Tricare for Life, the program that serves as supplemental coverage for military retirees on Medicare. Analysts estimated that the Defense Department could save \$12 billion between 2021 and 2028 if it adopted annual enrollment fees of \$485 for an individual or \$970 for a family for Tricare for Life, in addition to the Medicare premiums most military retirees 65 and older pay. According to CBO analysts, these options would reduce the financial burden of Tricare for Life to the DoD in two ways: It would cut the government's share by the amount of fees collected and indirectly would save money by causing some patients to forgo Tricare for Life altogether, either by buying a private Medicare supplement or simply going without one. Another option would be to introduce minimum out-of-pocket requirements for those using Tricare for Life. In this proposal, TFL would not cover any of the \$750 of cost-sharing payments under Medicare and would cover just 50 percent of the next nearly \$7,000.

Retired Navy Capt. Kathryn Beasley, director of government relations for health issues at the Military Officers Association of America, said her organization is concerned that the CBO continues to include health care rate hikes for military retirees in its list of options, which it publishes every few years or so. The CBO also ignored the fact that rate increases went into effect last year, she added. "CBO does this every year. Our biggest concern is that some of these options would make their way into the president's budget," Beasley said. "With all the changes to the military health care system in the past year, we think we simply need to stabilize Tricare. It's been a lot to absorb."

According to the CBO, the Department of Veterans Affairs also presents several opportunities for cost-savings measures. Some suggestions in the CBO assessment include:

- Narrowing eligibility for disability compensation for seven diseases the Government Accountability Office has said are not caused or aggravated by military service, including arteriosclerotic heart disease, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, Crohn's disease, hemorrhoids, multiple sclerosis, osteoarthritis, and uterine fibroids. This option would save \$33 billion over 10 years.
- Ending the VA's individual unemployability payments to disabled veterans when they turn 67, the retirement age for receiving full Social Security benefits, which would save an estimated \$48 billion.
- Reducing disability benefits to veterans older than 67 who are receiving Social Security payments. This could save the government \$11 billion.
- Eliminating disability compensation for 1.3 million veterans with disability rates below 30 percent, saving \$38 billion over an eight-year period.

The VA option with some of the largest savings potential, according to CBO, would be to end enrollment for the two million veterans in Priority Groups 7 and 8 -- those who do not have service-connected disabilities and have income above the VA national threshold and below a geographically adjusted threshold (Group 7) or above both thresholds (Group 8). This could save the government up to \$57 billion, CBO analysts said.

Finally, the CBO said the federal government could raise revenue by including VA disability payments as taxable income. According to the CBO, if all disability payments were to be taxed, federal revenues during the time frame would increase by \$93 billion. If just veterans rated 20 percent or less paid taxes on their disability compensation, federal revenues would increase by \$4 billion, it said. CBO analysts say their options only "reflect a range of possibilities" and are not recommendations or a ranking of priorities. "The inclusion or exclusion of any particular option does not imply that CBO endorses it or opposes it," they wrote.

[Source: Military.com | Patricia Kime | January 14, 2019 ++]

Government Shutdown Vet Impact Update 01 ► No Checks for 150K Vet Employees

Several prominent veterans' groups held a rare, joint news conference 15 JAN calling for an end to the government shutdown, saying tens of thousands of veterans in the federal workforce are facing increasingly difficult financial hardships as they continue to go without pay. The agencies affected by the shutdown employ at least 150,000 veterans, according to the White House Office of Management and Budget. "We ask the president and the Congress to get together, get your act together and get this situation resolved," said Regis "Rege" Riley, national commander of American Veterans, or AMVETS.



Members of major veterans organizations hold a press conference to push for the end to the government shutdown.

The national commander of Veterans of Foreign Wars, Vincent "B.J." Lawrence, highlighted the story of one veteran who came to his organization for help – a single mother of three, furloughed on unpaid leave, who now can't afford to pay for child care or rent. "She had approached a landlord and asked for some consideration during the partial government shutdown on her rent being due, and she was denied that consideration," Lawrence said. "So she was reaching out to family members, to move in with a family member, to help take care of her family."

Randy Reese, executive director of Disabled American Veterans, said it is "well past time" to end the standoff so veteran employees can collect their missing pay. "Who would have thought that we'd be in the state that we are, with those who served their nation, served honorably, got discharged after doing their duty, went to work, waving the flag, working for the United States of America and find themselves in a state where the government of the United States shuts down," he said.

They are part of the group known as the Big Six – The American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars, Vietnam Veterans of America, Paralyzed Veterans of America, American Veterans and Disabled American Veterans – which represent nearly 5 million members and wield considerable clout in Washington. Veterans also have been a key constituency for President Donald Trump. They voted for him by a margin of nearly 2 to 1 in 2016, according to exit polls. In an Associated Press poll last month, more than half of veterans surveyed – 56 percent – said they approve of the job he is doing and 62 percent approved of his handling of border security. The Big Six groups were joined by other veteran organizations, including Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, which have already condemned the impasse since the shutdown started 22 DEC.

The shutdown became the longest in history 12 JAN when it entered its 22nd day, breaking the previous 21-day record set in the 1990s during the Clinton administration. On 11 JAN, some 800,000 federal workers missed their first paycheck since it began. The employees have been out on unpaid leave or forced to keep working without pay. The Department of Veterans Affairs, which provides medical care and benefits to millions of veterans, is not one of the agencies affected by the partial shutdown. But that's not the case for the U.S. Coast Guard, which is part of the Department of Homeland Security.

The American Legion, which was not part of Tuesday's news conference, is doling out grants of up to \$1,500 each to help Coast Guard employees facing financial hardship during the shutdown. The Legion's national commander,

Brett Reistad, earlier this month called on the administration and Congress to make an exception for the guard so its workers can collect pay during the shutdown. "As a nonprofit, The American Legion is not capable of funding the entire Coast Guard payroll," Reistad said. But so far that hasn't happened. The commandant of the guard, Adm. Karl Schultz, noted in a statement that active-duty guard members would not be receiving paychecks as scheduled 15 JAN, even as they are deployed around the world, including in the Middle East, Antarctica and off the coasts of Central and South America.

"I recognize the anxiety and uncertainty this situation places on you and your family," Schultz wrote. He said Homeland Security Secretary Kirstjen Nielsen "remains fully engaged" and he would provide updates as the shutdown drags on. "The strength of our Service has, and always will be, our people," he wrote. "You have proven time and again the ability to rise above adversity. Stay the course, stand the watch, and serve with pride. You are not, and will not, be forgotten." Here's the breakdown of veterans employed at DHS and other departments and agencies affected by the shutdown, according to 2016 data from the Office of Management and Budget:

- Department of Homeland Security: 53,126
- Department of Justice: 29,246
- Department of Transportation: 20,249
- Department of Agriculture: 12,480
- Department of the Interior: 12,127
- Department of the Treasury: 10,203
- Department of Commerce: 5,636
- Department of State: 2,743
- NASA: 2,078
- Environmental Protection Agency: 1,364
- Department of Housing and Urban Development: 1,272
- Small Business Administration: 720

[Source: USA Today | Donovan Slack | January 15, 2019 ++]

Vet Fraud & Abuse ► Reported 16 thru 31 JAN 2019

Marines & Mickey -- A former Marine veteran is alleged to have bilked people into donating money to a charity that was supposed to send Marines and their families to Disney resorts and help cover the costs for families attending Marine boot camp graduations. A federal indictment filed in the U.S. District Court of South Carolina says **John Simpson**, the founder of Marines & Mickey, pocketed most of the money for personal use. According to feds, Simpson raised about \$481,000 from May 2014 through June 2016, but only about \$90,000 was used for the intended charitable purposes. Court documents allege Simpson pocketed the nearly \$391,000 for his own "personal use and enrichment."

Simpson allegedly lied about his military record to solicit donations for his charity. According to the indictment, Simpson falsely claimed he was a retired Marine master sergeant and prior drill instructor and recon Marine. But the feds said Simpson served less than five years as a disbursing clerk, received a bad conduct discharge in 1998 and was reduced in rank to private following a special court-martial for being absent without leave. Court documents said Simpson never obtained a rank higher than lance corporal. The Independent Mail reported Simpson was sentenced to nine years in prison in May 2018 for sexually assaulting his former girlfriend.

The primary victim of the scam, according to a federal indictment, was the mother of one of the Marines killed in the 2015 shooting at the military recruiting center in Chattanooga, Tennessee. The Charlotte Observer identified the mother as Cathy Wells, whose son, Lance Cpl. Skip Wells, was killed in the 2015 attack. The indictment says the mother gave nearly \$135,000 dollars to the charity through money from her son's death benefits and donations in her

son's honor. A second victim, according to feds, was the Community Foundation of Greater Chattanooga, which donated \$25,000. Simpson was also alleged to have scammed at least seven active-duty Marines who recently graduated from boot camp by making unauthorized bank withdrawals from their accounts.

According to the indictment, Simpson contacted the recently graduated Marines during family day events held aboard the Parris Island, South Carolina, recruit depot and eventually convinced them to donate \$25 on a monthly recurring basis. "Instead of making the agreed upon withdrawals, Simpson made unauthorized withdrawals from their accounts in a combined total amount of more than \$5,000," the indictment reads.

[Source: Star Tribune | Paul Walsh | December 29, 2018 ++]

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Cash Advanced Loan -- A man accused of issuing cash-advance loans with excessively high-interest rates to veterans while disguising the transactions as interest-free sales was ordered to pay a settlement after it was determined he "caused substantial injury" by swindling veterans out of their disability and retirement pay. Serving as a financial agent for several lending companies from 2011 to 2018, **Mark Corbett** would reportedly offer to send lump sum payments to veterans — some payments were in the tens of thousands of dollars — in exchange for receiving all or part of the veteran's monthly pension or disability payments for a period of five to 10 years, according to a 23 JAN consent order.

And what did the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau deem to be a necessary settlement for these fraudulent transactions? One dollar, which he was comically ordered to pay within 10 days via wire transfer or else suffer the accrual of interest on said dollar. The minuscule sum "accounts for Corbett's inability to pay more based on sworn financial statements that he provided to the Bureau and Corbett's ongoing cooperation with the Bureau's investigation," the order said. Bilk veterans out of disability and retirement pay for seven years? Your settlement, sir, is a McChicken sandwich.

The bureau concluded in its investigation that Corbett never accurately conveyed the exorbitant interest costs the veterans would incur after signing the contract. Instead, he would reportedly frame the exchange as a sale. "Please keep in mind that this is not a loan," the new seller information packet Corbett would send veterans read. "You are selling a product for a set price." Additionally, Corbett ignored a federal law that prevents pension payments from being reassigned to another party, one that would have voided contracts Corbett put in place requiring veterans to go into their VA or DFAS online portal and rewire their direct deposits into accounts controlled by the companies he worked for. Multiple veterans reportedly complained to Corbett that such transactions were illegal, but he would repeatedly reassure them no law was being broken, the report said. The names of Corbett's employers were withheld from the report.

Veterans were also required, as part of the contract, to purchase life insurance policies to ensure any outstanding amount would still be paid should that veteran die before full financial obligations were fulfilled. As part of the ruling, Corbett has unsurprisingly been banned from "brokering, offering, or arranging agreements between veterans and third parties under which the veteran purports to sell a future right to an income stream from the veteran's pension," the order said. An entirely separate 2017 federal lawsuit filed by three veterans, meanwhile, names Corbett as one who swindled them out of millions of dollars of retirement and disability pay, Stars and Stripes reported. It remains unclear what effect this ruling will have on that case.

The bureau partnered with the Office of Arkansas Attorney General and the South Carolina Department of Consumer Affairs for its investigation.

[Source: MilitaryTimes | J.D. Simkins | January 30, 2019 ++]

WWII Vets 182 ► Louis E. Curdes | American Flying Ace

During WWII, an American fighter pilot saw combat over all three Axis territories. By war's end, he had destroyed Italian, German, and Japanese planes. That man was Louis Edward Curdes, who was born on November 2, 1919, in Fort Wayne, Indiana. Though an engineering student at Purdue University, he joined the Army Reserves on March 12, 1942. In his third year, he dropped out of college to take up flight school at Luke Field, Arizona, which he graduated on December 3rd. He was commissioned as a 2nd Lieutenant and sent to Europe in March 1943.

In late April 1943, 2nd Lt. Louis E. Curdes flew his first mission in a Lockheed P-38G Lightning for the 95th Fighter Squadron, 82nd Fighter Group. Over Cap Bon, Tunisia, his flight ran into a group of Messerschmitt Me-109s. Curdes got behind one. "I could see my tracers curving right into his nose," he said. "I broke off at 100 yards and passed in front of the '109, which nosed over and went straight in. There was a big splash and an oval of white foam."

Separated from his flight, Curdes spotted three Messerschmitts chasing a Lightning just above the water. He attacked the right-hand plane. "My tracers went into him, puffs of black and white smoke came out and he did a wingover straight in," he reported. The remaining Germans were still pursuing the struggling P-38. "I made a 30-degree deflection shot at the leader, closing to 20 degrees and making about 350 mph. The '109 burst into flames, exploded and flopped into the water." With three kills on his first mission, Curdes named his P-38 Good Devil, adorning its nose with an image of Lucifer wearing a halo.

On 19 MAY, after the 82nd escorted B-25 Mitchell bombers to Sardinia, eight Me-109s engaged the Americans over the Mediterranean. "My leader chased one ME 109 off the tail of the first element and another came in at about a 30-degree angle," Curdes recalled. "I shot him down. We were attacked again and everyone seemed mixed up. These MEs were fast and persistent and three dived at us from the rear." Curdes turned into their attack. "I fired at the first ME and missed, but he took off. The second one I shot into the sea." After just two missions and a little over a month of combat, he had five swastikas painted on his P-38.

Curdes opened his account against a second Axis power on June 24th, shooting down an Italian Macchi C.202 over Sardinia. In August he was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross, but later that month his luck ran out. On August 27th, the 95th tangled with 50 enemy fighters over Naples. Curdes claimed two before his Lightning was hit. He crash-landed in enemy territory and was captured. That should have been the end of his fighter pilot career. Days later, however, Italy withdrew from the war and the Italian prison guards simply went home, leaving the prisoners to fend for themselves. Curdes made his way south, and on May 27, 1944-nine months to the day after being shot down-he met up with the advancing British Eighth Army.

Regulations forbade a former POW to risk fighting on the same front, lest he be recaptured and tortured to reveal the details of his escape and evasion. But the war wasn't over, and Curdes had plenty of fight left. He transferred to the Pacific. On January 6, 1945, U.S. forces landed at Lingayen, in the Philippines. Flying with the 4th Fighter Squadron, 3rd Air Commando Group, Curdes named his P-51D "Bad Angel." On February 7, 30 miles southwest of Formosa, the lieutenant completed his hat trick, downing a Mitsubishi Ki-46 twin-engine reconnaissance plane.

Just three days later Curdes made history during an attack on a Japanese airstrip on Batan Island, in the Formosa Strait. His flight of four Mustangs shot down two enemy fighters and got three others on the ground. After his section leader was hit by flak and bailed out over the water, Curdes messaged home to bring more fighters and ordered his wingman up to 15,000 feet to radio for a flying boat rescue. Then he headed back down to strafe the airfield, to keep any remaining enemy fighters on the ground. When Curdes came up again, he spotted a twin-engine transport approaching the field at low level from the east. Noting the American stars on what appeared to be a Douglas C-47 Skytrain, he at first thought, "Those damned Japs have patched up one of our buggies and didn't even have the grace to take the markings off."

"The P-51 pilot had to decide whether it was one of our own planes that was lost or a Jap-built DC-3 (Showa/Nakajima L2D), with American insignia," explained General George C. Kenney, commander of Allied air forces in the Southwest Pacific Area. "He flew up alongside and satisfied himself that the pilot was not a Jap." Curdes also recognized on the Skytrain the markings of the "Jungle Skippers," the 39th Military Airlift Squadron of the 317th Troop Carrier Group. The transport had taken off from Leyte for Manila with eight passengers, including two nurses. Rough weather had carried it far off course, and after almost five hours in the air, the C-47 was low on fuel and couldn't raise any help via radio. According to the after-action report: "We received no bearings or response of any kind. The airplane continued until 1150 hour and was still over water. The pilot then informed his passengers that he was in trouble and would set the airplane down on the first land he saw." Unfortunately, the crew didn't realize the island they headed for was enemy-held Bataan.

"I tried to contact the pilot by radio," Curdes noted. "This failed." "He then dived in front of the transport to keep it from landing on the Jap-held strip," related Kenney. "The pilot of the transport circled again and again started to glide in for a landing. The P-51 pilot then decided on a desperate measure." "The gear was put down," the report continued, "and at 150 ft altitude, with the airplane at half flaps and about to be put down, six strings of tracers came up in front of us."

"I shot across the nose of the ship," Curdes said, "but still he came on." In what he later referred to as a "last resort," he then closed to 20 yards, took careful aim and used his machine guns to take out the Skytrain's right engine. Still, the transport held course. The passengers and crew inside must have been horrified to see the Mustang then sideslip over to port and shoot up their left engine. That did it. "We ditched 300 yards from shore," they reported. "Four rafts were put out. One was perforated by bullets and sank. The 12 of us got into the three rafts. The P-51 circled us for an hour but did not fire again." Curdes dropped them a message: "For God's sake, keep away from shore. Japs there." By then, however, everybody had figured that out. "We were out about a mile when machine guns and rifles opened up on us from the shore," the crew noted. "We were out of range, but the shooting continued for 30 minutes."

Curdes and his wingman flew back to base but returned to Bataan before dawn to find the life rafts, including that of their section leader, still bobbing in the waves west of the island. The P-51s flew cover until a PBY-5A Catalina arrived and picked up everybody. "They were all quite put out at the action of the P-51 pilot until the situation was explained to them," remembered Kenney, "but from then on the kid was the greatest hero of the war as far as they were concerned." Back at base, Curdes was shocked to discover on the C-47 passenger manifest the name of a nurse he had dated the night before. "Jeepers," was his comment-or at least that's what the reporter who wrote up Curdes' story for the August 1945 issue of Air Force magazine recalled-"seven 109's and one Macchi in North Africa, one Jap, and one Yank in the Pacific-and to top it, I have to go out and shoot down the girlfriend."

"The P-51 lad already had painted on the nose of his airplane seven Nazi swastikas and one Italian insignia-as well as a Jap flag for a victory in the Pacific," Kenney recalled. "He added an American flag in memory of his latest exploit." But since the C-47 was not counted as an official victory, Louis Curdes' final score stands at nine. In recognition of his quick thinking and sharp shooting, he received an Oak Leaf Cluster to his Distinguished Flying Cross. General Kenny said, "I awarded him an Air Medal for the job and told him I hoped he wouldn't feel called on to repeat that performance."

After World War II, he joined an Air National Guard unit at Baer Field and remained there until 1948. In Allen County, Indiana, April 2, 1946, he married Svetlana Valeria, one of the passengers of the C-47 he shot down in the Philippines. Curdes returned to active duty, this time again with the United States Air Force. He participated in the Berlin airlift during the opening stages of the Cold War. He was promoted to Major on September 1, 1951, and retired from the Air Force as a Lieutenant Colonel in October 1963. After his retirement from the Air Force, he started a construction company under the name of Curdes Builders Company. Louis Curdes died on February 5, 1995, at the age of 75, and was buried at Lindenwood Cemetery in Fort Wayne. His widow Valeria died on October 10, 2013, at the age of 87. [Source: TWS Newsletter | January 2019 ++]

Vet Unclaimed Remains ► 3 in Memphis TN + 21 More in FL | Jan/Feb 2019

When the flags were removed from the caskets and folded with military precision, there were no family members there to receive them. So, the banners were passed, hand-to-hand, through the crowd. Some mourners wept as they clutched the flags briefly. Others kissed them. But the three veterans laid to rest on a rainy Memphis morning were strangers to most of those who gathered to honor their memory.

The service was part of a national effort by funeral homes, medical examiners, state and federal veterans' affairs departments, and local veterans' groups to pay final respects to members of the military whose bodies were not claimed by any relatives. Since 2000, Dignity Memorial and other funeral homes in more than 30 cities have organized about 3,000 funerals for soldiers, sailors and Marines who died alone, but still deserved a dignified funeral and burial, said Jeff Berry, Dignity's general manager in Knoxville.



A flag draped coffin (left), one of three Memphis veterans, Wesley Russell, 76, Arnold Klechka, 71, Charles Fox, 60, who died this past fall and whose remains were unclaimed, in Memphis, Tenn.is moved during the funeral. A retired U.S. Marine master gunnery sergeant (center) salutes during the ceremony, and (right) two elderly veterans were among the last to arrive at the service.

Soldiers Arnold M. Klechka, 71, and Wesley Russell, 76, and Marine Charles B. Fox, 60, were laid to rest in a service attended by about 700 people at West Tennessee Veterans Cemetery in Memphis on 17 JAN. There was a gun salute, and a bagpiper played "Amazing Grace." But none of them had family members present. Amelia Callicott did show up. She wept during the service, thinking of her late father and husband, who both served in the military. Callicott said she learned about the service through friends and Facebook. She felt a duty to honor the men. "It touched my heart when no one came to claim these gentlemen, these soldiers, because they fought for our freedom," said Callicott, 69. "Any serviceman, they're just like family to me, and I just can't see laying them to rest without going and seeing their final moments, to say goodbye."

Organizing the funerals, which are fairly commonplace in Tennessee, requires a lot of teamwork. Berry said the process usually begins with county medical examiners or local coroners, who contact state or national veterans' cemeteries with names of people whose bodies have gone unclaimed. They typically were either homeless or had no surviving relatives to claim them. And some have had surviving family members who did not want to claim them. The cemeteries determine whether the service members were honorably discharged. If they were, medical examiners or the cemeteries then contact Dignity, which is owned by Service Corporation International, or one of its partner funeral homes. A funeral director then sets up the memorial service, and the funeral home covers the cost, Berry said.

Cemetery directors can file claims with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs for grave markers or placards for columbariums, according to the Tennessee Department of Veterans' Services. The VA also gives money to individuals or entities that provide burials, caskets and transportation to cemeteries for unclaimed deceased vets. Memorial services are publicized through news outlets, veterans' groups like the American Legion, or social media. Honor Guard and other active military members attend, but it's the strangers who come out of respect for the military and the dead who bring dignity to the occasion.

"Most of the time, it's folks that had no knowledge of the person in life," Berry said. "One thing I've learned in working with the veterans is that they are a tight knit group. They really support each other. It's like a band of brothers or sisters." During the Memphis ceremony, funeral director Gary Taylor thanked those who showed up. Then, he spoke directly to the caskets. "Today, we salute you," Taylor said. "Today we all claim you as our own." [Source: The Associated Press | Adrian Sainz & Karen Pulfer Focht | January 18, 2020 ++]

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For decades, the unclaimed ashes of American military veterans have gathered dust on shelves inside funeral homes across East Central Florida, all but forgotten. These cremated remains are finally coming to light. On 2 FEB the urns of 19 veterans — including one who sat unclaimed since 1973 — and six spouses of veterans will be laid to rest with full military honors at Cape Canaveral National Cemetery. "It is to give every single veteran an honored, ceremonial burial in a place of rest after having committed service to the country. A funeral home shelf — decade after decade — is not that place," said Donn Weaver, chairman of the Brevard Veterans Council. "These are abandoned cremains for many, many reasons — but the reasons don't matter. What matters is, the veterans are given their entitled place of rest," Weaver said. Volunteers will ceremoniously load the 25 cremains, folded U.S. flags and flowers onto a horse-drawn caisson, which will transport them via procession to the national cemetery's columbarium.

Cape Canaveral National Cemetery hosted its first such "cremains" ceremony in June, when 21 veterans and one military spouse were laid to rest. They had been left unclaimed at Cox-Gifford Seawinds Funeral Home and Crematory in Vero Beach. Twenty-three more veterans and spouses were interred during a second, similar ceremony in November. That group included a World War I veteran whose ashes had languished on a funeral home shelf since his 1964 death, Weaver said. Saturday's ceremony will lay to rest members of the U.S. Army, Navy, Air Force and Coast Guard who served during World War I, World War II, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, the Persian Gulf conflicts and peacetime.

The ceremony will be conducted in cooperation with Seawinds Funeral Home and Crematory in Sebastian, Davis Seawinds Funeral Home and Crematory in Melbourne, and Baldwin Brothers Funeral and Cremation Society, which has locations across Central Florida.

The identities of the 25 people will not be publicly released until after the ceremony, Weaver said. The Missing in America Project (MIAP) is spearheading the event. The national nonprofit launched in 2007, one year after the Idaho State Veterans Cemetery in Boise interred 21 cremains of forgotten veterans. Since then, MIAP volunteers have visited 2,312 funeral homes, identified the cremains of 4,128 veterans, and interred 3,766 of them. Across Florida, as of mid-December, MIAP officials had visited 163 funeral homes and interred 250 veterans, 98 spouses and one dependent. "We have begun working this part of Central Florida for only less than a year. We have a team of seven volunteers, three of whom are going out to Brevard funeral homes as we speak," Weaver said.

[Source: The Associated Press & Florida Today | Adrian Sainz/Karen Pulfer Focht & Rick Neale| January 18 & 29, 2020 ++]

Obit: Joe M. Jackson ► 13 JAN 2018 | Battle of Kham Duc MOH Awardee

Retired Air Force Col. Joe M. Jackson, a Medal of Honor recipient, veteran of three wars and Air Force legend, has died. The 95-year-old Jackson passed on 13 JAN, according to Air Force Secretary Heather Wilson and Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. Dave Goldfein, who made the announcement 14 JAN. His death leaves James P. Fleming as the only other living Air Force Medal of Honor recipient, according to Military Times Hall of Valor Curator Doug Sterner.



Jackson, a native of Newnan, Ga. and avid model aircraft enthusiast in his youth, enlisted in the Army Air Corps in 1941 to be an aircraft mechanic. He quickly learned he could be of more service in the air as a pilot. He was selected for Aviation Cadet training, before pinning on his wings in 1943 to fly the P-40 Warhawk and the P-63 Kingcobra. Near the end of World War II, he became a gunnery instructor at Eglin Field, Florida.

In Jan. 1951, during their first days in Korea, Joe and his squadron of four F-84 fighter jets were tasked with bombing an enemy train. While preparing to engage the target, Joe and his squadron encountered a group of 16 enemy MIG-15 jet fighters. Despite the superiority of the MIG-15 squadron, Joe and his fellow airmen successfully evaded the enemy attack without taking casualties. Over the course of the Korean War, Joe flew 107 missions in his F-84, escorting bombers, providing close air support and engaging in air to air combat receiving the Distinguished Flying Cross and the Air Medal with three Oak Leaf Clusters for his service. Joe continued to serve after the Korean War, and in 1956 became a supervisor in the top-secret U-2 global reconnaissance program. Then, in 1968, the 45-year-old Jackson headed to Vietnam as a C-123 Provider pilot with the 311th Air Commando Squadron.

In May 1968, Jackson, then a lieutenant colonel, was called in to rescue a three-man combat control team trapped under heavy enemy fire at a Special Forces camp in Kham Duc in South Vietnam. He was famous within the aviation and special operations community for his daring rescue of the team of Air Force combat controllers who were stranded at the besieged airfield of an abandoned Army Special Forces camp during the Vietnam Tet Offensive. His exploits saved their lives, but risked his own, as the airfield had been the site of multiple U.S. aircraft shootdowns and aircrew fatalities over the previous 24 hours. By the end of the Vietnam War, Joe had flown 298 missions. After serving in Vietnam, Joe served as a faculty member at the Air War College in Montgomery, Alabama, before retiring from the United States Air Force in 1974 at the rank of colonel. Although Jackson has passed, his exploits and the significance of the battle he took part in were recorded in the Southeast Asia Monographs, Volume V-7, at the Airpower Research Institute of Maxwell Air Force Base, as well as first-person accounts archived by the Library of Congress. [Source: Task & Purpose | Oriana Pawlyk | January 14, 2019 ++]

Obit: Richard Sherman ► 09 JAN 2019 | WWII Flying Tiger

A World War II bombardier who flew 52 missions defending China has died at the age of 96. Maj. Richard Sherman died 9 JAN at a nursing home in Monroe, Louisiana, said Marquita Mihaliak, administrator at the Northeast Louisiana War Veterans Home. Sherman was in the 11th Bomb Squadron of the Army's 14th Air Force, commanded by Maj. Gen. Claire Chennault. The group was nicknamed the Flying Tigers after the famed volunteer fighter group that Chennault created to defend nationalist China before the U.S. entered the war. Chennault's granddaughter, Nell Calloway, says Sherman also was a founder of the Chennault Aviation and Military Museum in Monroe. Calloway says only one volunteer Flying Tiger is still alive.



This undated photo provided by the Chennault Aviation and Military Museum in Monroe, La., shows an exhibit of artifacts from Maj. Richard Sherman, who flew 52 missions over China during World War II. Sherman was in the 11th Bomb Squadron of the Army's 14th Air Force under Gen. Claire Chennault, who nicknamed the 14th the Flying Tigers after the volunteer fighter group he had created while acting as a civilian advisor to nationalist China to defend that nation before the U.S. entered World War II.

Obit: Charles Kettles ► 21 JAN 2019 | Nam MOH Army Helo Pilot

Lt. Col. Charles Kettles, USA (Ret), who received the Medal of Honor after returning his helicopter four times to a Vietnam battlefield under intense enemy fire to evacuate more than 40 American troops, died on Monday. He was 89. He is survived by his wife Ann and their children. Kettles was born in Ypsilanti Jan. 9, 1930, the son of a World War I Royal Air Force (Canadian) and World War II Air Transport Command (U.S. Army Air Corps) pilot. While attending the Edison Institute High School in Dearborn, he honed his love of flying on the Ford Motor Company Flight Department simulator. Following high school graduation, he enrolled in Michigan State Normal College (now Eastern Michigan University), where he studied engineering. Two years later, he was drafted to the Army at age 21. Kettles served active duty tours in Korea, Japan and Thailand before returning in 1956 and establishing a Ford Dealership in Dewitt, with his brother.

In Vietnam Kettles was an Iroquois helicopter pilot for the 176th Assault Helicopter Company when he learned an airborne infantry unit had suffered casualties during a firefight with the enemy. Kettles, a major at the time, volunteered to lead a flight of six helicopters to carry reinforcements to the embattled force near Duc Pho, Vietnam, and evacuate wounded troops.

Matt McGuire, who served in Vietnam with Kettles, said he was proud to serve with such a professional officer. “None of us expected to survive that day and Chuck Kettles performed as a beacon in the sky putting his life on the line to save all the trapped soldiers,” McGuire said in a Facebook post. “His award of the Medal of Honor for actions on that day did not adequately signify his bravery and commitment to saving lives with multiple examples of performance above and beyond the call of duty. He was an inspiration and mentor and the most professional combat pilot I have known.” In July 2016, then-President Barack Obama presented Kettles with the Medal of Honor during a ceremony at the White House. Forty-four men came home because Chuck Kettles believed that we leave no man behind,” Obama said during the ceremony. “That’s America at our best.”



Flying Into Danger

The helicopters came under intense fire near Duc Pho as the enemy sprayed small arms, automatic weapons, and mortar fire on the landing zone, according to Kettles' Medal of Honor citation. Kettles was undeterred. He refused to leave until all six helicopters were loaded to capacity. Kettles returned to the battlefield to bring more reinforcements, despite knowing the enemy was waiting. Blasts seriously wounded his gunner and severely damaged his aircraft. Even as he flew back to base, Kettles received a report from another helicopter crew that fuel had been streaming out of his damaged aircraft.

Later that day, the infantry battalion commander requested immediate, emergency extraction of the remaining 40 troops, including four members of Kettles' unit who had been stranded when their helicopter was destroyed by enemy fire. Kettles volunteered to return to the battlefield a third time, leading a flight of six evacuation helicopters. Wounded troops were loaded onto the helicopters. Once airborne, Kettles learned eight troops had been unable to reach the helicopters because of intense enemy fire. Kettles passed the lead to another helicopter and, again, returned to the landing zone to rescue the remaining troops. The enemy targeted all its firepower on the lone aircraft. Kettles' helicopter was damaged by a mortar round that shattered both front windshields and the chin bubble, yet he maintained control and was able to secure the eight troops on board.

Kettles guided his damaged aircraft back to base. "Without his courageous actions and superior flying skills, the last group of soldiers and his crew would never have made it off the battlefield," according to the citation. "Major Kettles' selfless acts of repeated valor and determination are in keeping with the highest traditions of military service and reflect great credit upon himself and the United States Army." There are 72 recipients alive today. [Source: The MOAA Newsletter | Armanda Dolasinski | January 23, 2019 ++]

Vietnam Vets [32] 01 ► R. Lee Ermey | POG Staff Sgt. & Actor Burial

Marines everywhere were saddened at the death of former Marine and committed POG Staff Sgt. R. Lee Ermey, who passed away last April. Ermey, a former supply clerk from Marine Wing Support Group 17 and winner of the coveted Meritorious Unit Award, served in the Marine Corps from 1961 to 1972 before starting a second career playing actual infantry Marines. He had a long and distinguished career, from the Buy Me Drinky bars on Okinawa to the brothels of Manila, to his tour in Vietnam where he served in an elite REMF Wing Wiper unit guarding the chow hall at Da Nang Air Base.

Although he was medically retired from the Marine Corps as a staff sergeant due to injuries sustained... somewhere... we don't know... not in combat, that's for sure, Ermey insisted on being called "The Gunny" after learning that "The Colonel" had already been trademarked by Kentucky Fried Chicken. Lance Cpl. Pete Ortiz, a junior enlisted mortar man serving in Afghanistan who already has more combat decorations than Staff Sgt. Ermey, said he would always be grateful for having men like Ermey convince generations of POGs and Boots that talking like a POG or Boot was salty. "Growing up, watching R. Lee Ermey in a fictional movie about Marines, that's what the Marine Corps has always meant to me. I know that no matter what I do I'll never live up to the standards he set, or would have set if he'd ever left the wire."

After moving on from the Marine Corps, Staff Sgt. Ermey developed a talent for acting, and later achieved fame in the 1987 film *Full Metal Jacket*. In the film he plays fictional drill instructor Gunnery Sgt. Hartman, whose terrorized Marine recruits eventually rebel against his POG ways by spending the entire second half of the film attached to grunt units in Vietnam and actually killing people. He appeared in more than 60 feature films, most notably as Gunnery Sgt. Hartman in the legendary 1987 Marine film, "*Full Metal Jacket*."



The firing party (left) from the Marine Barracks, Washington, D.C. (8th and I) march off following the conclusion of military funeral honors for U.S. Marine Corps Gunnery Sgt. Ronald Lee Ermey

And now, nine months later, with bells chiming in the distance and a soft, quiet new layer of snow covering the ground at Arlington National Cemetery in Virginia the iconic Marine drill instructor was finally been laid to rest on 18 JAN. He lived his life in a way that was “outspoken, rebellious, and creative,” as his obituary stated, even until his last breaths at 74 years old. Marine Corps Historian Dr. Charles Neimeyer said that Ermey’s fictional exploits were an important part of preserving the Marine Corps name. “We all know the real-life stories about real-life Marine heroes,” Neimeyer said. “But sometimes the fake Marine stories are just as important, whether it’s Jack Nicholson’s fake speech in *A Few Good Men*, Floyd Gibbons’ fake ‘Teufelhunden’ dispatches, or R. Lee Ermey’s fake Combat Action Ribbon.” Reached for comment, former Marine Commandant Gen. James Amos said Staff Sergeant Ermey was proof that even the POGest Winger could get more name recognition than any Medal of Honor recipient, as long as he could fake the funk.

Marines are known for having an element of surprise, and “Ron always had that element of surprise,” Ermey’s brother Terry said alongside another brother, Jack, in some remarks to family and friends after the official military ceremony. Ermey had decided to buy a unicycle at age 60 and had tried to learn how to ride, two of his six children, Betty and Clinton Ermey, said in remarks about their father. There also was the time he bought a full buffalo robe and had to wear it on the airplane in order to get it home, the now-retired 12th Sgt. Maj. of the Marine Corps Harold Overstreet recalled. “I can only imagine him getting on the plane with those buffalo horns on,” Overstreet said, a cowboy hat on his own head as he spoke. “And I have no doubt he did. He was just like that.”

Ermey left a legacy. And it’s more than just the one that Arlington chaplain Navy Cmdr. John Carter opened his initial remarks with: “a legacy of honorable and faithful service.” Ermey left a family legacy. “He loved his Marines and loved his family even more,” Carter said. Ermey left a wife of 38 years, Marianila. He left six children, 12 grandchildren and six great-grandchildren. He also left a heritage and persona among Marines that may perhaps never be matched.

Timing for the Arlington burial was up to the family, said Arlington National Cemetery spokeswoman Barbara Lewandrowski. A crowd of nearly 100 family members, friends and admirers gathered in the snow for the burial of Ermey’s cremated remains. The funeral included full military honors: a Marine Corps bugler, folding of the American flag — presented by Sgt. Maj. of the Marine Corps Ronald Green — and the firing of three volleys by Marines from nearby Washington barracks at 8th and I. A bagpiper was also in attendance. Go to <https://www.military.com/daily-news/2019/01/18/family-fans-attend-r-lee-ermey> for videos of the funeral. [Source: Duffel Bag & MarineCorpsTimes | G-Had & Andrea Scott | April 18, 2018 & January 19, 2019 ++]

WWI Vets 03 ► Morris Weiner

Army Veteran Morris Weiner. Morris served during World War II. Illinois native Morris Weiner was drafted into the Army in 1943 and received basic training at Camp McCoy, Wisconsin. After completing basic training, Morris received deployment orders for Europe and was taken by boat to France. Upon arriving in France, Morris was assigned to Company G of the 16th Infantry Regiment, 1st Infantry Division.

From France, Morris and the 16th Infantry Regiment were sent to the front line in Ogden, Germany. There, Morris participated in the Allied advance through Europe, fighting through Cologne and Luxembourg, and eventually reaching Bastogne, Belgium, where Morris and his regiment fought in the Battle of the Bulge. During the battle, Morris and two other men from his company were sent on a reconnaissance patrol. During their patrol, the men found a position from which they could spot a German line. They were then ordered to stay and direct artillery fire on the enemy position. Once it became too dark to continue, Morris and his fellow soldiers prepared to return to their company. However, before they could leave, Morris and his men were surrounded and captured by German forces.

Morris was taken aside and asked by his captors if he was Jewish. However, his German captors seemed more concerned with the ongoing battle and as a result, did not bother separating him from the other prisoners. Morris was then loaded into a boxcar with 48 other Allied prisoners and spent the next two days locked inside without food or water. After the two-day journey, Morris and his fellow prisoners arrived in Frankfurt. There, Morris was placed in a camp with over 20,000 other Allied prisoners. During their captivity, Morris and his fellow inmates lived in abysmal conditions, where disease and lice became rampant, and prisoners were forced to subsist on scraps and sawdust. Morris spent much of his time fearing his captors would eventually find out he was Jewish. However, that day did not come. After spending six months in captivity, British forces liberated the camp.

Upon being liberated, Morris received treatment for lice and was sent to a hospital in England to recover from malnourishment. Upon entering the camp, Morris had weighed 170 lbs., by the time he left, he weighed only 98 lbs. For actions during his service, Morris was discharged at the rank of corporal and presented with eight medals, including the Bronze Star and the Combat Infantryman Badge. After returning home, Morris returned to working in the restaurant business with his father in law and spent time volunteering with the Veterans Administration. As a result of his experiences, Morris struggled with PTSD for the remainder of his life. More of his story is revealed at <http://memory.loc.gov/diglib/vhp/story/loc.natlib.afc2001001.10635> through a November 3, 2003 audio and written transcript interview with him.

[Source: Vantage Point | January 23, 2019 ++]

Vet Hiring Fairs ► Scheduled As of 01 FEB 2019

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 31, 2018 ++]

Military Retirees & Veterans Events Schedule ► As of 01 FEB 2019

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.
- PDF: http://www.hostmtb.org/RADs_and_Other_Retiree-Veterans_Events.pdf.
- Word: 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\veterans related events to the Events Schedule Manager, Milton.Bell126@gmail.com

[Source: Retiree\Veterans Events Schedule Manager | Milton Bell | January 31, 2018 ++]

State Veteran's Benefits ► Idaho 2019

The state of Idaho provides several benefits to veterans as indicated below. To obtain information on these refer to the attachment to this Bulletin titled, “**Vet State Benefits – ID**” for an overview of the below benefits. They are available to veterans who are residents of the state. For a more detailed explanation of each of the below refer <http://www.veterans.idaho.gov>:

- Housing Programs
- Education Programs
- Employment Benefits
- Financial Benefits
- Recreation Benefits
- Other State Veteran Benefits

[Source: <http://www.military.com/benefits/veteran-state-benefits/idaho-state-veterans-benefits.html> | 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.



SBP DIC Offset Update 53 ► H.R.533 | Military Surviving Spouses Equity Act

Legislation introduced by Reps. Joe Wilson (R-SC) and John Yarmuth (D-KY) would end the deduction of Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP) annuities from Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) paid to survivors of fallen service members, also known as the “widows tax.” MOAA has long supported repeal of the widows tax, backing similar legislation from Wilson and others. The change would mean that in cases where military service led to the death of a servicemember, DIC would be paid in addition to the SBP annuity. About 67,000 military survivors would benefit from this legislation, with the current offset costing them about \$12,000 annually.

“The SBP-DIC offset remains grossly unfair to the members of the military community who deserve our support the most,” said Lt. Gen. Dana T. Atkins, USAF (Ret), President and CEO of MOAA. “We thank Reps. Wilson and Yarmuth for their bipartisan leadership on this issue, and we encourage their fellow legislators to join the fight. “This is uniformly agreed-upon throughout Congress, but they haven't found the political will to resolve it,” Atkins said. “The 116th Congress has an opportunity to be known for getting this done.”

Wilson introduced this new legislation on 15 JAN with Yarmuth as the bill's lone listed original co-sponsor. Text of the bill wasn't immediately available, but it's essentially similar to bills Wilson introduced in the last four congressional sessions, with all four bills garnering more than 200 co-sponsors. Despite the support, neither these bills nor similar ones put forward by other legislators in previous sessions were put up for a vote, even by a committee. “It is unconscionable to think there is a 'Widows Tax' on the surviving family members of our fallen heroes,” Wilson said in a release announcing the bill. “We owe it to them to secure stable benefits in the event of their retirement or death.” Yarmuth, the newly installed chairman of the House Budget Committee, echoed that statement in the release, saying the bill “corrects a terrible wrong and makes clear that we support members of our military not just when we need them, but when their families need us.” [Source: MOAA Newsletter | Kevin Lilley | January 15, 2019 ++]

VA Medical Marijuana Update 57 ► S.179 | VA Medicinal Cannabis Research Act

Federal legislation introduced this week by Montana Democratic Senator Jon Tester and Alaska Republican Dan Sullivan would require the Veterans Administration to study medicinal cannabis as an alternative treatment for veterans. The "VA Medicinal Cannabis Research Act" Directs the VA to begin clinical trials to test the effects of medical marijuana as a treatment for chronic pain and symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress. The bill mirrors legislation the senators drafted last year, with one key difference. As first reported by www.marijuanamoment.net, last year's version said the VA, “May conduct and support research relating to the efficacy and safety of forms of cannabis.” This year's version says the secretary of Veterans Affairs "shall" start those double-blind clinical trials. Tester is quoted in a press release issued 18 JAN saying, “The VA needs to listen to the growing number of veterans who have already found success in medicinal cannabis in easing their pain and other symptoms.” [Source: Montana Public Radio | Edward O'Brien | January 18, 2019 ++]

Burn Pit Toxic Exposure Update 62 ► **H.R. 663/S.191 | Burn Pit Accountability Act**

Representatives Tulsi Gabbard and Brian Mast, along with Senators Amy Klobuchar and Dan Sullivan, introduced the *Burn Pit Accountability Act*, bipartisan and bicameral legislation to evaluate the exposure of U.S. servicemembers to open burn pits and toxic airborne chemicals by:

- Requiring the Secretary of Defense to record whether servicemembers have been based or stationed at a location where an open burn pit was used or exposed to toxic airborne chemicals, including any information recorded as part of the [Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pit Registry](#), in the Periodic Health Assessment (PHAs), Separation History and Physical Examination (SHPEs), and Post-Deployment Health Assessment (PDHAs).
- Enrolling any servicemember who meets the above criteria in the [Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pit Registry](#), unless he or she opts-out.
- Requiring the Secretary of Defense and the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to share information relating to exposure of burn pits and toxic airborne chemicals recorded in PHAs, SHPEs, and PDHAs.

[Source: VFW Action corps Weekly | January 18, 2019 ++]

GI Bill Update 276 ► **S.2248 | Veterans Benefits and Transition Act**

The Veterans Benefits and Transition Act passed by Congress on 20 DEC has been signed by the president. It protects student veterans from future hassles with educational institutions over non-payment of GI Bill benefits. Last fall, major technology failures at the Department of Veterans Affairs led to delayed and inaccurate payments for thousands of Post-9/11 GI Bill users, as the agency failed to implement a provision of the Forever GI Bill law that changed the way housing stipends are calculated. In some cases, students grappling with late rent or mortgage bills as a result of the delays faced another challenge: Their schools charged late fees for tuition bills that VA didn't pay on time, blocked access to campus facilities or did not allow them to register for the next semester of classes until their balance was covered. Ashlynn Haycock, deputy director of policy and legislation for the Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors, said members of her organization were even advised by schools to take out loans to cover tuition costs — even though the payments were late through no fault of their own. If schools don't agree to the new rules, they won't be allowed to keep enrolling students using the Post-9/11 GI Bill. Additional benefits to veterans covered under the bill include:

- **Spouse voting.** Military spouses can now elect to use the same residence as their active-duty spouse for state and local voting purposes, regardless of when or where they got married and whether they are currently living in that state because of military orders. Under previous law, a spouse had to meet the residency requirements of a state on his or her own merit for the purposes of voting.
- **VA Payment documentation.** VA is required to provide veterans with electronic proof that they will be receiving housing payments from the VA. Students can then show these to landlords. Students who live in high-cost areas, especially, can have trouble finding housing without a job to put on their application, according to a House Veterans Affairs Committee staffer familiar with the legislation. The documentation from VA would provide information for landlords, such as how much and how long a veteran will be receiving benefits that help them pay for housing.

- **Spouse lease termination.** The new law allows the spouse of a service member who dies on active duty to terminate a residential lease for up to one year after the death without being penalized. This expands on the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act, which allows service members to break lease if they deploy or PCS.
- **Transition help.** For troops transitioning out of the military, the VA will now post a list of programs and organizations that can help. The law requires the VA to contract with a non-federal entity to identify these programs, which will include smaller, more community-based organizations, according to the committee aide.
- **Homeless Vet Job Program Access.** The law requires better access to jobs programs for homeless veterans. This provision of the Veterans Benefits and Transition Act is “an absolute game changer” for homeless veterans, said Kathryn Monet, CEO of the National Coalition for Homeless Veterans, which has been advocating for a law like this for five years. Previously, veterans had to be either on the streets or in a shelter to qualify for employment assistance under the federal Homeless Veterans’ Reintegration Program. But now, veterans have 60 days after moving into housing to apply for these services. The provision applies to veterans participating in the Department of Housing and Urban Development-VA Supportive Housing program and a similar initiative for Native American veterans, as well as the Supportive Services for Veteran Families program. It also applies to veterans who are transitioning after being incarcerated and other recently homeless veterans, according to a summary of the legislation released by Congress. “It’s basically the difference between housed and going back to homelessness for some of these veterans,” Monet said, adding later, “We know from our work how important this bill is to fix systemic problems that create unnecessary barriers to housing stability for veterans.”
- **Reservists employment benefits.** Certain members of the National Guard and reserves called to active duty will have more time to use benefits under the VA’s Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment program, or Voc Rehab. The program provides job counseling and other services for veterans with a VA disability rating of 20 percent or higher. Veterans that qualify must use the program within 12 years of separating from the military. The clock gets paused for Guardsmen and reservists called to active duty. So, if they get activated for a year, they will get another year to complete Voc Rehab. Before the new law, this did not apply to members serving under particular orders relating to national emergencies and combatant commands. As a result, such service members would lose time to use the benefit as they continued to serve. Now, the clock gets paused for them the same way as it does for their fellow Guardsman and reservists. Daniel Elkins, legislative director at the Enlisted Association of the National Guard of the United States, said the new law will help many of the organization’s constituents. Voc Rehab benefits are “hugely important” for those who are service disabled, and this “is an extremely beneficial expansion to those benefits and long overdue,” he said.
- **Enhanced burial rights.** The new law allows spouses and children of active-duty service members to be buried in veteran cemeteries through Sept. 30, 2024, even if they pass away before the service member — something that was previously allowed but only with the VA’s approval. “We did expedite that,” said Patricia Lynch Watts, director of legislative and regulatory service for the National Cemetery Administration. “We tried not to make that too burdensome on the family, but there is certain information that we had to ask for, and it had to go through the process of being approved here by the secretary or the undersecretary, which could delay plans for burial by the family.” The law also provides headstones and markers for burials in tribal cemeteries that receive grants from the VA. Watts said this corrects a previous oversight, which granted these for state veteran cemeteries but not those on tribal lands. There are currently 11 tribal veteran cemeteries across the country and another two under construction, according to information provided by the VA

[Source: MilitaryTimes | January 17, 2019 ++]

GI Bill Update 277 ► S.3777 | Forever GI Bill Housing Payment Fulfillment Act

The new Forever GI Bill Housing Payment Fulfillment Act signed by the President holds the VA accountable for retroactively fixing payments that were inaccurate as a result of the technology problems. To accomplish this, the law establishes a so-called “tiger team” to oversee these reimbursements. The team is required to report to Congress every 90 days on the reimbursement plan, and, by July 2020, report how many GI Bill beneficiaries were impacted, and to what extent. The bill also holds the department to its promise not to collect on any overpayments made to GI Bill users. “For many student veterans, every dime counts. That’s why the VA needs to get this right and pay student veterans the full amount of money they were promised,” Sen. Brian Schatz (D-HI) said in a statement. The senator co-sponsored the legislation, which became law 31 DEC.

In a 4 JAN address to some 2,300 student veterans attending the annual Student Veterans of America National Conference, VA Sec. Robert Wilkie assured students that anyone who was underpaid as a result of the technology issues will be made whole. “The bottom line is: We owe you every penny that you’ve earned,” he said. “That is what the nation has promised you, and that is what you deserve.” GI Bill users who did not receive a cost-of-living increase on their fall 2018 payments will get a check in the mail for the difference by the end of the month. The rest of the fixes won’t happen until at least December 2019, when the VA is slated to have its updated technology systems in place. [Source: MilitaryTimes | January 7, 2019 ++]

Military Spouse Deportation Update 07 ► H.R. 557 | Protect Patriot Spouses Act

A measure was reintroduced in the House on 23 JAN to provide relief to military spouses facing deportation, with particular attention paid to one spouse – Alejandra Juarez, the wife of an Iraq War veteran who was deported to Mexico last year. Rep. Darren Soto (D-FL) introduced the Protect Patriot Spouses Act to give military spouses priority when applying for a Green Card, which would allow them to live permanently in the United States. Soto said the bill would also provide more leniency to military spouses who violated certain laws – acts that would typically lead to deportation.

The bill stalled in the House last year. With the lower chamber now controlled by Democrats, Soto is more hopeful about its chances. He described the bill as more “generous” than the measure that he introduced last year. “It’s more generous than last year’s bill because it’s a new Congress, and because we believe strongly in second chances,” Soto said during a news conference outside the Capitol. He was joined by Reps. Mark Takano (D-CA) and Ruben Gallego (D-AZ).

At the same time Wednesday, Soto reintroduced another bill on behalf of Juarez. Last year, Juarez, who had lived in the United States for 22 years, took on a very public and dramatic fight against President Donald Trump to remain in the country under increasingly stringent immigration policies. After pursuing every legal and political avenue to petition against her deportation, Juarez left for Mexico in August. She now lives there with her younger daughter, Estela. Her older daughter, Pamela Juarez, remained in Florida with her father, Cuauhtemoc “Temo” Juarez. Pamela Juarez, a 16-year-old junior in high school, was present at the news conference Wednesday. Her father, who has been described as a Trump supporter, wasn’t there.

“Since the day I watched my mom board that flight to Mexico, I felt a deep hole in my heart. When my sister followed her a couple of weeks later, that hole got bigger,” Pamela Juarez said. “I haven’t slept well in months...I can’t remember the last time when I wasn’t anxious or nervous, because every day I’m just worrying about what’s going to happen to my mom, or how my sister’s doing.” She went on to say her family was “forced apart” by the Trump administration’s zero tolerance policy for illegal immigrants. Advocates contend the policy has meant that there is no longer an order of priority in enforcing immigration law.

Soto said he, along with other congressmen, had filed bills, sent letters and had personal conversations – done everything in their power to sway the authorities in Juarez’ case. The bill that he introduced Wednesday would afford Juarez legal permanent residence status. The legislation will likely have a better chance of being considered under the new chairman of the House Judiciary Committee, Jerrold Nadler (D-NY), Soto said. “With a new judiciary chairman... I believe we’re going to have some private bills heard in this term, so it gives her in her individual case an opportunity as well,” he said.

Soto rounded up 7 cosponsors--all Democrats--to back his proposal which was sent to the U.S. House Judiciary Committee. Cosponsors Rueben Gallego offered his thoughts on the proposal on Wednesday, “As a Marine, I know that you cannot give your all to serve our country without a support system back home. Military families sacrifice so much in order to support their loved ones as they serve our nation in uniform, and to help them readjust to civilian life once they return home. It’s our duty as a nation to support them in turn. I’m proud to cosponsor this legislation to support our service members, who only want their families to remain together”. The bill has the support of VoteVets and immigration reform groups. So far, there is no counterpart bill in the Senate. Soto’s bill giving Alejandra Juarez permanent status has no cosponsors yet. It was also sent to the Judiciary Committee. [Source: Stars & Stripes | Nikki Wentling | January 23, 2019 ++]

DoD/VA Concurrent Receipt ► H.R.303 | Retired Pay Restoration Act Reintroduced

Congressman Gus Bilirakis and Senator Jon Tester reintroduced the Retired Pay Restoration Act (H.R.303) on 8 JAN to ensure full concurrent receipt of military retirement pay and VA disability compensation. Presently, concurrent receipt of these benefits applies only to those with a 50 percent VA disability rating or higher. [Source: VFW Action Corp | January 25, 2019 ++]

*** Military ***



Army Retention Program Update 01 ► ‘Up Or Out’ Is On Its Way Out

Army Secretary Mark Esper is looking to make talent management his top priority in 2019, he told Army Times on 24 JAN. As Army readiness continues on a steady uptick, and the infrastructure for a modernization push is in place with Army Futures Command, the service’s top civilian is devoting more attention to a task force stood up specifically to help the Army through an overhaul of its promotions, assignments and other processes that affect soldiers' careers. "My view is, we’re going to move away from ‘up or out,’ " he said. "My shorthand is ‘perform or out.’ "

Over the past several years, the Army has been making overtures about the importance of talent management, of getting the best qualified and highest performing soldiers into the positions that best fit their skills and knowledge, rather than simply moving personnel around to fill openings based on who’s up for new orders first. The service took a step in that direction with beta testing of the Integrated Personnel and Pay System, which is underway with the

Pennsylvania National Guard. “The system, as I envision it, is going to be a market-based system, where talent is managed at echelon,” he said. Maybe the top and bottom 10 percent to 15 percent of the ranks will be centrally managed according to the needs of the Army, he said.



Army Secretary Mark Esper talks to soldiers during a troop visit to Europe

But that marketplace idea is available with officers already, to a certain extent, with the Assignment Interactive Module. “There’s a fairly good percentage of officers today who can go online and see what’s available,” he said. “But we need to make that the standard.” Congress’ reshaping of the Defense Officer Personnel Management Act with the 2019 National Defense Authorization Act moved the needle yet again. “Some of their focus this past year has been in terms of making sure we take full advantage of the changes in law that the Congress gave us, in terms of officers,” Esper said.

The change gives the services latitude to retain some highly specialized officers rather than force separations because they don’t promote “on time,” bring in civilian experts at ranks up to O-6, and disregard year groups in order to promote officers who are performing ahead of their peers. “I need to make sure we tell the force what to expect, what a successful career looks like, what are the ground rules,” Esper said. Esper met with the Talent Management Task Force recently, he said, and he set an 1 APR deadline for a list of its goals and the plan to meet them, he said. The plan is to have an order out by the end of the year, he added, along with the beginnings of implementation. “If I can hit those marks, I’ll be very satisfied,” he said. [Source: ArmyTimes | Meghann Myers | January 24, 2019 ++]

Navy Blue-Gold Model ► Projected Crewing on New FFG(X)

The U.S. Navy is looking to get a lot of underway time out of its new frigate and is eyeing a crewing model that swaps out teams of sailors to maximize the operational time for each hull. The so-called blue-gold crewing model effectively creates two crews for each ship of the class. The blue crew and gold crew switch out to keep the ships at sea for as long as possible without breaking the sailors and their families. It’s the model the Navy has used for years on the ballistic missile submarines and is employing on the littoral combat ships, but now the model is likely to extend to the LCS successor, said Rear Adm. Ron Boxall, the Chief of Naval Operations’ surface warfare director. “We’re looking at the blue-gold construct on FFG(X). We’re planning on it, which gives us a larger operational availability – it should double it,” Boxall told Defense News in an interview late last year.

The use of blue-gold crewing hints at how the Navy is viewing its new frigate: as a ship that can carry out a broad range of tasks that have consumed the operational time of larger combatants. That includes exercises with allies and freedom of navigation operations to counter-piracy and routine presence missions that don’t require an Arleigh Burke destroyer to be successful but are time-intensive. The Navy has bemoaned the lack of a small surface combatant that

can hold down low-end missions but still contribute in a high-end fight, which has been the impetus behind the whole FFG(X) program.

Even though the crews will catch a break in the blue-gold construct, off-hull crews won't be kicking back during their shore rotation, Boxall said. The surface force has been investing in higher-end training facilities in fleet concentration areas in an effort to increase the proficiency of its watch teams. Crews on shore will be going through those trainers, he said. "So, these ships are going to be out there half the time while the [off-hull] crews are back training in higher-fidelity training environments," Boxall explained. "And what [commanding officers] will tell you is that as we get to higher and higher fidelity training, time to train becomes equally as valuable. "So, in an increasingly complex environment, it's just intuitive that that you have to have time to train. We think Blue-Gold makes sense for those reasons on the frigate."

Lessons from LCS

Getting more simulator time for surface sailors has been an initiative championed by the Navy's top surface warfare officer Vice Adm. Rich Brown. It's an off-shoot from lessons-learned from FFG(X)'s predecessor, the LCS, which has extremely high-fidelity simulator trainers for its crews before they take over their assigned hulls. One thing the surface force has been intrigued to see has been the high quality of the officers that come up through the LCS program, something the Navy in part attributes to the trainers, Boxall said, and the SWOs want to replicate that for the FFG(X).

"One really interesting side-note with LCS has been the quality of the training," Boxall said. "As we went back and looked at the lessons learned from McCain and Fitzgerald, we're trying to apply some of the good things about LCS to that. "Those officers, because they are smaller ships they get a lot more water under the keel. And they're faster ships so they are getting that water under the keel in a faster-moving environment. So we're creating a generation of officers who are getting tougher navigation environments thrown at them more quickly, and we're also getting the quality and fidelity of their trainers." This has meant that LCS officers more-than stack up to their peers from larger, more advanced ships, he added. "What we're seeing is they are doing very, very well against their contemporaries coming off the bigger ships," Boxall said. "Why is that happening? It's fairly logical: More stick time, better fidelity trainers and more time in the trainers."

Ownership

The littoral combat ship adopted the Blue-Gold crewing model after a series of high-profile breakdowns, some caused by crew errors. The original model was to have three crews for two hulls, a rotational model that the Navy worried was taking away from the sense of ownership for a single, specific hull that permanently attached crews might have to a greater degree. The program was reorganized to a Blue-Gold model, which required hundreds of new billets for the LCS program, under then-head of Naval Surface Forces Pacific, Rear Adm. Thomas Rowden. Expanding Blue-Gold to the FFG(X) would further spread the model inside the surface warfare community.

Both minesweepers and patrol craft, two other workhorse platforms in the surface community, operate under a Blue-Gold crewing model as well. However, it may not be a model that the Navy will pursue on the large surface combatant now in development. That ship may be better with a lower operational tempo, Boxall said. "We'll look and see if that makes sense on the large surface combatant or not," he said. "Maybe those are better ships to keep as a surge force, maybe they're fine operating on a lower rotational model." [Source: DefenseNews | David B. Larter | January 30, 2019 ++]

PCS Moves Update 03 ► \$11,592 to Fly Two Pet Dogs to Guam

In early December, Kenneth and Emily Sanders learned the Navy was transferring them from Norfolk to Guam at the end of February. The transfer was somewhat unexpected because Kenneth, a petty officer second class and master-at-arms, and his wife had only been at Norfolk Naval Station, Va., for about a year after returning from a stint in Bahrain.

But the real shock came weeks later when the couple learned how much it would cost to ship their two beloved German shepherds, Nautia and Phoenix, to Guam: \$11,592. The couple find themselves being squeezed by an onerous flight route that spans half the globe and by United Airlines' decision last year to stop transporting large dogs (<https://www.military.com/daily-news/2018/05/02/new-united-policy-bans-breeds-sizes-and-has-no-military-exceptions.html>).



The couple set up a [GoFundMe account](#) in hopes of defraying the cost of shipping the pair of 8-year-old dogs. As of 30 JAN they have received \$4,248 of their \$8,000 goal "I'm smart enough to know that I probably won't reach anywhere near my goal," Emily Sanders said. "My family and friends are great. They're supporting me and I'm so thankful for that. But that's a lot of money." They plan on using credit cards to pay the bill. "I know they have a high interest rate, but, what's a girl to do?" she said.

The couple, who have no children, got Nautia from a Tennessee backyard breeder when she was 3 months old and stunted in growth. A month later they got Phoenix. "I felt like [Nautia] was lonely and needed a sister, so I got her a sister," she said. Nautia is "prissy" and clinging; the bold Phoenix "loves everyone and everything," she said. She recalled that it cost only about \$250 to ship each dog when they had traveled on Delta Airlines on the flight the couple took to Bahrain. But dog transport for military members became thornier in the wake of a high-profile incident early last year, resulting in United Airlines changing its pet-shipping policy.

During a United flight in March from Houston to Newark, a flight attendant insisted that the owners of a French bulldog in a pet carrier be placed in an overhead bin instead of beneath the seat where such crates are normally placed. The dog suffocated during the flight. In response, on 18 JUN United banned transporting snub-nosed dogs and cats, as well as breeds of dogs regarded as "strong-jawed," out of concern for "higher adverse health risks," according to the policy. But the airline also stopped hauling pet crates taller than the 30-inch-high Series 500 carrier. United told Sanders that Nautia and Phoenix require the next largest crate, Series 700, for shipping, which by the airline's own policy, it will not carry, she said.

The Sanders had routinely shipped their dogs in Series 500 crates, including their trips to and from Bahrain, but United will not allow them to use Series 500 carriers because the dogs' ears and tails touch the crate's ceiling, she said. Aside from that, she said, United's new policy of excluding big dogs seems to have little to do with potential breathing problems for snub-nosed dogs while aboard planes. Meanwhile, Delta is unable to ship the dogs to Guam because of its own policy restrictions. "Delta won't allow a dog on one flight more than 12 hours for health reasons," Emily Sanders said. Delta would allow the dogs to travel in the smaller Series 500 crates, with a potential route to Los Angeles, then a flight to Guam. But the shortest-duration flight time -- including connections -- to Los Angeles is 12 hours and 5 minutes, she said. "We couldn't find any shorter connections," she said.

Leo Mendoza, the owner of South Korea-based Shindogs Air, has collected more than 120,000 signatures on a petition he began last year on change.org urging United to ease its policy on big and strong-jawed dogs. "Historically, United has been the only affordable option for big dogs, as other airlines cost up to 3-4 times as much," wrote Mendoza,

whose business specializes in moving pets to and from Asia for servicemembers. Getting big dogs to and from Guam is "extremely difficult," Mendoza told Stars and Stripes. "The only airline that accepts them out of Guam is Korean Air," he said. "We have to fly them here, to Seoul, and then from here use a European airline to send them to the states."

That's basically how Nautia and Phoenix will have to make the trip to Guam, using pet-transport companies that manage the move. For a fee of \$5,692, the dogs will fly on Lufthansa from Washington, D.C., to Amsterdam, where they will spend the night. They then fly to South Korea, where they will require veterinarian's health certificates for import into that country. Once that import paperwork is completed, they will stay at a pet hotel overnight. For another fee of \$5,900, they will then fly to Guam, where they will need a new set of health certificates. The Sanders will then pick them up, \$11,592 later.

"I don't mind paying to ship my dogs; I'm going to do it no matter what," Sanders said. "But the way this is playing out, we're having to go with these pet-shipping companies who use foreign airlines, like Korean Air." Sanders said that as someone in a U.S. military household, "it just doesn't seem right that we have to use these foreign airlines and be charged this much." Stars and Stripes asked United if it had considered the petition request to once again ship large dogs. "We're going to do what's in the best interest of our customers and in the best interest of the animals," said United spokesman Charles Hobart. "We know these pets are part of the family."

Nautia and Phoenix will be 12 when the Sanders' three-year assignment to Guam is completed, and the dogs will then likely generate another huge moving bill. She's already planning to sock away hundreds of dollars each month to prepare for that day. "I've already got that in the back of my mind," she said. [Source: Stars & Stripes | Wyatt Olson | January 28, 2019 ++]

USS South Dakota ► SSN-790 To Be Commissioned 2 FEB 2019

The Navy will commission its newest fast attack submarine, the future USS South Dakota (SSN 790), during an 11 a.m. (EST) ceremony Saturday, 2 FEB, at Naval Submarine Base New London in Groton, Connecticut. The principal speaker will be U.S. Senator Mike Rounds of South Dakota. The submarine's sponsor is Mrs. Deanie Dempsey, wife of the 18th Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Gen. Martin Dempsey. She will give the order to "man our ship and bring her to life!" in a time-honored Navy tradition. "USS South Dakota enters service during a period of dynamic security challenges," said Secretary of the Navy Richard V. Spencer. "I am confident USS South Dakota and its crew will ensure our Navy and nation remain safe and strong, and proudly serve our nation's interest for decades to come."

USS South Dakota, a Virginia-class submarine designated SSN 790, is the third ship to bear the state's name. The first South Dakota was an armored cruiser commissioned Jan. 27, 1908. The ship served in a convoy escort role during World War I before being renamed Huron June 7, 1920. She was decommissioned following seven years of service in the Pacific on June 17, 1927. The second ship was a battleship commissioned March 20, 1942. She saw service in a number of important World War II battles including Santa Cruz, Guadalcanal, Philippine Sea, and Okinawa, earning thirteen battle stars over the course of the war. South Dakota was present at Tokyo Bay when the Japanese surrendered and was later placed out of commission on Jan. 31, 1947.

USS South Dakota is the 17th Virginia-class attack submarine and the seventh Virginia-class Block III submarine. Virginia-class submarines are built to operate in the world's littoral and deep waters while conducting anti-submarine warfare; anti-surface ship warfare; strike warfare; special operation forces support; intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance; irregular warfare; and mine warfare missions. Their inherent stealth, endurance, mobility, and firepower directly enable them to support five of the six maritime strategy core capabilities—sea control, power projection, forward presence, maritime security, and deterrence. The ceremony can be viewed online, and the media kit with photos and videos can be accessed at <http://www.navy.mil/southdakotacommissioning>. Additional information

at http://www.navy.mil/navydata/fact_display.asp?cid=4100&tid=100&ct=4 is available on Virginia-class Attack Submarines. [Source: DoD New Release | No. NR-017-19 | January. 30, 2019 ++

Government Shutdown USCG Impact Update 06 ► Recent Accomplishments Without Pay

As a partial government shutdown continues into its 24th day, members of the Coast Guard saw their first missed paycheck 15 JAN. The service, which falls under the Department of Homeland Security, was able to pay Coasties through the end of the year thanks to a last-minute determination based on legal analysis. But until a budget agreement is reached or another appropriation made, Coast Guardsmen will go without pay, despite continuing to execute their duties around the globe. "I recognize that there is anxiety and uncertainty about the status of your pay this evening," Coast Guard Commandant Adm. Karl Schultz posted to his official social media accounts Monday evening. "Your senior leadership team continues to work on your behalf. We will provide an additional update by 1200 EST tomorrow. Continue standing the watch -- I am proud of your unwavering devotion to duty." Photos, videos and news stories released by the Coast Guard this month reveal just how much the service has done without the promise of pay. Here's a small sampling of what it has accomplished:

- **Medevaced ill fisherman --** Members of U.S. Coast Guard District 14 Hawaii Pacific rescued a 37-year-old man from a tuna longliner about 80 miles north of Kauai on Jan. 13, according to a release. The man, who had been ill for several days and was getting worse, was hoisted from his boat by an MH-65 Dolphin helicopter and transferred safely to Lihue airport, where he received medical care. Oh, and winds of up to 20 miles per hour were causing sea swells of 8 to 12 feet at the time of the rescue.
- **Salvaged downed aircraft --** Coast Guard District 14, which had a busy month, also oversaw recovery of parts of a Hawker Hunter aircraft 9 JAN, which went down in December off Honolulu. "Using a blend of local salvage assets, remote engineering guidance, and advanced sensing technology sourced from the mainland, the locally based salvage company Parker Marine Corporation has completed the next stage of the aircraft salvage," Chief Warrant Officer Russ Strathern, a marine safety specialist and response officer at Sector Honolulu, said in a statement. "The main section of the fuselage containing residual oil and potentially hazardous substances has been salvaged and transported to a staging location for the ongoing National Transportation Safety Board-led investigation." The Coast Guard was also involved last month in the rescue of the aircraft's pilot, who ejected safely.
- **Rescued Chinese fishing crew --** In yet another mission for District 14, Coast Guardsmen assisted in the rescue of 24 mariners Jan. 2 from the Ou Ya Leng No. 6, a 308-foot Chinese-flagged fishing vessel that ran aground on Taka Atoll in the Marshall Islands. The district dispatched a HC-130 Hercules crew to support the rescue and keep any of the mariners from being swept out to sea. All were rescued safely.
- **Interdicted migrants near Puerto Rico --** In a period of 72 hours, the Coast Guard interdicted 66 migrants who were attempting to illegally enter the U.S. territories of Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands this month. Migrant interdiction makes up a significant part of the Coast Guard mission; since October, the service has interdicted 708 migrants in the region of Puerto Rico alone.
- **Seized illegal drugs --** Crew members of the Coast Guard Sentinel-class cutter Bernard C. Webber made a drug seizure 7 JAN, interdicting a sport fisher boat carrying a suspected smuggler, a pair of migrants, and 7 kilograms of cocaine east of Dania Beach, Florida. It's a relatively small haul for the Coast Guard, which has seized more than 15,000 pounds of cocaine, 11 pounds of heroin and 225 milliliters of fentanyl in the region of Puerto Rico alone since October.
- **Assisted grounded cargo ship --** When the cargo ship JSW Salem ran aground east of Virginia Beach on Jan. 10, the Coast Guard was on hand to help. The service dispatched a 45-foot response boat-medium crew from

Station Little Creek, according to released information, along with an MH-60 Jayhawk crew from Air Station Elizabeth City. They assisted the crew of the tanker as it got clear and eventually anchored itself.

- Patrolled Antarctica -- Crew of the Coast Guard icebreaker Polar Star are working to "clear a path through multi-year ice" to support Operation Deep Freeze, a training exercise organized by U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, Schultz said in a statement this month. The Polar Star is America's only operational heavy icebreaker, and the Coast Guard is the only service with ice-breaking capabilities, which are increasingly in demand. "While our Coast Guard workforce is deployed, there are loved ones at home reviewing family finances, researching how to get support, and weighing child care options -- they are holding down the fort," Schultz said in a Jan. 13 message. "Please know that we are doing everything we can to support and advocate for you while your loved one stands the watch. You have not, and will not, be forgotten."

[Source: Military.com | Hope Hodge Seck | January 15, 2018 ++]

Government Shutdown USCG Impact Update 07 ► Coast Guard City's Response

If the uniformed cadets milling about the local movie theaters and pizza joints didn't make it obvious enough, a banner hanging from a downtown parking garage makes it crystal clear: New London is an official Coast Guard City. The pride is on display everywhere in this former whaling town of 27,000 people that, among other things, is home to the U.S. Coast Guard Academy and U.S. Coast Guard Station New London, which patrols the Long Island Sound. Now, the town's residents are rallying around their own as the partial government shutdown has left the Coast Guard — the only branch of the armed services that is part of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security rather than the Pentagon — out in the cold. "The people have really just come together and said, 'hey, it's the Coast Guard's time. They need our help,'" said Troy Castineria as he pushed his shopping cart around a pop-up food pantry filled with donated, free goods.

Both he and his wife Lauren are former active duty members of the Coast Guard who work at the academy. Both have been furloughed. "A lot of people have lost faith in humanity. But this right here goes to show that we are appreciated and there are people to help when the time comes," he added, staring with amazement at the makeshift supermarket created by a coalition of local Coast Guard-related advocacy groups.



Members of the U.S. Coast Guard browse through bags of donated pet food (left), Coast Guard personnel stack boxes of donated cereal at a pop-up food pantry created at the Coast Guard Academy (left center), Christine Lamb delivers bags of donated pet food (center right), and Retired U.S. Coast Guard Adm. Thad Allen (right)visiting a pop-up food pantry created at a school.

The free pantry is just one of several efforts big and small by area residents and businesses. At the popular Slice Pizza Bar, a chalkboard sign proclaims "Proudly serving our USCG" and offers a 15 percent discount to Coast Guard families. Castineria said the local utility in nearby Norwich has waived late fees for federal employees who are not being paid and can't cover their bills. Separately, nurses at New London's Lawrence and Memorial Hospital have been offering gift cards to needy families; a city activist plans to open her home on Martin Luther King Jr. Day as a drop-off location for donations; local restaurants and other businesses are offering discounts, and local banks are providing no-interest loans to supplement lost paychecks; and the city's police department and the U.S. Navy submarine base in nearby Groton have collected donations.

Waller Walker of nearby Mystic arrived in New London on Thursday afternoon with a friend, driving two vehicles packed with groceries. The pair had reached out to a network of 400 people to raise money and get food donations after hearing about the collection site on the news. "We want to support the Coast Guard," she said. "They're in our neighborhood and they do so much good." New London Mayor Michael Passero said the shutdown's impact has been personal for his city, where the Coast Guard is among the city's top employers, with a workforce approaching 1,000 people and a campus with more than 1,000 cadets. It's also been an opportunity for New London to live up to the city's 2015 congressional designation as a Coast Guard City, a place where Coast Guard men, women and their families are made to feel welcome.

Besides the New London station and the academy, a top military college where the cadets are required to volunteer in New London's schools and social service agencies, the city is home to the U.S. Coast Guard Research and Development Center and the International Ice Patrol Operations Center. The city is also awaiting construction of a Coast Guard museum, which is planned along the downtown waterfront and seen as a way to attract tourists to help revitalize a sleepy downtown that has struggled to keep storefronts filled.

Mayor Passero worries about what will happen to his city if this shutdown continues. He said New London is at the beginning of what he sees as an economic revitalization, given stepped-up hiring at Electric Boat and plans for off-shore wind generation development. "The longer it drags on, the harder these impacts are going to be felt," he said. "It's going to start to drain public resources and it's going to start to take away from our economic base at some point."

Jessica Bello, whose husband has been in the Coast Guard for eight years, said her family is relying on the free food pantry and her extra shifts working as a bartender and cocktail waitress at nearby Foxwoods Resort Casino to help make ends meet. "I was sent to the ER three days ago due to sciatica because of the extra hours and stress. I have no choice but to go back to work tomorrow injured or not because my bills don't care if I'm injured," the mother of two said. In their quest to help, people have been sharing tips about restaurants offering free meals for federal employees, stores discounts and job postings, said Crystal Simmons, 35, who administers a Facebook group for New London Coast Guard families.

"It has been amazing to see people jumping into action," she said. "We're not sitting on our hands and saying, 'What are we going to do?' It's jumping in, posting to find out who needs something, what can we do, who can we contact? It's been really great to see people stepping up to fix what the government's not." She said people have been cutting back on shopping and eating out, which she predicts will have a "huge trickle-down effect that people aren't thinking about." Peter Farnan, manager of Mr. G's restaurant, a popular eatery and bar for the academy's cadets, enlisted personnel and instructors, estimated that business is down about 10 percent compared to this time last year. "If this goes on for another two weeks ... we'll definitely be a little bit more anxious and concerned," said Farnan, who has been offering 10 percent discounts to all Coast Guard employees affected by the shutdown. "We'll start tightening our belts."

The irony of the Coast Guard's predicament wasn't lost on retired Adm. Thad Allen, who toured the pop-up pantry on 17 JAN during a visit to the academy. He expressed his frustration at how the shutdown has been impacting people who often rescue others from natural disasters. "We have people under duress right now that are still expected to do their duty. But it's not Mother Nature that's inflicted the wound. It's our own government," he said, adding how the leaders in Washington need to "carry out their constitutional duties to provide for the general welfare and common defense" or else morale and readiness will suffer. He added: "It's pretty rough to come in and do your job every day when you're not sure what's happening to your family."

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President Donald Trump on 25 JAN announced plans for a short-term budget deal without border wall funding that could re-open the government as early as this weekend, resuming pay for more than 800,000 federal workers whose finances have been tied up in the political fight. That would include about 50,000 members of the Coast Guard, who have been required to conduct their normal security and rescue operations without pay since the start of the year. If the budget dispute is resolved in the next few days, servicemembers would avoid missing their next scheduled paycheck

on 30 JAN. [Source: The Associated Press & FederalTimes | Susan Haigh, Jennifer McDermott & Leo Shane III | January 19 & 25, 2019 ++]

Government Shutdown USCG Impact Update 08 ► Wives Concerned About Reoccurrence

U.S. Coast Guard spouses in southern New England say they'll continue to spend money cautiously even though the longest government shutdown in U.S. history has ended. President Donald Trump signed a bill 25 JAN to reopen the government for three weeks, backing down from his demand that Congress give him money for his border wall before federal agencies go back to work.

Mariah Battermann and Rachel Malcom, whose husbands serve in the Coast Guard in Rhode Island, and Crystal Simmons, whose husband serves in Connecticut, all said on 26 JAN that they're sticking to the tight budgets they adopted when the government shut down. They worry the government will be shuttered again. "I would have breathed a much larger sigh of relief if it was a permanent, not temporary, agreement," Battermann said. "We're just still uncertain as to how to proceed with this. For our household, we're definitely going to stay cautious." "You can only be so happy because you just have to know that it could happen again," added Malcom. "We're going to be playing catch up, so I don't want to overspend."

Battermann and Malcom were at the United Baptist Church in Newport, Rhode Island 26 JAN, opening a resource center where people affected by the partial government shutdown could pick up household goods. They said they wanted to open the "Beacon for the Brave Resource Center" as planned because there's going to be a lapse in time before people get their paychecks and they want to be of service until this uncertainty is over. Some 800,000 workers were furloughed or required to work without pay for 35 days, including members of the Coast Guard. They will receive back pay, but it's unclear when. The White House tweeted that it will be "in the coming days."

"You're looking at almost a week to process back pay and that gives us maybe two weeks to breathe a little more normally, then we may be in the same situation," Simmons said by phone from Connecticut. "I don't think I can really relax and go back to the way things were." Simmons said she'll continue to buy bare necessities and go fewer places to save on gasoline, but it won't take too long for her family to recover because they relied on income from her job in admissions at Mitchell College in New London, Connecticut. "There were a couple of bills we had to push off and they were accommodating in working with us. For a lot of families who are a one-income family, it's going to take a much longer time," said Simmons, who administers a Facebook group for New London Coast Guard families. "It's so disheartening to know that." [Source: Associated Press | Jennifer McDermott | January 26, 2019 ++]

U.S.-Somalia Ops ► Our Military To Stop Giving Details on Strikes

The U.S. military says it has carried out two new airstrikes in Somalia against the al-Shabab extremist group but will no longer give details on fighters killed or damage done. A spokesman for the U.S. Africa Command says those details are now up to Somalia's government to share. On 19 JAN the U.S. announced its deadliest airstrike in Somalia in months, killing 52 of the al-Qaida-linked extremists after a "large group" mounted an attack on Somali forces. The new U.S. statement says the latest airstrikes occurred on 23 JAN near Jilib in Middle Juba region, where Saturday's strike occurred. The United States has dramatically stepped up airstrikes against al-Shabab in Somalia since President Donald Trump took office, carrying out at least 47 last year to diminish the Islamic extremist group's "safe havens." [Source: The Associated Press | January 24, 2019 ++]

Feres Doctrine Update 10 ► Potential New Rules Being Looked at by Congress

A key House Democrat is targeting legislative fixes to the Feres Doctrine as a top priority this session, taking aim at the legal precedent critics say unfairly blocks troops from suing the military for medical malpractice, supervisor negligence and a host of other on-duty mistakes. Rep. Jackie Speier (D-CA) and the new chairwoman of the House Armed Services personnel subcommittee, listed the legal issue among her areas of focus in her first statement in the new leadership role. In her statement, she said the panel's guiding focus will be to tackle "critical issues that impact not only our service members but their families who also bear the burden of sacrifice and commitment to our country."

Those include potential new rules for response and prosecution of sexual assault cases in the military — a topic for which Speier has been a vocal advocate for years — as well as reviewing rules for transgender enlistment, improving data usage in military recruiting and retention, and monitoring troops' pay and benefits. But the Feres Doctrine debate could lead to some of the most dramatic military policy changes to come out of Congress this year. Speier has been following a handful of court challenges to the legal precedent in recent months, and is planning a hearing on the issue early this session. The 1950 Supreme Court decision — which ruled the family of an active-duty soldier killed in a barracks fire could not sue the government — has been cited repeatedly by lower courts to block troops from claiming damages for actions related to military service.

Defense officials have argued that breaking the precedent would prompt a flood of frivolous lawsuits. But critics say the courts have gone well beyond the idea of preventing troops from suing for war-related injuries or on-duty accidents, and deprived military families of compensation for negligence. Last fall, the case of Sgt. 1st Class Richard Stayskal drew national attention to the topic again. A misdiagnosis by Army doctors in early 2017 allowed his lung cancer to worsen and spread, leaving him with just months to live. If civilian doctors had made the errors, his family would be able to file suit seeking damages. But because of the Feres Doctrine, the prospects of winning a similar judgment against the Army is nearly impossible.

Sean Cronin, whose Florida law firm Cronin & Maxwell specializes in military medical malpractice cases, said federal attorneys are quick to cite the Feres decision in any military litigation, creating a frustrating legal roadblock for a wide variety of lawsuits. "And every time this has come before the U.S. Supreme Court, they have said the legislative branch can fix this if they want to," he said. "It's surprising it hasn't been dealt with. We've had enough government changes over the last 30 years, and enough cases of the (precedent) being abused that we can see the need."

Cronin said he believes amending the federal tort claims act to allow some military malpractice lawsuits won't upend Defense Department operations. Cases that clearly fall within military orders and missions can be excluded, while non-combat mistakes that would be liable under civilian law are allowed. "In a lot of these cases, there's no reason that the Feres Doctrine should even apply," he said. "It's not an issue with the chain of command or getting in the way of appropriate order and discipline." Speier's office has not released details on what legislative options she may have to deal with those cases. Hearings for the committee and its subcommittees are expected to begin in the next few weeks. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | January 25, 2019 ++]

Nuclear Power Program ► Project Dilithium | Deployable Nuclear Reactors

Getting fuel to remote operating bases is a big problem for the U.S. military. In 2008, during the height of combat in Iraq, the Government Accountability Office estimated that more than 900,000 gallons of fuel went to bases for basic power needs like lighting and refrigeration (on top of the 6.7 million gallons the military burned that year in jets and ground vehicles.) The U.S. military's Strategic Capabilities Office has put out a request for information about small nuclear reactors that could deploy to the sorts of hillside forward bases U.S. troops set up in places like Afghanistan.

According to the request for “Project Dilithium,” the reactor should fit on a truck and a C-17 aircraft and generate from one to 10 megawatts of electric power for three years without refueling. Soldiers have to be able to stand it up in 72 hours and take it down in a week. It’s got to be meltdown-proof. The office is looking to fund three different prototype designs and will then select a winner from among them. The idea of deployable nuclear reactors only seems outlandish. In fact, the research has a long history in the military.

In 1954, the Army launched the Nuclear Power Program, under its Corps of Engineers developed a variety of nuclear reactor cores of different sizes. They were deployed to places like Fort Greely, Alaska; Sundance, Wyoming; Camp Century, Greenland; even a barge in Lake Gatun in the Panama Canal. All functioned well with no safety issues. But the military lost interest in the projects before too long. Oil was cheap and there was already a supply and logistics infrastructure to deliver it. The idea re-emerged in the 2000s, when hauling fuel to remote bases in Afghanistan proved costly — and perilous to convoy crews and frontline troops alike. In 2011, the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency, or DARPA, picked Army Col. Paul Roege to manage a six-year, \$150 million program to develop small, modular, nuclear reactors for forward bases.

Roege’s first step: figure out just how much electricity the troops needed. “Your basic case is a brigade-size base, 1,000-plus soldiers,” Roege said. “You might want two, 5-megawatt reactors...those type of basic operational requirements. That was probably enough to get us started on a prototype. Then you get into the specifics with the services in terms of security, safety.” But then came sequestration, and tough financial choices. Then-DARPA Director Regina Dugan faced the prospect of cutting money out of several programs or going after select big ones. The nascent program to develop small nuclear reactors was shoved overboard.

It was only recently that the military returned to the subject. In 2016, a Defense Science Board Study concluded, “There is an opportunity for exploration of the use of nuclear energy applications at forward and remote operating bases and expeditionary forces.” The board concluded that the best approach for these super small reactors was radioisotope thermoelectric generators. They work simply: as the reactor fuel — either plutonium-238 or strontium-90 — decays, it slowly but surely releasing lots of heat, which is converted by thermocouples into electricity. NASA uses these generators to power satellites and other spacecraft; the Soviets once used them to power Arctic lighthouses. The study proposes Schriever Air Force Base in Colorado and the Clear Air Force Station in Alaska as the most likely sites to host the reactors at first.

Last October, the U.S. Army put out its own study. Declared that small, mobile nuclear reactors present “a classic example of disruptive innovation,” the study said, “The return of nuclear power to the Army and DOD will have a significant impact on the Army, our allies, the international community, commercial power industry, and the nation. U.S. nuclear industry growth affects the nation economically and geopolitically. With nuclear industry growth, there is significant potential for generating thousands of jobs... while providing a deployable, reliable, and sustainable option for reducing petroleum demand and focusing fuel forward to support

Currently, Idaho National Lab and Los Alamos National Lab are working toward new designs for modular nuclear power. Andy Erickson, the deputy principal associate director of Global Security at Los Alamos, recently forecast that microreactors could be ready for deployment in “less than five years.” But there’s a lot to overcome, mostly in terms of regulations and skepticism. The Army study notes that the “existing nuclear regime, and its supporting treaties and other international agreements, are fashioned to support large, stationary nuclear facilities, not small, mobile, [nuclear power plants.] The rules have not kept pace with progress.”

There’s also a lot of confusion around the topic of nuclear power generally, especially after the 2012 Fukushima Daiichi disaster, a sensational event that obscured the fact that nuclear energy is far cleaner and safer than alternatives like oil and coal. Roege recalled many frustrating conversations spent trying to convince others that deployable nuclear power was worth further investigation. “We never got very far because most people don’t believe it’s something that could happen. Whenever the topic comes up, people dismiss it.” If it can work, it beats the alternative, hundreds of thousands of gallons of fuel trucked over dangerous enemy terrain. It seems there are fewer people dismissing the idea, now. [Source: Defense One | Patrick Tucker | January 24, 2019 ++]

Military Earplug Lawsuit ► Defective Earplug Impact On Vets

Retired Army General Jay Gothard said a legal settlement, between the maker of an earplug used by the military and the United States Department of Justice, made him feel violated. In the lawsuit, Case No. 3:16-1533-MBS, the U.S. government claimed that **Dual-Ended Combat Arms** Earplugs, made by Aearo Technologies but later acquired by 3M and sold to the Army, were "dangerously defective" and contributed to significant hearing loss in service members. According to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, more than half (52 percent) of combat soldiers return home with moderate or severe hearing loss. It costs taxpayers an estimated \$1 billion to treat the problem. "We spend a lot of our national treasure to insure that our national service members have the best equipment in the world – unfortunately, perhaps that didn't occur with these earplugs," he said of the Combat Arms earplugs.

The Department of Justice asserts that Dual-Ended Combat Arms Earplugs used by the military between 2003 and 2015 were defective, and that "3M employees were aware of the defects ... several years before 3M Aearo became the exclusive provider of the earplugs to the military." The DOJ alleged that the company knew the earplugs were too short for proper insertion and did not work correctly. In July, the government recently reached a \$9.1 million settlement with 3M. "The Department of Justice is committed to protecting the men and women serving in the United States military from defective products and fraudulent conduct," said Acting Assistant Attorney General Chad A. Readler of the Department's Civil Division in announcing the settlement. "Government contractors who seek to profit at the expense of our military will face appropriate consequences."

Raleigh attorney Ben Whitley, who represents some veterans, points out, "But none of that money goes to the veterans. That money is going back to the government and the whistle blower." Whitley has over 100 veteran clients for whom he is working to recover losses for the loss of their hearing. He anticipates filing civil lawsuits on their behalf. For Gothard, it's a case of tinnitus which results in a constant buzzing. "It sounds like a chorus of probably 10,000 cicadas on my shoulders 24 hours a day," he said.

3M did not admit any guilt or liability in the settlement. A 3M spokeswoman told WRAL News: *3M has a long history of serving the U.S. military. We have sold and continue to sell thousands of products to help our troops and support their missions, with safety as a key component. 3M disagrees with many of the allegations made by the government about the legacy Combat Arms Earplug product, and we do not believe it is the cause of injury. We chose to settle the matter for a variety of reasons, including to avoid further legal fees and because we do not relish the prospect of being in litigation with such an important and valued customer as the U.S. military or the government.*

It's not quite so easy for Gothard to put his problems behind him. "I'll live the rest of my life with a hearing problem which was probably aggravated by using these earplugs for a number of years," he said. After serving more than three decades in the Army, he's expecting to face another battle – this time in court. To read the DOD DOJ News Release on this case go to <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/3m-company-agrees-pay-91-million-resolve-allegations-it-supplied-united-states-defective-dual>. [Source: WRAL.com | Sloane Heffernan | January 23, 2018 ++]

M17/M18 Sidearm ► Army Fielding New Pistols w/Enhancers

In November 2018 the 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) became the first unit to field the U.S. Army's new M17 and M18 Modular Handgun System. The MHS handgun is a variant of the SIG SAUER® P320® pistol and is equipped with an external safety, an integrated MIL-STD-1913 Picatinny rail for the attachment of light and laser systems, self-illuminating night sights to maintain combat effectiveness in all lighting conditions, and is capable of accepting a sound

suppressor. Over the next 10 years the Army will distribute the new MHS handguns to all Army units replacing the M9 pistol, which has been in service since 1986.



As soon as April, soldiers could be getting a full sidearm kit complete with the Army's newest handgun, along with a new "pistol enhancer" and holster built to fit the device. The Army selected Laser Max Defense to provide more than 20,000 pistol enhancers for its M17/M18 sidearm. The 9mm handgun, built off a modified version of the Sig Sauer P320, began fielding to Army units in late 2017. It will be the standard issue sidearm for all the services moving forward, replacing the decades-old Beretta M9 pistol.

The pistol enhancer gives shooters white light, infrared laser and IR illuminator at the flick of a switch. The device slides on the short rail system at the front of the gun and rests flush with the barrel and sides, keeping bulkiness to a minimum. Chris Gagliano, marketing director for LMD, told Army Times that design work also included a flat bottom on the device, which gives it added stability over other such gear with rounded edges when shooting from a platform. Gagliano said that both the Air Force and Coast Guard, who also field the pistol, have been tracking the Army's testing. The device weighs 1.9 ounces without the battery and 2.6 ounces with the battery. The design also allows for operators to change batteries while the device is still on the pistol so they won't have to re-zero the weapon. The battery door also has knurled screws for finger grip and can be tightened using a multi-purpose tool or a dog tag so no specialty tools are needed.



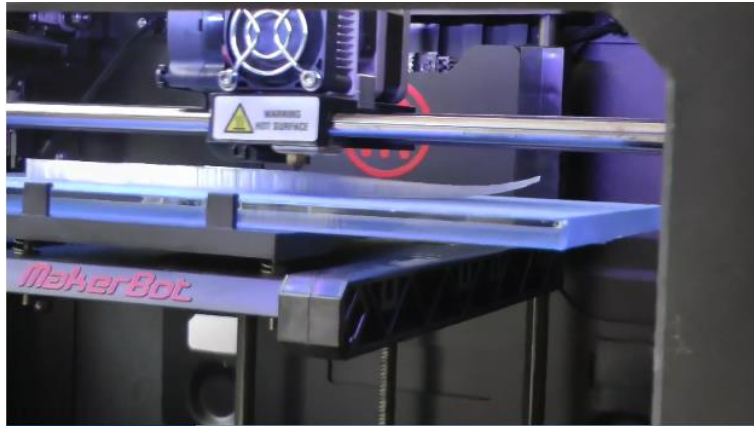
As far as adjusting fire, the enhancer has tic marks visible with night vision goggles for quick adjustments to the aiming point. The commercially available 123-volt battery gives the user two hours of continuous operation on the white light mode and up to six hours operation with the IR settings, Gagliano said. It comes in tan color for military handgun compatibility but is also offered in black for law enforcement use. A commercial version is being developed, depending on demand. LMD is looking to make a version with a more universal mounting base that would work on a variety of handguns for the civilian consumer market. [Source: ArmyTimes | Todd South | January 22/2019 ++]

U.S. Naval Academy Update 05 ► Audit Shows It Is Falling Apart

An audit has found that the Naval Academy has decaying walls, plumbing issues and condemned offices and balconies. The Capital Gazette reported Friday that it obtained the 2018 audit through a Freedom of Information Act request. The Naval Audit Service's report says the Annapolis, Maryland, college's infrastructure has degraded to the point of threatening its ability to train midshipmen. The report outlined 13 unfunded maintenance or renovation projects across 15 facilities between March 2017 and April 26. It says there are failing classrooms and athletic facilities, and the stormwater system has dumped unfiltered water into the Severn River. The Navy didn't release the costs of all unfunded

projects. Academy spokesman Cmdr. David McKinney says in a statement that the school agrees with the audit's findings and looks forward to addressing them. [Source: The Associated Press | January 20, 2019 ++]

Military 3D Printing ► **May Revolutionize Maintenance for Air Force F-22 Raptor**



The world's most expensive fighter jet soon may be flying with parts made from a 3D printer. Maintainers at Hill Air Force Base, Utah, last month installed for the first time a metallic 3D-printed bracket on an operational F-22 Raptor, according to the Air Force and Lockheed Martin, the company that produces the \$150 million aircraft. If the titanium piece holds up, the part will be installed on all F-22 aircraft during maintenance, and the use of 3D parts in the aircraft could be expanded, with the eventual goal of reducing depot time for the maintenance-prone jets, officials said. "We're looking to go a little bit further as this part proves itself out," said Robert Blind, Lockheed Martin modifications manager, as quoted in an Air Force release.

Though a first for the stealthy F-22, harnessing 3D printing technology for use in a combat jet isn't new among the services, which have used additive manufacturing for everything from Humvee door handles and rifle grips to gas mask modifications. The Marine Corps last April flew an F-35B Lighting II aircraft with a part supplied by a 3D printer to replace a worn, plastic bumper on the plane's landing gear door. The part was printed, approved and installed within a few days, eliminating a longer wait for a replacement part from the States. Unlike the Marines' plastic bumper, the 3D bracket in the F-22 was made using a powder bed fusion process with a laser to build the part layer by layer from a titanium powder, the Air Force said.

The printed bracket won't corrode, it said. It replaced a corrosion-prone aluminum component in the kick panel assembly of the cockpit that is replaced 80 percent of the time during maintenance. The part will be monitored while in service and inspected when the aircraft returns to Hill Air Force Base for maintenance, the release said. If validated, the part will be installed on all F-22 aircraft undergoing maintenance. The Air Force said it has at least five more metallic 3D printed parts it plans to test on the F-22. "Once we get to the more complicated parts, the result could be a 60 to 70 day reduction in flow time for aircraft to be here for maintenance," Robert Lewin, 574th Aircraft Maintenance director at Hill, said in the statement.

The Air Force did not say how much time or money 3D printing could save in F-22 maintenance. But Lewin said the technology gives the maintainers the ability to acquire replacement parts on short notice without minimum order quantities, an issue that's particularly challenging in the F-22 community due to the small fleet size. Maintenance problems and the small size of F-22 squadrons have contributed to low aircraft availability rates service-wide, a government report found last year. [Source: Stars and Stripes | Jennifer Svan | January 19, 2019 ++]

Payday Loans Update 05 ► CFPB Authority to Verify Lender’s MLA Compliance

The director of a federal agency has asked Congress for explicit authority to strengthen its enforcement of financial protections for service members. The Consumer Financial Protection Bureau wants specific authority to conduct examinations of payday lenders and others under their jurisdiction to ensure they’re complying with the Military Lending Act (MLA). Among other things, the MLA limits interest rates that can be charged to active-duty members and their dependents to 36 percent annual percentage rate. Last year, the CFPB pulled back on its regular examinations of payday lenders and others to make sure they’re complying with that law. CFPB determined they didn’t have authority to do those examinations, although they have been conducting the MLA exams for years.



In announcing the legislative proposal submitted on 17 JAN, CFPB Director Kathleen Kraninger said the bureau’s commitment to the well-being of service members “includes ensuring that lenders subject to our jurisdiction comply with the Military Lending Act so our service members and their families are provided with the protections of that law. “That’s why I have asked Congress to explicitly grant the bureau authority to conduct examinations specifically intended to review compliance with the MLA,” said Kraninger, who became director of the CFPB in December. Kraninger noted that she was pleased to see that legislation proposed recently in the House is also aimed at granting the bureau this authority. Consumer advocates, military community advocates and senators have urged the bureau to continue these MLA examinations, citing the need to proactively protect service members.

In an interview with Military Times, Kraninger said she has heard from a number of lawmakers that this issue is important to them. “It makes perfect sense to make sure that Congress clarifies” the authority, she said. “As we’ve looked at our authority, it’s not clear in this respect. Kraninger said CFPB examiners who monitor lenders for compliance with other laws and regulations do have the ability to highlight concerns or violations of the Military Lending Act. “If examiners see something related to the MLA, they absolutely cite it and make the company aware of it, and to the extent it needs to be taken to the next level, we have full enforcement authority when it comes the MLA,” Kraninger said. “What we’re seeking is narrow, explicit authority to do exams particularly on the MLA, to actively go in and do a concerted MLA-related exam.”

Kraninger had just come from Travis Air Force Base, California, where she met with a number of service members, including first sergeants who discussed some of the challenges of their airmen, she said, and how they handled it. She sat in on a financial readiness class, and talked to military attorneys, among others. She said it was “a great opportunity to see the changes made in roughly the last 15 years, the shift from support to readiness, the focus on financial readiness as an area of key importance.” In working with defense and service officials, she said, CFPB can help support them with tools and materials they need to protect service members, and to educate them on financial services and products.

Kraninger said some of the top issues discussed at Travis relate to housing costs, and vehicle purchases. With the high cost of living in the local area, there are issues with airmen’s ability to manage financially with the costs of housing, and making the right decisions. Car buying is another issue — airmen’s knowledge about best practices related to buying a vehicle, and how to avoid bad actors, she said. There were concerns about some landlords’ compliance with the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act in allowing service members to terminate their lease because of deploying, but

military attorneys have been able to resolve issues at the local level without going to the Department of Justice, she said. While Travis AFB was her first visit to a military base as director of CFPB, Kraninger said she hopes to visit more installations. “It’s important to me. It’s a responsibility we have at the bureau to support service members and dependents. It’s absolutely something I’m going to weave into trips as I get around the country.” [Source: MilitaryTimes | Karen Jower | January 19, 2019 ++]

Air Force KC-46 ► Delivery Accepted 10 JAN 2019

While the Air Force accepted delivery of the first KC-46 on the 10th, Boeing could face a total of \$4.5 billion in cost overruns and withheld payments on the initial \$4.9 billion contract for 52 KC-46 airborne tankers, depending on what happens as the company tries to fix the plane’s Remote Vision System. How does that work? Boeing has already spent more than \$3 billion of its own money getting the KC-46 started. And the Air Force announced, as it accepted delivery of the first KC-46 some 17 months late, that it may withhold up to \$28 million per plane until Boeing fixes the crucial Remote Vision System. RVS is a set-up of sensors and cameras which allows the boom operator to connect the tanker to the plane that needs gas. Sadly, the Rockwell Collins system doesn’t work well in certain light conditions. The Air Force says there are operational workarounds for the light conditions, but that’s what they are — workarounds. The service believes it will take Boeing three to four years to fix the RVS.



A tiger team from Boeing and the Air Force worked on RVS and developed nine critical parameters. Those must be met or the Air Force reserves the right to withhold \$28 million per plane. In the meantime, Air Force officials say the plane offers capabilities such as casualty evacuation, rapid offload of fuel to virtually all US combat aircraft (using either boom or drogue systems), is much more survivable than the current fleet and, most importantly, isn’t an antique. The average age of the KC-10 and KC-135 fleets is about 50 years. That’s why the service accepted delivery of the first plane, which Boeing considers a huge milestone.

In addition to RVS there is a need to redesign the boom so the KC-46 can refuel the venerable A-10. When the contract was awarded, the Air Force used the internationally accepted standard of 1,400 pounds pressure for the boom as it meets the refueling aircraft. The A-10 only develops 650 pounds. Since this is, in effect, a new requirement, the Air Force will eat the cost of redesigning the boom. What next? Four KC-46 will be delivered to McConnell followed by four to Oklahoma’s Altus Air Force Base. By this summer Air Force officials expect Boeing to hit a delivery rate of three to four aircraft each month. The long-term plan for Boeing appears simple — eat the costs of development now and make money as the Air Force purchase sweeps up to 179 planes, or more. [Source: Breaking Defense | Colin Clark | January 10, 2019 ++]

Robotic Targets ► Use Can Modernize any Range & Keep Marines, Soldiers Shooting Sharp

Upright, wheeled, semi-autonomous robots rolled their way across a dusty range here as a mock team of shooters mounted up for their attack. The robots took their places behind cardboard cover and began their own version of an

ambush setup. The human team sped into the zone on two all-terrain vehicles and engaged. Through programming, the robots know when they're being shot at, from where and if one of their compatriots has been hit. They react accordingly. They seek cover, use obstacle avoidance software to keep from running into each other or running over the shooter, should they close the distance.



The robots were on display for a shooting scenario at the Sig Sauer range day, part of the annual Shooting, Hunting, Outdoor Trade Show. And an estimated 6,000 Marines over the past year have had a chance to get some more realistic target practice than what they usually see in paper targets and specified, known distances. Ralph Petroff, president of the North America branch of Marathon Targets, touts his product as a way to make century-old ranges modern without rebuilding the whole enterprise. The robots effect goes beyond large fields with open terrain. They can be set up in urban environments and programmed for patterns of movement and move at differing speeds to mimic large crowds in which friendly and unfriendly actors are mixed together.

Retired Marine Col. Walt Yates, formerly head of Training Systems at Marine Corps Systems Command, now works as a consultant for Marathon. He noted that the Corps has been looking for a better way to do mobile shooting for a decade. The Marathon robots are robust, Petroff said they can withstand calibers up to .338mm range, which packs more punch than all but the .50 caliber in the current service branches' arsenals. The company has received an extension of a few months for further evaluation after the yearlong study recently wrapped up, Petroff said. The study ran from November 2017 through the end of 2018 and took place with Marines at Twentynine Palms, California; Quantico, Virginia; and Camp Lejeune, North Carolina. [Source: MarineCorpsTimes | Todd South | January 22, 2019 ++]

Nuclear Weapons Update 01 ► Work Completed on Navy's Upgraded Nuclear Warhead

The National Nuclear Security Administration has completed work on an updated nuclear warhead for the Navy, the first in a series of major life-extension programs for America's arsenal. The NNSA announced 23 JAN that as of December, all of the Navy's W76-0 warheads, introduced in the late 1970s, have been updated to the W76-1 design. The W76-1 warhead is placed on the re-entry vehicle for the submarine-launched Trident II D5 ballistic missile. Production on the W76-1 started in Sept. 2008; the modernization effort not only extends the service life of the weapons by about 20 years, but comes with added safety features, requiring what NNSA head Lisa Gordon-Hagerty called "significant modifications" to the design.

"Today is a shining example of the crucial role NNSA plays in enhancing our nation's nuclear security," Gordon-Hagerty said at a ceremony in Texas. Completing the W76-1 program is indeed a major milestone for the agency, not just because of the capability it will provide, but because it is the first of the major life-extension programs NNSA has underway — something of a proof-of-concept for the agency going forward. Gordon-Hagerty acknowledged at much, saying the program's completion is a sign the agency can "develop, execute and complete" future life extensions and modifications.

However, there may still be work to do for the W76 going forward, thanks to the Trump administration's decision to seek a low-yield variant of the weapon, dubbed the W76-2. Production for that design could be done as soon as next year or go through FY24, depending on funding, but its future is unclear; democrats oppose the warhead design, and Rep. Adam Smith of Washington, the new chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, has said he will look to kill the development and use those funds elsewhere. For now, Gordon-Hagerty said, the NNSA is "on track to meet DoD requirements" on the W76-2.

The next nuclear warhead program to hit a major milestone should be the B61-12, a new version of America's nuclear gravity bomb which will replace the B61-3, -4, -7 and -10 variants. That program is slated to deliver its first production unit in FY20 and complete production by FY24. NNSA estimates the program will cost between \$7.3 and \$9.5 billion. [Source: DefenseNews | Aaron Mehta | January 23, 2019 ++]

Nuclear Weapons Update 02 ► U.S. Cost Projected to be \$494B Over the Next Decade

If the U.S. carries out all of its plans for modernizing and maintaining the nuclear arsenal, it will cost \$494 billion over the next decade, an average of just less than \$50 billion per year, a new government estimate has found. The number, part of a biannual estimate put out by the Congressional Budget Office, is 23 percent over the previous estimate of \$400 billion released in 2017. That 2017 figure was a 15 percent increase over the 2015 number. The number will likely grab attention in Congress, especially on the House Armed Services Committee, where new Chairman Rep. Adam Smith (D-WA) has made it clear he's looking for ways to save money by cutting nuclear costs.

Told of the new estimate, ranking member Rep. Mac Thornberry (R-TX) acknowledged the topic as a possible partisan friction point and defended nuclear modernization as worth the cost. "What I believe all the previous estimates have been is that at no point does it take more than 7 percent of the defense budget — and from my standpoint, it's upon which most of our defense efforts are based," Thornberry said. "I have no doubt it will be a topic we discuss this year." Just more than half of that increase, however, is based on a technicality, driven by the fact that this projection covers two years later than the 2017 projection did, and a number of modernization programs will be further along — and hence costlier. Overall, the \$494 billion figure represents roughly 6 percent of overall projected defense spending during that time period.

Three notable changes featured in the Nuclear Posture Review — the development of a low-yield submarine-launched ballistic missile, development of a new sea-launched cruise missile and increased plutonium pit production — result in an estimated \$17 billion increase over the time period above what the number would have been without them. That number could increase should the administration follow through on plans in the NPR to keep the B83 nuclear bomb in service longer than intended, or if it develops a land-based nuclear cruise missile following an expected U.S. exit from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty. However, it is unclear whether those programs will move forward and at what levels, leaving that estimate "very uncertain." Overall, the Pentagon and the Department of Energy are preparing to spend the money in the following way:

- \$234 billion on strategic nuclear delivery systems and weapons, including submarines (an estimated \$107 billion over this time period), intercontinental ballistic missiles (\$61 billion) and long-range bombers (\$49 billion, less than the full projected cost of the dual-use bomber fleet); the nuclear warheads for use from those systems; and DOE's funding of nuclear reactors for the submarine fleet.
- \$15 billion on tactical nuclear delivery systems and weapons, including tactical aircraft for delivering weapons; management of the warheads for those tactical aircraft; and funding for the new submarine-launched cruise missile.
- \$106 billion for DOE's nuclear weapons laboratories and production facilities, where America's stockpile of nuclear warheads are maintained and developed. The department has a longstanding backlog on maintenance and upgrades for its locations.

- \$77 billion on nuclear command, control, commutations and early warning systems, used to coordinate any nuclear-related issues. While not as flashy as the weapons themselves, Pentagon officials over the last two years have sounded the alarm that nuclear command and control is at risk of being outdated without major investments.

The remaining \$62 billion in projected costs come from “CBO’s estimate of additional costs that would be incurred over the 2019–2028 period if the costs of nuclear programs exceeded planned amounts at roughly the same rates at which costs for similar programs have grown in the past.” When all that is factored in, CBO’s estimated annual cost rises from \$33.6 billion in 2019 to about \$63 billion in 2028, a roughly 90 percent increase over that period. [Source: DefenseNews | Aaron Mehta | January 24, 2019 ++]

Weapons Testing ► Navy Builds Hypersonic Test Ground in California

The Navy is refitting its decades-old China Lake weapons testing and research site in the Mojave Desert to begin hosting hypersonic weapons testing from a variety of platforms, including undersea launchers. A notice posted on a government contracting Website 23 JAN offered the first concrete evidence that the Pentagon is moving ahead on ambitious plans to develop a variety of weapons that can streak through the atmosphere and strike any target on the globe within an hour. The program, dubbed Conventional Prompt Strike, is a Pentagon-wide effort the Navy is taking a central role in developing, though no firm dates on the start of testing have been offered.

Part of the work being announced at China Lake fits into this plan, as there is a call for “conceptual design and operation” of an Underwater Test complex “which will include estimated costs, technology maturity and estimates on build schedules.” The Navy had not responded by publication to questions from Breaking Defense about the overall cost and schedule of the work at China Lake and whether it will become the primary nerve center for the Pentagon’s efforts. Overall, the Navy plans to collect data gathered at both test sites to “aide in the conceptual design of a new weapons system, through qualification of hardware, various components and systems,” but “also provide risk mitigation for the testing of the new weapons system on a ship, submarine, aircraft, and land to achieve the hypersonic capability as directed by the Office of the Secretary of Defense.”

The Pentagon’s 2019 budget called for increased funding for a cornerstone key hypersonics program from \$201 million in 2018 to \$278 million in 2019, with around \$2 billion in a variety of programs. The fiscal 2020 budget is due some time next month. Developing hypersonic weapons is the Pentagon’s “highest technical priority” undersecretary of Defense for research and engineering Michael Griffin has said. “In the last year, China has tested more hypersonics weapons than we have in a decade,” Griffin said last month. “We’ve got to fix that — hypersonics is a game changer.”

The solicitation calls for contractors to offer potential cost and scope of work estimates to improve and redesign the Launch Test Complex at China Lake, which is to be renamed the Air Launch Test complex. Work includes “site re-activation, test and evaluation, support to enable fielding or deployment, as well as upgrade, design and fabricate” a number of systems. They include a Test Payload Tube, Launch Test Stand, Launch Test Vehicles, Advanced Payload Module and a simulator. Whichever company wins the bid “will provide the air launch testing/capability to support the [Conventional Prompt Strike] program.”

While the Navy is building things in the desert, the Air Force and Army are working in hypersonics. Last April, the Air Force awarded Lockheed Martin a \$928 million contract for a hypersonic cruise missile to cover the “design, development, engineering, systems integration, test, logistics planning, and aircraft integration support of all the elements of a hypersonic, conventional, air-launched, stand-off weapon,” the service said at the time. The Army is also developing its blandly-monikered Alternate Re-Entry System, which is actually a maneuverable warhead that could end up on Mach 5-plus missiles fired from Air Force bombers and Navy vessels, as well as Army launchers on land. We each have pieces of programs,” Air Force Secretary Heather Wilson told a Washington Post forum late last year.

“The Army’s warhead had worked much better than the Air Force’s....So we’re going to take the Army warhead, put it on an Air Force booster, launch it off of a B-52, while the Army is developing on the ground and the Navy wants to put it on the deck of a ship.”

Navy Vice Adm. Johnny Wolfe, head of the service’s Strategic Systems Programs office, told a Naval Submarine League symposium in November that the Pentagon had forged an agreement with the Navy to develop a new hypersonic capability. “We have a program, we are funded, and we’re moving forward with that capability...whether it be from submarines or from surface ships,” Wolfe said.

The jury is still out on whether hypersonic missiles can be launched from submarines, and what modifications would have to be made to the missiles and surface ships to give them a sea-based capability. But according to the solicitation, the Navy is intent on finding out. The Pentagon is, as well. Military and civilian leaders have issued a steady stream of warnings over the past two years over the growing imbalance between US investments and those being made by Russia and China in hypersonics. The newly-released Missile Defense Review, while thin on details and vague about both the threat and efforts to counter hypersonic glide vehicles, calls for a Space Sensor Layer as a necessary countermeasure. In October 2017, the Navy tested its first version of a hypersonic boost-glide missile in Hawaii, which it plans on tweaking to make it capable of being launched from an Ohio-class submarine tube. [Source: Breaking Defense | Paul McLeary | January 23, 2019 ++]

USS Gerald A. Ford Update 11 ► Once Beleaguered by Critics, The Ford Gets A Lift

The aircraft carrier Gerald R. Ford is now closer than ever to becoming an operational flattop. The crew has taken charge of the first of the high-tech warship’s 11 Advanced Weapons Elevators and a second lift isn’t far behind in the building, testing and certification process, Navy officials say. In fact, this year the Ford should have all 11 elevators working, according to an official announcement last week shortly before a visit to Norfolk by Secretary of the Navy Richard Spencer and James Geurts, the civilian leader in charge of the service’s research, development and acquisition programs. Lawmakers on Capitol Hill grilled Guerts in November about the Ford’s elevators and other gadgets that have been bedeviled by gremlins since the carrier’s 2017 commissioning.

The Ford also has faced problems with its Advanced Arresting Gear and Electromagnetic Aircraft Launch System. EMALS has long been a source of disgruntlement to President Donald J. Trump, who repeatedly has bashed the digital replacement to steam catapults. But Pentagon officials insist that both EMALS and the Advanced Arresting Gear should be fully operational when the Ford returns to the sea this fall.

Navy officials say that the Ford’s new electromagnetic elevator design will move up to 24,000 pounds of ordnance at a rate of 150 feet per minute. The cables and pulleys on Nimitz-class carrier elevators can move 10,500 pounds at 100 feet per minute. “This will allow us to load more aircraft faster, and in the long run, increase our overall sortie generation rates,” said Lt. Cmdr. Chabonnie Alexander, the Ford’s ordnance handling officer. The elevators are a key part of the layout and design of the Ford-class carriers. Along with moving the position of the island and the refueling stations, they’re expected to help boost both sortie rates and combat power. The Ford’s designers set a goal of conducting sustained flight operations of 160 sorties per day for 30-plus days, with a surge capability of 270 sorties daily. Nimitz-class carriers are expected to run 120 sorties daily over the same span with a surge capability of 240 per day.

Called “Upper Stage #1,” the new elevator officially became the responsibility of the Ford’s crew on Dec. 21st after an engineering team from Huntington Ingalls Newport News Shipyard tested and certified it as operational. It’s located in the forward weapons handling area on the 02 level, just below the flight deck, according to Lt. Cmdr. Anthony Falvo, the ship’s public affairs officer. “Ford features three upper stage elevators that move ordnance between the main deck and flight deck, and seven lower stage elevators that move ordnance between the main deck and the lower levels of the

ship,” Falvo told Navy Times. The Ford’s dedicated weapons handling area is situated between the hangar bay and the flight deck on the 02 level. By placing it there, designers eliminated several movements necessary on Nimitz-class carriers and slashed the distance ordnance must travel from the magazine to the aircraft by 75 percent.

The Ford’s 11th elevator has been marked for “utility” use, which means it also can move other supplies to and from the flight deck and evacuate injured personnel to the hangar bay. “This allows the 10 main AWEs and Ford’s three aircraft elevators to be dedicated to their primary missions of ordnance and aircraft movement during real-world operations,” Falvo said. A new familiarization, operations and maintenance training program for the new elevators has kicked off and Lt. Cmdr. Alexander says his sailors are “100 percent invested in this, but there’s still work left to do” to get all the systems operational. “To be able to finally push the buttons and watch it operate like it’s designed to do was a great feeling,” he added. [Source: NavyTimes | Mark D. Faram | January 23, 2019 ++]

Warships That Will Change The Future ► TCG Heybeliada (F-511)



This is another ship which was originally intended to keep the Straits of Marmara open. The Ada Class TCG Heybeliada is a corvette which has had quite a few operational successes, including making sure that international commerce can easily flow in and out of the Black Sea and into the Mediterranean. Most recently, the ship has been transferred to the coast of Izmir in order to stop illegal immigrants travelling from Turkey to Greece.

The Heybeliada utilizes largely accepted "stealth" concepts concerning modern ship design - mainly the use of special coatings and enclosed structures and sides. Many hand rails and crevices detailed in ship designs prior are largely limited to help promote a cleaner profile and present a smaller radar signature. The exhaust funnel is wholly enclosed and kept low to the superstructure to further diminish radar returns while also representing a shallower side profile along the horizon. The mast is also enclosed and is home to the available systems and processing centers utilized by the vessel. The forecastle is well tapered at the bow and home to a single Italian 76mm OTO-Breda deck gun with an unobstructed firing arc ahead and to the sides. The bridge is positioned well-forward in the superstructure and is capped by the aforementioned mast assembly. Beyond the bridge, heading aft, is the smoke funnel found at midships and aft of this is the full-service hangar which can house a single medium-type transport helicopter as well as support Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) as required.

UAVs serve these type of warships by providing over-sea reconnaissance measures in addition to onboard systems. The naval helicopter of choice is the American-made Sikorsky S-70B "Seahawk" series, a multi-mission platform stocking several naval forces around the world since the mid-1980s. Aircraft are recovered/launched through a conventional flight deck at the stern (limited to rotary-wing aircraft). The sides of the vessel feature boat launches for Rigid-Hulled Inflatable Boat (RHIB) craft useful in quick interception of enemy vessels (including pirate craft) or

aiding in the recovery of persons (downed aviators, stranded civilians or similar). In addition to the 76mm deck armament, the TCG Heybeliada sports (or can be outfitted with) a bevy of weapons to suit the mission role. This includes 8 x Harpoon anti-ship missiles, 2 x 324mm Mk 32 triple-launch torpedo tubes (Mk 46 torpedoes), 21 x RIM-116 Rolling Airframe Missiles (RAMs), Mk 41 Vertical Launch Systems (VLSs) and 2 x 12.7mm Aselsan STAMP (STabilized Machine gun Platform). The STAMP system utilized laser/Infrared/Television tracking for more precise engagement, either through an automated setting or through manual acquisition/fire. A traversing missile launcher is fitted over the hangar door.

Beyond her conventional armament means, the TCG Heybeliada is also fielded with highly-capable sensor equipment and processing suites for her various tracking and engagement facilities. This includes Satellite Communications (SATCOM), Global Position System (GPS), protected communications data links, the SMART-S Mk 2 search radar and the G-MSYS (GENESIS) Combat Management System (CMS) - the latter used to control much of the onboard systems through one multi-processing suite. X-Band and a fire control radar are also standard fixtures and fitted to the mast. The vessel crew can call upon the ARES-2N for encrypted SIGnals INTelligence (SIGINT) and use various jammers and decoys to head off any potential, or active, launch threat from the air, from the surface or from below.

The Heybeliada displaces at approximately 2,500 tons and features a bow-to-stern length of 99.5 meters, a beam of 14 meters and a draught of 3.9 meters. Propulsion is obtained through a Combined Diesel And Gas (CODAG) arrangement made up of 1 x gas turbine and 2 x diesel engines driving 2 x shafts outputting 40,200 horsepower. This supplies the vessel with an optimal speed of 30 knots in ideal conditions (about 15 knots during normal cruise) and an operational range of 3,500 nautical miles (approximately 4,000 miles). The vessel can remain on station for up to ten days without resupply and this can then be bolstered to twenty-one days through regular resupply/refueling measures at-sea. Her full crew complement (including air wing) is listed at 93 personnel while the ship boasts living space for up to 106 persons under war time / humanitarian conditions.

Navy Terminology, Jargon & Slang ► Banca Boat thru BB Stacker

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

Banca Boat – Term for any small native craft, especially in the Western Pacific or Indian Ocean/Persian Gulf. ‘Banca’ is literally translated from the Tagalog as ‘boat.’

Bandit – (1) Air contact positively identified as hostile. (2) (RCN) A sailor often in trouble.

Bang Seat - (UK) Ejection seat.

Banjo, Butty – (1) (RN) A sandwich. Also ‘sarnie’. (2) (USN) ‘Banjo’ is also a nickname for the F-2 Banshee fighter.

Banyan - (RCN/UK) A barbecue or party on the flight deck, usually with steaks and beer. The term is derived from ‘banian’, a garment worn by an East Indian sect which neither kills nor eats meat (‘Banyan’ is a species of tree). In the 18th century, the British navy denied its sailors meat on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays; these days were known

as 'banian (or Banyan) days.' The term has now come to mean just the opposite. The USN form is STEEL BEACH (without the beer).

Bar Hog – A woman who hangs out in bars.

Barrack Stanchion – (RNZN) A sailor who rarely goes to sea.

Barricade (the) - (1) A device vaguely similar to (but much larger than) a tennis net which can be rigged and used to stop an aircraft which is unable to TRAP. Aka 'barrier'. (2) In the days of the straight-deck carriers, the barricade was a series of devices rigged during normal landing operations to prevent an aircraft which failed to trap from smashing into THE PACK, graduating from a low barrier which just engaged the landing gear, all the way to a device more similar to the contemporary one.

Basha – An improvised shelter.

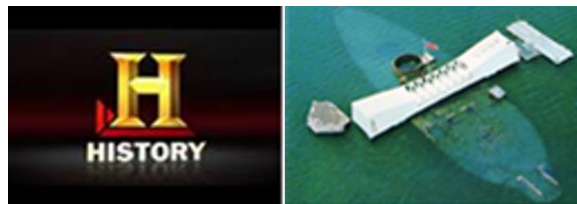
Batten Down – Make fast, secure, or shut. Originally, deck hatches did not have hinged, attached covers. Hatch covers were separate pieces which were laid over the hatch opening, then made fast with battens (pieces of timber).

Battle Cover – The steel cover for a port or deadlight.

BB Stacker - Generically, any ORDIE.

[Source: <http://hazegray.org/faq/slang1.htm> | January 31, 2019 ++]

* Military History *



The Battle of Kham Duc ► MOH Joe Jackson's Involvement

The incident took place on May 12, 1968, at a camp for U.S. Special Forces and South Vietnamese irregular troops called Kham Duc. The base was located 16 kilometers from the Laotian border and surrounded by sweeping mountains on all sides. During the pivotal Tet Offensive, largely seen as a turning point for the American public's perception of the Vietnam War, Kham Duc came to be surrounded by North Vietnamese Army forces and Viet Cong fighters. The enemy troops were part of a larger assault force that had been repelled by U.S. forces during an attack on Da Nang Air Base. After the battle for Da Nang in early February 1968, the NVA and VC melted back into the jungle and managed to evade U.S. intelligence for several months. In May, the enemy emerged and began attacking outposts surrounding the Special Forces camp and paved runway at Kham Duc.

The larger assault began 11 MAY. Although the U.S. had by this point reinforced Kham Duc, the intense attack involving artillery, mortars and recoilless rifles being fired from tall mountains overlooking the base convinced Army Gen. William Westmoreland, commander of U.S. forces in South Vietnam, to order an evacuation. Roughly 1,000 people, including a mix of U.S. soldiers, local allies and civilian family members loyal to the American cause, needed to be airlifted out. The evacuation began the morning of 12 MAY and involved cargo and helicopter transports, as well as airstrikes around the besieged camp.

Joe Jackson received orders to pilot a C-123 Provider with the 311th Air Commando Squadron. Although the C-130 was quickly becoming the premier airlift provider by this time, the C-123 proved useful for landing in the remote jungles and on the short airstrips dotting the country. He almost didn't land at Kham Duc on 12 MAY. That morning, eight aircraft had been lost during the evacuation — one of which was a C-130 loaded to the brim with Vietnamese civilians. Jackson didn't arrive on-station until the afternoon, however. By that point, the evacuation was finishing up, the weather was deteriorating, and the former Special Forces base was littered with burning aircraft wreckage and artillery craters. Except there had been a mistake.

As the last C-130 took off with the final group of evacuating personnel, the commander of the airlift ordered airstrikes to be dropped on the abandoned base and its equipment. "Negative, negative!" a C-130 pilot yelled over the radio. He reportedly punctuated his remarks with profanity as he explained that he had just reinserted three airmen on the airfield based on orders from higher up. The cacophony of fighter pilots, cargo aircrews, forward air controllers, and battle-space commanders abruptly ended. The C-130 pilot later remembered that an "unreal" silence fell over the radio waves. Major Gallagher, Sergeant Freedman and Sergeant Lundie, the three-man Air Force combat control team that was dropped off to direct airlift in and out of Kham Duc, had been left behind in the confusion.

The men had been at the airfield since 10 MAY, but were evacuated earlier in the day on 12 MAY via a bullet-riddled C-130 after their jeep containing their primary radios had been pummeled by artillery rounds. Not long after evacuating from Kham Duc, the combat control team was ordered back in, despite them being down to only emergency radios. After landing once more, they began searching compounds for personnel to help evacuate, but found no survivors. The airmen didn't know how close they came to being victims of their own air power, because their radios weren't working and they couldn't coordinate with the pilots overhead.

"They called that [airstrike] off, sent an observation plane down to see if they could locate them and they weren't able to," Jackson said, according to his archived interview in the Library of Congress. At this point, the airmen on the ground — armed with only M-16 rifles and .38 caliber revolvers — were hugging dirt as they watched the North Vietnamese set up .50 caliber machine gun emplacements on either side of the runway, one of which was under the wing of the destroyed C-130. The airmen exchanged fire with the nearest gun emplacement as the enemy tried to load the weapon. They saw an enemy gunner keel over, silencing one of the .50 cal's, according to the after-action report of the battle. The other gun continued to fire at them periodically as they watched a second group of North Vietnamese approach from the west end of the runway. The men said that blasts from exploding ammunition dumps began to surround them.

The combat controllers recounted in their after-action reports that they were convinced no one would come for them — that it was impossible to land at Kham Duc airfield now that the enemy was upon it. "[I] never felt so lonely in all my life," Freedman later said. Because the airmen's radios weren't reaching the pilots above, the men were convinced they would be considered dead. But unbeknownst to them, two C-123 aircraft were working through the problem. There was one C-123 pilot ahead of Jackson in the airfield's landing pattern. He was going to fly in first and try to find the lost combat controllers. "He went in and landed, and I watched his approach coming in off the jungle from the southwest," Jackson said. "Even at 9,000 feet I could see tracers coming out of the jungle aimed at his airplane. And as soon as he touched down, he came under heavy attack from both sides of the runway. But he touched down, rolled down the runway and he didn't see anybody right offhand. So, he came under this heavy attack from both sides and he applied the power and went around."

Just as the pilot took off, the combat controllers came running out of their hiding spot. The enemy fire forced them to dive for cover once again, but the pilot at least saw them. That C-123 was out of fuel, though, so he relayed to Jackson where he had seen the three men and returned to base. Jackson's crew was up next. "From 9,000 feet, I started an extremely steep landing approach," Jackson said. "We call it an assault landing approach, where it had full flaps down to cause as much drag as possible, put the landing gear out to increase the drag, put the propellers in flat pitch, so that that would hold us back, and pitched over." Jackson didn't know how fast they were descending, but he did know his air speed was maxed-out for that configuration at 135 knots. 'I was the luckiest guy in the world' "The rate

of descent had hit the limit on the instruments,” he said. “I told the guys I’m not going to reverse the propellers, because to do that would shut down the auxiliary jet engines. And I didn’t want to take time to restart them. ... I said, ‘We’re not going to be on the ground very long.’”

Jackson’s C-123 managed to touch down in the first 100 feet of the runway, stopping exactly opposite the three lost airmen who were taking cover in a ditch. “I was the luckiest guy in the world,” Jackson said. “They started running out. ... They belly-flopped on-board the airplane.” As the airmen jumped in, the co-pilot called out, “Oh, my god, look at that!” “A 122 millimeter rocket had been fired directly towards the airplane,” Jackson said. “It skidded down the runway and broke in half and stopped right immediately in front of the nose wheel of the airplane. I mean, really, really close. It didn’t go off. So, again, I was the luckiest guy in the world, I guess.” The loadmaster yelled back that they were ready for take-off. Jackson hit the throttle, taxied around the unexploded ordnance and flew out of Kham Duc for good. “As I was taking off, automatic weapons and small-arms fire was directly in front of me and probably behind me as well, from both sides of the runway,” he said. “The spot where we were parked, that spot erupted with mortar fire. They had just had time to load in some rounds in the tubes and lob them over there.”

Jackson cruised back to Da Nang Air Base as artillery fire gave way to thunder, and the weather deteriorated over the abandoned U.S. base. Jackson would eventually be awarded the Medal of Honor by President Lyndon B. Johnson on January 16, 1969. Kham Duc would eventually be reoccupied by U.S. forces, but the initial withdrawal was considered a major defeat for the Americans. Many of the bodies of the Americans who perished at Kham Duc would not be repatriated for several decades. The remains of six airmen from the downed C-130, for instance, weren’t located until the early 1990s.



A little while after the fall of Kham Duc, a friend of Jackson’s named Keith Ferris did a painting of the 12 MAY evacuation. He sent Jackson a slide for critiques on accuracy, to which Jackson replied that it was mostly correct. “But you know, with the actual layout of those airplanes, the [Cessna O-2 Skymaster] that had been shot down, the helicopter on the runway and the C-130 that was wrecked right there, I said the orientation of the C-123 I was flying was not correct,” Jackson told Ferris. “He told me that he had to take a little artistic liberty here to get all the action in. And I said, ‘Well, okay, you take all the artistic liberty you want to, but I’m not going back and pose for that picture again.’ “We had a little chuckle over that. Anyway, he named his picture the Miracle at Kham Duc,” Jackson said. “A little later on, I was talking with Keith and he said: ‘Really, you know, there were two miracles there that afternoon. One is that you were able to get in and get out safely. And the other one is there was not a single bullet hole in your airplane.’”
Source: Aviation History Magazine | Robert Guttman | December 27, 2018 ++]

Leningrad Siege ► **Tamara Chernykh’s Survival**

Tamara Chernykh, 81, still can’t forget those tiny pieces of bread that her granny used to put under her pillow as a night treat for a starving four-year-old girl in besieged Leningrad during the deadly winter of 1941-1942. Chernykh’s

grandmother, who gave the bread out of her own scanty food ration, said they would bring good dreams. What her granny didn't tell her was that while sharing her bread with the little girl she was dying from starvation herself.

The siege of Leningrad lasted nearly 2 ½ years until the Soviet Army drove the Nazi troops away on Jan. 27, 1944. Estimates of the death toll vary, but historians agree that more than one million Leningrad residents died of hunger and air and artillery bombardment in one of the most horrifying episodes of World War II. On 26 JAN, Russian President Vladimir Putin, a native of the city, led events marking the 75th anniversary of the end of the blockade of the city that has regained its old name, St. Petersburg.

When the advancing Nazi troops closed the circle around Leningrad on September 8, 1941, Chernykh's family consisted of six members living together: herself, her mother, her 12-year-old brother Valentin, her mother's sister and her four-month-old baby daughter, and the granny. As the city faced daily air raids and artillery barrage, the family moved to a basement downstairs, where all six slept together on a full-size bed, with the baby in the middle to keep her warm. Like most Leningrad residents, they had to survive on a daily ration of just 125 grams (less than 0.3 pounds) of bread and whatever other food they could buy or exchange at local markets after selling their belongings.

In the daytime, Chernykh and her baby cousin mostly stayed put under several blankets in the darkness. There was no heating during the first and the coldest winter of the siege, when temperatures outside sometimes plunged to -40 degrees C (-40 degrees F). To distract the children from hunger, cold and bombardments, Chernykh's mother kept reading them stories and poems. Everyone's favorite fairy tale at the time was the one about the magic tablecloth that brought any food desired. "We imagined how that tablecloth would give us meat, fish, soup, porridge," Chernykh told The Associated Press at her apartment. "As for me, I always had a special dream about a sugar roll with cream."

Chernykh's granny was the first to die. "One morning I woke up to not find her in our bed," she said. "My mom said that granny went to see a doctor, but somehow I understood the truth and cried bitterly." Chernykh's brother, who helped extinguish fire bombs dropped by Nazi planes, got infected with brain fever and died in a hospital. Miraculously, Chernykh's baby cousin, Galina, survived even though her mother lost her breast milk during the siege. "They say she survived thanks to the chocolate that Galina's father, who fought the Nazis outside Leningrad, brought now and then from his army food ration," Chernykh said.

Natalya Malacheva, 68, says her family still keeps a pledge taken by her grandmother during the siege. Malacheva's grandmother and a relative promised on Jan. 1, 1942 that if they survive, they'd take care of the grave of Malacheva's uncle, then a 21-year-old medical student who died from hunger and pneumonia. "To this day our family takes care of the grave," Malacheva said. "I bring my grandchildren there on important memory dates."



Tamara Chernykh, 81, dances during a party marking the 75th anniversary of complete ending of the blockade in St. Petersburg, Russia.

Chernykh and her remaining family were evacuated from the city in September 1942, travelling by a barge along the Ladoga Lake that was constantly barraged by Nazi warplanes. She remembers the joy of a warm porridge with

butter that was served before the ride — but still shudders at the memory of another barge with hundreds of people on board that followed theirs being hit by a Nazi plane. “A sailor on our barge had to cut the towing cable to save our barge from sinking along,” she said. “Nobody from the sunken barge survived. It was dreadful to see only a suitcase that popped up on the waves.”

After the siege, Chernykh graduated from a medical school, worked for the Red Cross, became an honorable donor and wrote poetry about the siege. She has two children and five grandchildren, and at her age is still full of energy, doing up to 10 kilometers (6 miles) Nordic walking daily. [Source: The Associated Press | Irinia Titova | January 28, 2019 ++]

SADM Units ▶ **Hand Carried Nukes Users**

You probably did it with a firecracker when you were a kid. You'd set it on rock or a stump, then you'd light the fuse, clamp your hands over your ears and run, to get out of range of the cardboard shrapnel. Or, if you set it on someone's porch, you ran so as not to get caught. Well, that's what Mark Bentley of De Pere practiced doing in the U.S. Army, only he did it with atomic bombs: Carry one on your back, plant it somewhere, set the timer, clamp your hands over your ears and run like hell. “We all knew it was a one-way mission, a suicide mission,” Bentley, who is now 68 and quite probably not even quick enough anymore to outrun firecracker shrapnel, told the Green Bay Press-Gazette.



You might not have realized they ever made A-bombs small enough for one man to carry, but they did. They had one called the W54 that fit into a duffel bag. It was less than a tenth as powerful as “Little Boy,” the one dropped on Hiroshima a quarter-century earlier, but without benefit of you being able to fly away in an airplane before it goes off. There was also a bigger one that fit into a 55-gallon drum, two or three times as powerful as the one you could carry on your back, Bentley recalled.

It was part of the post-WWII, Cold War era in which the Soviet Union was viewed as an expansionist threat into western Europe, said John Sharpless, newly retired professor at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, where he taught a class on the period. “The Soviet Union had a substantially larger land army, considerably larger than NATO and the U.S.,” Sharpless said. “When you consider the possibility of war in Europe, if the Russians decided to invade from the east, it would be nearly impossible to stop them. So, one strategy was to block various access routes and perhaps funnel them into an area where you could use larger weapons against them.” That was the apparent strategy with the hand-carried nukes, Bentley said — not to nuke Russians directly but rather nuke big holes in the Alps, so that all the resultant ash would fill up the valleys and prevent Soviet tanks and trucks from being able to pass, he said.

The hand-carried nukes evolved out of even smaller nuclear weapons that had been developed in the 1950s, Sharpless said. Those included the Davy Crockett nuclear warheads that could be fired from bazookas and even recoilless rifles, he said. “The problem was, the blast range was larger than the trajectory,” he said. In other words, you couldn't shoot them far enough to keep yourself out of harm's way. That essentially was the same worry about the hand-carried nuclear mines that Bentley and his fellow soldiers were training to plant: You were unlikely to be able to get out of range yourself.

The funny thing is, Bentley put in for the duty. And no, not because he was suicidal. The year was 1968, when the Vietnam War was still raging, and Bentley, a new high school graduate, had an alarmingly low draft number. “It's the

only lottery I ever won," said Bentley, who was holding lucky number 27. Enrolling in college, getting married, having a son — none of it staved off the inevitable. "The question was, do I go in as a draftee and essentially become a target for two years, or do I enlist for three and maybe get to do something I want?" he said. He decided to enlist. His timing wasn't great; the draft was eliminated just about when he signed the dotted line. But at least the Vietnam War was coming to an end.

He eventually found himself at Fort Belvoir, Virginia, home of the Army engineers. At first, he was trained in a program to deliver acetylene and oxygen to engineers to do repairing and welding in the field. That program was finally deemed unfeasible and he was transferred to one of the Special Atomic Demolition Muniton (SADM) platoons. He recalled he was in one of two such platoons stationed stateside, training, while several others were stationed in central Europe. Anyway, Bentley never got to the Alps. He kept training and practicing against the possibility of Soviet aggression in Virginia. They took turns carrying a dummy version of the bomb into the woods near the base, setting the timer and imagining the results. "You constantly trained," he said. "You talk about something being driven through your brain — that's all you ate, slept and thought about eight hours a day."

He got to carry the duffel bag bomb once and set the timer. "You set your timer, and it would click when it went off, or it went ding or I forget what, but you knew you were toast," he said. "Ding! Your toast is ready, and it's you." In theory, you could set the timer to give you enough time to flee properly, but somebody would have to stay behind and secure the site, Bentley said. "The Army is not going to set a bomb like that and run away and leave it, because they don't know if someone else would get ahold of it," he said. "They have to leave troops there to make sure it's not stolen or compromised, and that would just be collateral damage. You didn't go out with the thought that it was anything other than a one-way mission. If you're Bruce Willis, you get away, but I ain't Bruce Willis."

Mercifully, even the platoons stationed near the Alps never got a chance to set off a real one. Maybe the Army decided nukes were better off being dropped from planes, or maybe the threat of attack dwindled as the Cold War was beginning to wind down, Bentley was never sure. But he wasn't surprised. "I banked on them never doing it," he said. While actually having to do it would be a scary proposition, merely hanging out in a base not too far from Washington, D.C., and training for it was pretty good duty in Bentley's mind. "It was a great place to be stationed," he said. "Being a history nut, I had battlefields to visit . . . Jefferson's home at Monticello, Madison's home a couple miles away. We went camping on weekends, at Bull Run. How many people can say they camped at Bull Run, at a national Civil War battlefield?"

Bentley got out in August 1975, a few years before the SADM units were entirely disbanded. For some reason, he didn't find a lot of civilian employers clamoring to hire someone trained in hand-delivering atomic bombs. His undergraduate degree was in business education, but he quickly learned teaching wasn't for him, so he got a master's degree in personnel and industrial relations and spent most of his working years dealing with union negotiations and other human resources jobs. "The best thing I ever did was go into the Army," Bentley said. "You won't hear many people say that, but you were exposed to so many different ways of life, occupations, places to live, people." [Source: Green Bay (Wis.) Press-Gazette via the AP | Paul Srubas | January 14, 2019 ++]

USS Pueblo Update 06 ► Held Hostage for 11 Months | Freed 2 days Before Xmas

On the afternoon of Jan. 23, 1968, an emergency message reached the aircraft carrier Enterprise from the Navy vessel Pueblo, operating in the Sea of Japan. A North Korean ship, the message reported, was harassing Pueblo and had ordered it to heave to or be fired upon. A second message soon announced that North Korean vessels had surrounded Pueblo, and one was trying to put an armed party aboard the American ship. By then it was clear something was seriously amiss, but Enterprise, which was operating 500 miles south of Wonsan, North Korea, was unsure how to respond.

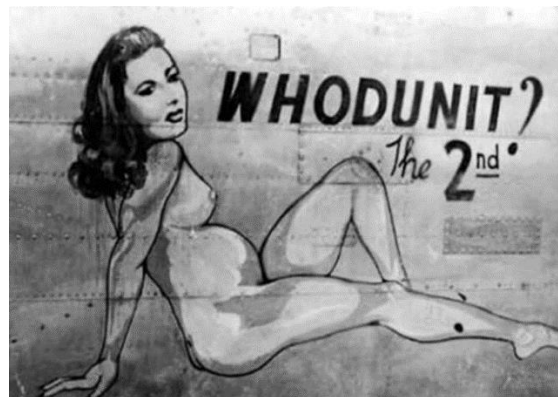
“Number one,” recalled Enterprise commanding officer Kent Lee, “we didn’t know that there was such a ship as Pueblo....By the time we waited for clarification on the message, and by the time we found out that Pueblo was a U.S. Navy ship...it was too late to launch.” This confusion was replicated elsewhere. Messages had started to flood the nation’s capital as well, but with similar results. Inside the White House Situation Room, watch officer Andrew Denner quickly recognized the gravity of the incident and started making calls but could obtain little information. “I couldn’t find any people in the Pentagon,” he later lamented, “who’d ever heard of Pueblo.” Soon, however, almost everyone in America would know of Pueblo, even if the details were sketchy in 1968 and for many decades thereafter. To read more on the details and the eventually outcome of the incident refer to the attachment to this Bulletin titled, “**The Pueblo Incident**”. [Source: Military History Magazine | Mitch Lerner | December 21, 2018 ++]

War Memorials ► Liberty WWI Memorial, Kansas City, Missouri



The Liberty Memorial, dedicated in 1926, was one of the earliest monuments erected to honor the soldiers who perished in World War I. A pillar of limestone, concrete, and steel rising 217 feet, the Liberty Memorial is now surrounded by the [National World War I Museum](#), the official museum dedicated to the "Great War." The museum was opened to the public in 2006.

WWII Bomber Nose Art [23] ► Whodunit? The 2nd



Post WWII Photos ▶ **First U.S. Cemetery at Saint-Laurent-sur-Mer France**



One year after the D-Day landings in Normandy, German prisoners landscape the first U.S. cemetery at Saint-Laurent-sur-Mer , France , near " Omaha " Beach, on May 28, 1945. (AP Photo/Peter J. Carroll)

Every Picture Tells A Story ▶ **Continuation War**



It was a small aircraft, but a large hat! A curious Finnish soldier pokes his head inside the cockpit of a nosed-over Russian Polikarpov I-16 on the Finnish-Russian front. This was during the second war between the two nations, known as the Continuation War. The Soviet pilot of the I-16 had made a forced landing near the village of Riiska on the shores of Lake Suvanto in Karelia. The diminutive but pudgy I-16 was a target for many nicknames, mostly mocking. The Russians called it the *Isak* (Donkey) or *Ishakok* (Burro) while their Finnish opponents called it the *Siipiorava* (Squirrel). It was used during the Spanish Civil War, where it was known as the *Rata* (Rat) by the Nationalists and the *Mosca* (Fly) by the Republicans.

Military History Anniversaries ▶ **01 thru 14 FEB**

Significant events in U.S. Military History over the next 15 days are listed in the attachment to this Bulletin titled, "**Military History Anniversaries 01 thru 14 FEB**". [Source: This Day in History www.history.com/this-day-in-history | January2018 ++]

Medal of Honor Citations ► Roy W. Harmon | WWII



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

ROY W. HARMON

Rank and organization: Sergeant, U.S. Army, Company C, 362d Infantry, 91st Infantry Division

Place and date: Near Casaglia, Italy, 12 July 1944

Entered service: Pixley, Calif.

Born: 1915 Talala, Oklahoma

Citation

He was an acting squad leader when heavy machinegun fire from enemy positions, well dug in on commanding ground and camouflaged by haystacks, stopped his company's advance and pinned down 1 platoon where it was exposed to almost certain annihilation. Ordered to rescue the beleaguered platoon by neutralizing the German automatic fire, he led his squad forward along a draw to the right of the trapped unit against 3 key positions which poured murderous fire into his helpless comrades. When within range, his squad fired tracer bullets in an attempt to set fire to the 3 haystacks which were strung out in a loose line directly to the front, 75, 150, and 250 yards away. Realizing that this attack was ineffective, Sgt. Harmon ordered his squad to hold their position and voluntarily began a 1-man assault. Carrying white phosphorus grenades and a submachine gun, he skillfully took advantage of what little cover the terrain afforded and crept to within 25 yards of the first position. He set the haystack afire with a grenade, and when 2 of the enemy attempted to flee from the inferno, he killed them with his submachine gun. Crawling toward the second machinegun emplacement, he attracted fire and was wounded; but he continued to advance and destroyed the position with hand grenades, killing the occupants. He then attacked the third machinegun, running to a small knoll, then crawling over ground which offered no concealment or cover. About halfway to his objective, he was again wounded. But he struggled ahead until within 20 yards of the machinegun nest, where he raised himself to his knees to throw a grenade. He was knocked down by direct enemy fire. With a final, magnificent effort, he again arose, hurled the grenade and fell dead, riddled by bullets. His missile fired the third position, destroying it. Sgt. Harmon's extraordinary heroism, gallantry, and self-sacrifice saved a platoon from being wiped out, and made it possible for his company to advance against powerful enemy resistance.



Harmon joined the Army and by July 12, 1944, was serving as a Sergeant in Company C, 362nd Infantry Regiment, 91st Infantry Division. On that day, near Casaglia, Italy, he single-handedly attacked three German positions which were firing on a friendly platoon. He destroyed one position and, despite being wounded on his approach, continued to silence another. He was killed while attacking the third position. For these actions, he was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor a year later, on October 2, 1945. Harmon was buried at the Florence American Cemetery in Florence, Italy. Harmon was one of six Native Americans to receive the Congressional Medal of Honor.

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

*** Health Care ***



TRICARE Urgent/Emergency Care Update 03 ► Do You Know the Difference?

You feel lousy and know you need medical care. But you aren't sure if your symptoms require urgent or emergency care. Sometimes it's difficult to know [level of care you need](#). Especially when you're hurt or sick. Learn the difference between emergency and urgent care, and the rules for your TRICARE plan now. That way, you'll be able to make informed decisions should the need arise.

What is Emergency Care?

An emergency threatens life, limb, or eyesight. Examples include severe bleeding, spinal cord or back injury, chest pain, broken bones, or difficulty breathing. Other types of emergencies include maternity and psychiatric. If you have an emergency, go to the nearest emergency room or call 911. If overseas, call the emergency medical service for your area. You want to get in touch with your primary care manager or regional contractor within 24 hours or the next business day after you receive care.

What is Urgent Care?

Urgent care is care you need within 24 hours for a non-emergency illness or injury that requires treatment. Examples include a rising fever or sprained ankle. You should get urgent care before your condition becomes an emergency. Most TRICARE beneficiaries can visit an urgent care center whenever needed, but you should check the [urgent care rules](#) for your plan. When possible, visit a [TRICARE network provider](#) or a TRICARE-authorized (network or non-network) urgent care center to avoid additional out-of-pocket costs. If you're a family member or retiree and get urgent care from a non-network provider outside of a TRICARE-authorized urgent care center, you'll have to pay [point-of-service cost-shares](#). You can find TRICARE-authorized urgent care centers by searching your region's [provider](#)

[directory](#).. Active duty service members enrolled in TRICARE Prime or TRICARE Overseas Program Prime must continue to visit military hospitals and clinics for urgent care. A referral would be required for civilian urgent care.

Not Sure Where to Go After Hours? Call Military Health System Nurse Advice Line

If you're not sure whether to seek urgent care, emergency care, or routine care, contact the Military Health System (MHS) [Nurse Advice Line](#). You can call, chat online, or video chat with a [registered nurse 24/7](#). The nurse can answer questions and give you medical advice. You can also get help with scheduling an appointment within 24 hours at a military hospital or clinic, if available. In the U.S., call the MHS Nurse Advice Line at 1-800-TRICARE (1-800-874-2273) and choose option 1. For all country-specific numbers, visit the [MHS Nurse Advice Line website](#). The MHS Nurse Advice Line is available to TRICARE beneficiaries living or traveling in the U.S. or a country with an established military hospital or clinic. However, if you have the [US Family Health Plan](#), there's a different resource for you to use.

Take command of your health in 2019 by learning more about your emergency and urgent care coverage. And how to get care based on your TRICARE plan. Remember costs differ based on who you are and your plan, so visit [Health Plan Costs](#) for information.

[Source: TRICARE Communications | January 15, 2019 ++]

Hemochromatosis ► Research Reveals Genetic Condition More Serious Than Previously Thought

New research has revealed that hemochromatosis—a genetic condition that causes more than a million Americans to absorb too much iron from their diets—is a much more serious cause of disease and disability than previously thought. The upside is that the condition is easy to detect and treat.

Two new studies, published in *The BMJ* and *The Journals of Gerontology: Medical Sciences*, showed that hemochromatosis, previously thought to be a low-level health risk, actually quadruples risk of liver disease and doubles the risk of arthritis and frailty in older people. It also causes higher risk of diabetes and chronic pain, and a small number of patients develop liver cancer. The research was led by a team from the University of Exeter in the United Kingdom, the University of Connecticut, and the NIA Intramural Research Program.

The disease is caused by two mutations in the gene known as HFE C282Y that codes for a protein regulating iron absorption. In a study about 10 times larger than any previous look at hemochromatosis rates, the team reviewed data on 2,890 British people who carried the two mutations. They found that one in five men and one in 10 women with these mutations developed additional diseases as they got older, compared to those without the genes. Hemochromatosis sufferers were also more likely to have chronic pain, lower muscle strength, and to be frail as they aged.

Hemochromatosis symptoms, such as fatigue and muscle and joint pains, are easily confused as part of typical aging, and the disease often goes undetected until damage is done. Known in Ireland as the Celtic Curse, the disease is common in Northern Europe. One in 300 U.S. non-Hispanic whites have two copies of the mutated gene, and about 10 percent are carriers. Women are less at risk for the condition until later in life, since they lose iron naturally through menstruation and childbearing.

The good news is that hemochromatosis can be detected through medical tests and treated by blood withdrawals. Researchers hope that this increased awareness of the scope of the problem can help lead to increased testing and treatment, which should improve quality of life and reduce frailty and disability rates for those with genetic risk for hemochromatosis. Anyone with a family history of the condition should talk to their doctor and consider being tested for hereditary hemochromatosis if they are experiencing severe fatigue, unexplained cirrhosis, joint pain, arthritis, diabetes, heart problems, or erectile dysfunction. [Source: National Institute On Aging | January 25, 2019 ++]

Medicare For All ► What It Is & What It Would Cost

Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders' "Medicare for All" proposal is coming back in a major way as Democratic presidential hopefuls begin stumping for 2020. The government-funded health care system — strongly opposed by President Trump and fellow Republicans — would expand benefits beyond what is already offered under former President Barack Obama's Affordable Care Act. The legislation was first introduced in 2016 by Sanders, who said it would be another step toward achieving universal health care.

During a speech to officially launch her 2020 run, Sen. Kamala (D-CA) declared "health care is a fundamental right" and vowed to serve her constituents by supporting "Medicare for All." In August 2017, Harris became the first Senate Democrat to support Sanders' "Medicare for All" bill. "It's just the right thing to do," Harris said at the time, according to The Washington Post. Since then, 2020 candidates Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY), former Secretary of Housing and Urban Development Julian Castro, Sen. Elizabeth Warren (D-MA), and Rep. Tulsi Gabbard (D-HI) have also endorsed the program.

But while Democrats are embracing the plan, critics point to the soaring cost of implementing it — something numerous studies put well into the trillions. There doesn't seem to be much dispute that a single-payer system would require tax increases, since the government would essentially take over premiums now paid by employers and individuals as it replaces the private health insurance industry. The question is how much. "Medicare for All" is estimated to cost tens of trillions of dollars over a decade. Several independent studies have estimated that government spending on health care would increase dramatically, in the range of about \$25 trillion to \$35 trillion or more over a 10-year period. Specifically, a study released over the summer by the Mercatus Center at George Mason University estimated it would cost \$32.6 trillion — \$3.26 trillion per year — over 10 years. For comparison, the federal budget proposal for the fiscal year 2019 was \$4.4 trillion, the Congressional Budget Office states.

Sanders blasted the Mercatus Center's analysis as "grossly misleading and biased." "If every major country on earth can guarantee health care to all, and achieve better health outcomes while spending substantially less per capita than we do, it is absurd for anyone to suggest that the United States cannot do the same," Sanders replied, arguing on his website that his plan would cost about \$1.38 trillion per year. "This grossly misleading and biased report is the Koch brothers' response to the growing support in our country for a 'Medicare for all' program."

Analysis by The New York Times in 2017 showed at least 74 million Americans who currently benefit from Medicaid would potentially face higher taxes under "Medicare for All." "The average of what people would pay when you take into account taxes, premiums and out-of-pocket costs would go down," Larry Levitt, senior vice president for health reform at the Kaiser Family Foundation, told CNBC in August. "Generally, lower-income people would end up paying less for health care. But higher-income people would pay a whole lot more. It depends a lot on which taxes end up getting increased in order to pay for the new plan." However, a recent estimate from the Political Economy Research Institute at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst suggests that it could be lower. With significant cost savings, the government would need to raise about \$1.1 trillion from new revenue sources in the first year of the new program.

House Budget Committee Chairman John Yarmuth (D-KY) has asked the Congressional Budget Office for a comprehensive report on single-payer. The CBO is a nonpartisan outfit that analyzes the potential cost and impact of legislation. Its estimate that millions would be made uninsured by Republican bills to repeal the Affordable Care Act was key to the survival of Obama's health care law.

Many Americans still don't know specifics about the grand plan. A recent survey from social research nonprofit NORC at the University of Chicago found almost half of adults say they haven't heard anything about "Medicare for All." Here's the basic idea: "Medicare for All" is a single-payer health insurance plan that would require all U.S.

residents be covered with no copays and deductibles for medical services. The insurance industry would be regulated to play a minor role in the system.

"[Sanders'] plan will cover the entire continuum of health care, from inpatient to outpatient care; preventive to emergency care; primary care to specialty care, including long-term and palliative care; vision, hearing and oral health care; mental health and substance abuse services; as well as prescription medications, medical equipment, supplies, diagnostics and treatments," Sanders' old campaign website explained. "Patients will be able to choose a health care provider without worrying about whether that provider is in-network and will be able to get the care they need without having to read any fine print or trying to figure out how they can afford the out-of-pocket costs." The phrase "for all" doesn't mean the plan would instantly give every American insurance. It would be slowly extended to citizens — from older to younger — over a period of four years, NPR reports.

A year ago opinions on “Medicare for All” seemed to be mixed among participants in The Senior citizen League’s (TSCL) 2018 Senior Survey. When asked whether the eligibility age for Medicare should be gradually reduced to allow all Americans to enroll in Medicare, 43% were opposed, versus 31% who supported the idea. On the other hand, 59% of survey participants supported allowing people age 55 to 64 the option to buy-in to Medicare, if more affordable than other coverage. Only 21% were opposed.

TSCL agrees that Medicare has some problems that need to be addressed. Of particular concern is the upward spiral of costs that have contributed to Part B premiums rising, on average, 11% per year since 2000. TSCL supports legislative changes that include:

- Limiting the amount of Medicare Part B premium increases to no more than 30% of an individual’s cost-of-living adjustment (COLA).
- Allowing Medicare to negotiate the price of prescription drugs.
- Restricting out-of-network healthcare providers from surprise balance billing, particularly when the care is received from an “in network” facility or provider.

[Source: FOX News & TSCL: The Advisor | Jennifer Earl & | January 11 & 28, 2019 ++]

Surprise Medical Bills Update 01 ► Trump Boosts Fight Against Unexpected Medical Bills

Momentum is building for action to prevent patients from receiving massive unexpected medical bills, aided by President Trump, who is vowing to take on the issue. Calls for action against so-called surprise medical bills have been growing, spurred by viral stories like one involving a teacher in Texas last year who received a \$108,951 bill from the hospital after his heart attack. Even though the teacher had insurance, the hospital was not in his insurance network. Lawmakers in both parties say they want to take action to protect people from those situations, marking a health care area outside of the partisan standoff over ObamaCare, where Congress could advance bipartisan legislation to help patients.

Trump gave a boost to efforts on 23 JAN. “[People] go in, they have a procedure and then all of a sudden they can't afford it, they had no idea it was so bad,” Trump said at a roundtable with patients about the issue. “We're going to stop all of it, and it's very important to me,” he added. But the effort still faces obstacles from powerful health care industry groups — including hospitals, insurers and doctors. Those groups are jockeying to ensure that they avoid a financial hit from whatever solution lawmakers and the White House back. Asked if he expected resistance from the health care industry, Sen. Lamar Alexander (R-TN), the chairman of the Senate Health Committee, told reporters Thursday, “I would expect so.” “Someone has to pay the bill,” Alexander added.

A source familiar with the discussions said insurers and hospitals are “both at the table,” but “they're just battling with each other on who's going to take the bigger hit.” Alexander insisted lawmakers would push forward nonetheless. “People go to the emergency room and they suddenly are surprised a few weeks later with a bill for \$3,000 from an

out-of-network doctor,” Alexander said. “We don’t want that happening, so one way or the other I expect to see that addressed in the next several months.” Trump also received praise from Democrats for highlighting the issue this week. “I was very glad to see the president start to pay attention to the issue,” Sen. Maggie Hassan (D-NH), who has sponsored legislation to protect patients from surprise bills, said in an interview. She said she is “very optimistic that we will be able to find common ground.”

Lawmakers must first reconcile competing bills. In addition to Hassan’s measure, there is a bill from a bipartisan group led by Sen. Bill Cassidy (R-LA), and a House bill from Rep. Lloyd Doggett (D-TX), the chairman of the Ways and Means health subcommittee. “I am encouraged by the increased bipartisan interest, but we still face significant pushback,” Doggett said in a statement, adding that he will keep pushing to end the “predatory practice” of surprise billing.

The Senate group led by Cassidy hopes to get bipartisan support to coalesce around one bill on the issue. They've been in touch with Hassan's office to discuss the best way to address the problem, a GOP aide said. Cassidy’s group hopes to introduce updated legislation soon, the aide said. In the House, a Democratic aide said there is “momentum” for legislation on surprise bills and a hearing and markup are expected, but there is no timeline yet. House Democratic staff have been in touch with Cassidy’s office, and there is a briefing on the issue from outside experts for staff for Ways and Means Committee members set to happen in the coming weeks. All of the possible solutions would protect patients from having to pay exorbitant amounts if their doctor is outside of the insurance network. But the lingering question is who decides how much the insurer should pay to the doctor or hospital for that care. Those details are what health care groups will be fighting over.

Molly Smith, a vice president at the American Hospital Association, said “patients need to be held harmless” and “we definitely want to be at the table” to discuss the solution. “We are all on the same page of what the problem is,” said Kristine Grow, a spokeswoman for America’s Health Insurance Plans. Grow said the debate comes down to details over how health care providers will be paid and ensuring that insurance companies are able to maintain control over their networks. Alexander said Congress will act even if health care groups cannot agree. “The first place to deal with it is for the hospitals and doctors and insurance companies to get together and end the practice,” Alexander said. “And if they don't, Congress will do it for them.”

[Source: The Hill | Peter Sullivan | January 27, 2019 ++]

Prostate Cancer Update 17 ► New Biopsy Procedure More Accurate and Thorough

A high-tech procedure that makes prostate biopsy more accurate and thorough is being rolled out at Eisenhower Army Medical Center. The procedure merges ultrasound with MRI images to give urologists a real-time, three-dimensional view of the prostate. Because the MRI images are analyzed by a radiologist prior to the biopsy, the urologist has a targeted approach to collecting tissue samples. "Eisenhower is one of a few hospitals doing this procedure in the state of Georgia," said Army Lt. Col. (Dr.) Jennifer Pugliese, chief of Urology at Eisenhower Army Medical Center.

Other than skin cancer, prostate cancer is the most common cancer in American men, according to the American Cancer Society. For 2018, the Society estimates about 164,690 new cases of prostate cancer will be diagnosed and there will be about 29,430 deaths from prostate cancer. "About 1 man in 9 will be diagnosed with prostate cancer during his lifetime," according to ACS statistics. "Prostate cancer develops mainly in older men and in African-American men. About 6 cases in 10 are diagnosed in men aged 65 or older, and it is rare before age 40. The average age at the time of diagnosis is about 66."

The standard screening for prostate cancer, according to Pugliese, is a blood test that specifically measures PSA, or prostate serum antigen, and a digital rectal examination. Abnormal PSA levels may indicate the need for a prostate

biopsy where, using ultrasound alone for guidance, tissue samples are taken with a biopsy needle that is passed through the ultrasound probe and rectal wall into the prostate. Dr. Pugliese said, "Using a standard grid pattern, I'll take at least 12 samples. This method returns a false negative result of 20 to 30 percent. The difference with the ultrasound/MRI fusion is that I can better 'visualize' which areas of the prostate need to be sampled. This is a multidisciplinary approach with an experienced radiologist who identifies and digitally marks the suspect tissue on the MRI before the actual biopsy".

The urologist moves the ultrasound probe around the prostate while the fusion software shifts the overlaid MRI image, already marked by the radiologist, giving the medical team a real-time, 3-D ultrasound/MRI view. They use the fused image to guide the biopsy needles precisely to the tissue indicated as suspicious, rather than poking around a pre-determined grid, hoping they find something. "This is an exciting new approach that yields a lower false negative rate than standard template biopsy and has a higher likelihood of identifying clinically significant prostate cancer," Pugliese said. "It is simply a more accurate prostate biopsy."

According to the ACS, "prostate cancer is the second leading cause of cancer death in American men, behind lung cancer. About 1 man in 41 will die of prostate cancer. "Prostate cancer can be a serious disease, but most men diagnosed with prostate cancer do not die from it. In fact, more than 2.9 million men in the United States who have been diagnosed with prostate cancer at some point are still alive today." The earlier prostate cancer is diagnosed, the better the long-term prognosis is for the patient and the more likely a curative treatment will be successful. Curative treatments can include radiation and surgery. Hormone therapy, immunotherapy and chemotherapy are typically reserved for advanced or metastatic prostate cancer. Active surveillance can even be offered to patients with low risk or very low risk disease, avoiding active treatment all together.

Early and reliable diagnosis is key to sorting out the appropriate treatment and, thanks to the ultrasound/MRI fusion procedure, it's easier to get an accurate diagnosis sooner.

[Source: Health.mil | David M. White | January 9, 2018 ++]

Prescription Filling Options Update 03 ► Online From Canada

Americans continue to struggle with skyrocketing prescription drug prices. Personal prescription importation has given millions of Americans access to safe and affordable medications through licensed and legitimate online pharmacies. The Campaign for Personal Prescription Importation (CPPI) Second Annual Survey: Cost and Safety Primary Reasons for Importation from Canada reveals shows that cost is the primary reason that Americans order medications from online pharmacies in Canada as they feel it is a reasonable option for accessing life-saving and life-enhancing prescription drugs.

- More than half of respondents (52 percent) report saving up to \$199 each month by ordering through an online pharmacy. Among people who save more than \$300 per month (38 percent of respondents), the average savings that they report is \$910.
- Thirty-nine percent of respondents learned about online pharmacies from either a healthcare provider or pharmacist. This is an increase compared to last year's survey in which 26 percent of respondents cited learning about online pharmacies from a healthcare provider or pharmacist.
- Survey respondents are aware of the dangers of "rogue" pharmacies and they are savvy in their search to find an online pharmacy that they can trust. Furthermore, the majority of people (97 percent) who import their personal prescriptions would recommend accessing medications through licensed, legitimate online pharmacies to their friends and family members.

CPPI conducted this online survey between September 3, 2018 and November 12, 2018. Based on the universe of followers of CPPI, this sample of 1,354 responses represents findings with a standard sampling error of plus or minus 5 percent. Following are additional findings from the survey:

Primary Reason is Cost: The majority of respondents (94 percent) – cite cost as the reason that they order their medications from an online pharmacy in Canada. Other reasons cited include consistency in pricing (9 percent); convenience (7 percent); consistency in availability (6 percent); and lack of availability in the U.S. (4 percent).

Spending through Ordering Online: Nearly half of respondents (48 percent) spend less than \$99 per month ordering personal prescriptions from licensed online pharmacies in Canada. Thirty percent of respondents spend between \$100 to \$199 and 12 percent spend between \$200 to \$299. Among people who reported spending more than \$300, the average amount they reported spending is \$493 per month.

Savings through Ordering Online: Respondents were also asked in the survey to compare what they would spend on their prescriptions in the U.S. to what they pay by purchasing them through a licensed online pharmacy in Canada. More than half of respondents (52 percent) report saving up to \$199 each month by ordering through an online pharmacy. Among people who save more than \$300 per month (38 percent of respondents), the average savings that they report is \$910.

Insurance Coverage: Despite having Medicare or other insurance coverage, many Americans still purchase safe and affordable prescription drugs from Canada. More than half of respondents (67 percent) report having Medicare. Sixteen percent report that their employer provides insurance coverage, nine percent do not have insurance, and eight percent are self-insured.

Years of Ordering Online: More than half of respondents (52 percent) report ordering their prescription medications from an online pharmacy for less than three years. Thirty-one percent have been using online pharmacies for between four and seven years, and 17 percent of respondents have been ordering for more than eight years.

Recommendations to Family and Friends: Overwhelmingly, survey respondents (97 percent) would recommend ordering prescription medications from an online pharmacy in Canada to their family and friends. More than half of respondents (55 percent) know someone already who has ordered their medications from Canada.

Initial Awareness of Ordering Online: Sixty-one percent of people surveyed heard about online pharmacies from friends or family members. Thirty-nine percent of respondents learned about online pharmacies from either a healthcare provider or pharmacist. [Note: This is up compared to last year’s survey in which 26 percent of respondents cited learning about online pharmacies from a healthcare provider or pharmacist.]

Choosing an Online Pharmacy: More than 40 percent of people surveyed looked for a verified, certified site when deciding which online pharmacy to use. Twenty-eight percent of people surveyed use an online pharmacy that was recommended by a friend or family member. Twenty-nine percent of people selected a site based on ease of use or best price.

Knowledge of Rogue Pharmacies: The majority of respondents (78 percent) can properly identify the attributes of a rogue website that sells counterfeit medications.

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Thousands of Americans use licensed Canadian pharmacies annually, to purchase their daily prescription medications at an affordable price. All Americans have a right to affordable medications. It is time to change the current U.S. policy on this issue to provide immediate access to life-saving medications, taken daily for chronic health conditions, at affordable prices.

[Source: Prescription Justice | January 16, 2019 ++]

Tricare/Medicare Fraud ► False Medical Bills

South Carolina -- Federal authorities are seeking to recover \$9 million that they say a S.C. woman stole in a wide-ranging scheme involving false medical bills for treating autistic children. **Susan A. Butler**, the “founder” of the S.C. Early Autism Project, is charged with overbilling Tricare and Medicaid, two federal health insurers, and making false claims about patient services. Money the insurers paid for patient care instead went for administrative costs, according to a federal grand jury indictment made public 17 JAN. Butler “paid or caused to be paid kickbacks and bribes to clients by illegally offering free child care services for siblings,” and billed Medicaid and Tricare “at higher rates than allowable for the services rendered,” according to the indictment.

With seven S.C. clinics, the Early Autism Project is the state’s largest care center for autistic children. Its internet site says Butler founded the company in 1995. Today, it treats hundreds of children and “offers the highest quality of intensive, research-based behavioral treatment for children and young adults between 20 months and 21 years with autism spectrum and related disorders,” according to its internet site. That internet site says government health insurers — Tricare, for active-duty military members, and Medicaid, for low-income and disabled Americans — will “pay for some or all” autism treatments. Greenville lawyer Beattie Ashmore, an attorney for Butler, could not be reached immediately for comment Wednesday. Butler’s place of residence is unclear. Various sources give it as Lexington, Sumter or Charleston.

ChanceLight, an autism care firm with nearly 19,000 clients at more than 150 locations in 20-plus states, bought the Early Autism Project’s S.C. clinics in 2013. In a statement, ChanceLight said the billing practices questioned by the government were in place when it acquired the Early Autism Project. It added Butler no longer works for the company, declining to say when she stopped being an employee. Senior vice president Sarah Vega said ChanceLight “cooperated fully with the government.” The company has taken steps, including hiring outside experts to evaluate its billing practices, to ensure it is complying with all regulations, Vega added.

In August, the U.S. Attorney’s office in Columbia announced the Early Autism Project had paid \$8.8 million to settle a civil case under the False Claims Act, alleging it had submitted false claims to Tricare and the S.C. Medicaid program for children with autism. That settlement resolved allegations the Early Autism Project had submitted numerous false bills, padding the hours that therapists were billing Tricare and Medicaid for treatments. The Early Autism Project and its parent company admitted no fault in the settlement. Records in that case are sealed and not available to the public. However, in the August press release, the U.S. attorney’s office in Columbia said the case began when a whistleblower, former Early Autism Project employee Olivia Zeigler, brought the allegations to the government’s attention. Under the False Claims Act, a whistleblower can file a lawsuit on behalf of the government. If the government gets involved and recovers money, the whistleblower gets part of any settlement. Zeigler was paid \$435,000, the U.S. attorney’s office said. [Source: The State | John Monk | January 16, 2019 ++]

POCUS ► New Portable Ultrasound Device Produces Precise, High-Quality Results

Clinicians who are, or becoming, experts in Point of Care Ultrasonography (POCUS) are in awe of a new ultra-portable ultrasound device, the Butterfly IQ. The Butterfly’s first use in the United States is at VA Bellevue Hospital and at NYU campuses. It is a very lightweight probe that looks like a sleek black electric razor. It plugs into an iPhone. The user prompts the probe into action and gives it directions with a finger-flick of an app and a tap on individual links that are pre-programmed for screening of the heart, lungs, veins of the legs and other parts of the body.



Squeezing some gel onto the head of the probe, the physician then places the device on a patient’s body in the specific area of concern. For example, it might be placed on the side of the patient’s chest corresponding to the location of the lungs. The interior structure and movement of the lungs then is visualized in real time on the physician’s cell phone screen. “Most of the time, you can figure out why a patient is having trouble breathing immediately at the bedside without sending the patient for any additional test,” said Dr. Harald Sauthoff (pictured above with Veteran Thomas LoRusso).

Dr. Sauthoff considers the Medical Intensive Care Unit (MICU) as his “home”, but he also sees patients on the general medicine wards, where he was using the Butterfly to examine LoRusso, a Veteran with lung cancer. Fluid had been drawn and removed the previous day with a needle guided by ultrasound. Dr. Sauthoff said, “I can still see a lot of fluid around the lung.” The patient was most concerned about not having another tissue biopsy that had been performed some weeks before. Dr. Sauthoff explained that use of the sonogram, unfortunately, might not eliminate the need for another biopsy. He told the Korean War Veteran that taking and testing more fluid might provide enough information to identify and then target the specific type of cancer cells that caused his disease.

Point-of-care ultrasonography (POCUS) is revolutionizing the way physicians examine their patients. Rather than just feeling and listening, physicians can now look into their patients’ bodies often supporting an immediate bedside diagnosis without delay and potentially harmful radiation. Lightweight, portable, and simple to use, the Butterfly IQ is an enormously attractive clinical tool because it produces precise, high-quality results. The low cost will make it possible for more clinicians to examine their patients using ultrasound at the bedside, carrying an ultrasound probe in their coat next to the stethoscope. The remaining hurdle for the widespread utilization of POCUS is lack of physician training in this powerful technology. Because most attending physicians are not trained in the use of POCUS, the traditional method of teaching students and residents is ineffective.

For this reason, Dr. Sauthoff has recently created a POCUS teaching course for hospitalist attending physicians across NYU, including VA NY Harbor Healthcare System’s Manhattan Campus. Carrying a Butterfly during their rounds, they are rapidly learning to use this powerful tool, and they will soon help to teach students and residents and change the culture of bedside diagnosis across VA and NYU. [Source: Vantage Point | Claudie Benjamin| January 14, 2019 ++]

Food Safety Myths ► Exposed

Myth #1: Food poisoning isn’t that big of a deal. I just have to tough it out for a day or two and then it’s over. **Fact:** Many people don’t know it, but some foodborne illnesses can actually lead to long-term health conditions, and 3,000 Americans a year die from foodborne illness. [Get the facts on long-term effects of food poisoning.](#)

Myth #2: It’s OK to thaw meat on the counter. Since it starts out frozen, bacteria isn’t really a problem. **Fact:** Actually, bacteria grow surprisingly rapidly at room temperatures, so the counter is never a place you should thaw foods. Instead, [thaw foods the right way.](#)

Myth #3: When cleaning my kitchen, the more bleach I use, the better. More bleach kills more bacteria, so it’s safer for my family. **Fact:** There is actually no advantage to using more bleach than needed. To [clean kitchen surfaces effectively](#), use just one teaspoon of liquid, unscented bleach to one quart of water.

Myth #4: I don't need to wash fruits or vegetables if I'm going to peel them. **Fact:** Because it's easy to transfer bacteria from the peel or rind you're cutting to the inside of your fruits and veggies, it's [important to wash all produce, even if you plan to peel it](#).

Myth #5: To get rid of any bacteria on my meat, poultry, or seafood, I should rinse off the juices with water first. **Fact:** Actually, rinsing meat, poultry, or seafood with water can increase your chance of food poisoning by splashing juices (and any bacteria they might contain) onto your sink and counters. The best way to cook meat, poultry, or seafood safely is to [make sure you cook it to the right temperature](#).

Myth #6: The only reason to let food sit after it's been microwaved is to make sure you don't burn yourself on food that's too hot. **Fact:** In fact, [letting microwaved food sit for a few minutes \("standing time"\)](#) helps your food cook more completely by allowing colder areas of food time to absorb heat from hotter areas of food.

Myth #7: Leftovers are safe to eat until they smell bad. **Fact:** The kinds of bacteria that cause food poisoning do not affect the look, smell, or taste of food. To be safe, [use our Safe Storage Times chart](#) to make sure you know the right time to throw food out.

Myth #8: Once food has been cooked, all the bacteria have been killed, so I don't need to worry once it's "done." **Fact:** Actually, the possibility of bacterial growth actually increases after cooking, because the drop in temperature allows bacteria to thrive. This is why [keeping cooked food warmed to the right temperature is critical for food safety](#).

Myth #9: Marinades are acidic, which kills bacteria—so it's OK to marinate foods on the counter. **Fact:** Even in the presence of acidic marinade, bacteria can grow very rapidly at room temperatures. To marinate foods safely, it's important to [marinate them in the refrigerator](#).

Myth #10: If I really want my produce to be safe, I should wash fruits and veggies with soap or detergent before I use them. **Fact:** In fact, it's best not to use soaps or detergents on produce, since these products can linger on foods and are not safe for consumption. [Using clean running water is actually the best way to remove bacteria and wash produce safely](#).

[Source: www.foodsafety.gov | January 14, 2019 ++]

Medicaid Fraud Update 96 ► Disclosures 16-31 JAN 2019

Brooklyn, NY -- The CEO of a New York home health aide company has been accused of embezzling \$11 million from Medicaid to fund a lavish lifestyle with her NYPD cop husband. **Farrah Rubani**, 51, was arrested on 18 DEC on a first-degree grand larceny charge in an alleged scam to submit false claims through her Brooklyn-based company Hopeton Care. The New York Attorney General's office claimed in a civil suit that Rubani and her partners billed New York State Medicaid for home care for children when was none provided, then paid the kids' parents to stay quiet, the New York Daily News reported.



'Rubani misrepresented to parents... that the Medicaid program permitted Hopeton to pay them directly to care for their children instead of sending a nurse, notwithstanding the fact that these parents were not qualified to provide the

nursing services that their children required,' the AG said in the lawsuit filed in Manhattan Supreme Court. State investigators allege that Rubani, a native of Pakistan, stole nearly \$4 million in that scheme alone. Rubani's husband is 50th Precinct NYPD Officer Richard Tricario. Prosecutors allege that he spent some of the ill-gotten money on a \$250,000 Bentley, a \$60,000 Dodge Ram pickup and a \$1.8 million Cape Cod vacation home that the couple nicknamed 'Rich At Heart'. Tricario has not been charged criminally. But the attorney general's office maintains that he wrote nearly \$3 million in checks on the couple's joint bank account between 2016 and 2018.

Rubani's lawyer, Richard Harrow, said his client 'denies the allegations and looks forward to presenting evidence that will exonerate her.' Meanwhile, Rubani's assets have been seized and the home health aides she employs have been faced with the tough decision between abandoning their patients and working without pay. Among the patients in danger of losing their caregivers is Queens Centenarian Rose Lawson, 102, the Daily News reports. Lawson's only living family is niece Patricia Murphy, who lives in Texas and has been paying \$180 a day out of pocket to contribute to her aunt's care.

On 18 JAN, frustrated Hopeton Care employees gathered outside of the company's offices in Midwood to demand their paychecks. 'They lying every Friday,' Yolene Jean-Charles told the Daily News. The AG's office says it has twice released funds so the home health aides could be paid. A spokeswoman for the office said that complaints should be handled through the Medicaid managed care organization. Rubani is considered a flight risk and is being held on Rikers Island without bail. She is next due in court on 1 MAR. [Source: Daily Mail | Keith Griffith | January 19, 2019 ++]

Medicare Fraud Update 136 ► Disclosures 16-31 JAN 2019

Red Bud, IL -- A pharmacist and former owner of Gibson's Discount Drugs in Red Bud has been sentenced to 33 months in prison on federal health care fraud charges. In August, Steven P. Gibson, 30, admitted that he had engaged in a scheme to defraud federal health care benefit programs and private insurance companies out of \$630,000. On 19 JAN, he was told he must pay all of that back before he heads to prison for almost three years.

According to a news release from the U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of Illinois, Gibson submitted almost 1,000 false and fraudulent claims in the names of his family members and customers for prescription medication from December 2016 to February 2018. Gibson said he chose the most expensive medications to file bogus claims because he knew it would be paid for by insurers, including Medicare and Medicaid. Some of those medications included Creon, which treats chronic pancreatitis, and hydroxychloroquine, which treats malaria. These medications, among others, were not authorized by any licensed medical practitioners and were never filed or given to any of the family members or customers whose names were on the prescription.

According to the release, Gibson's crime first came to light in late 2017 when a pharmacist answered a call from a customer who recognized her son had been billed for expensive medications he had not received. The pharmacist quit her job and notified authorities of Gibson's fraud. In February 2018, Gibson told the News-Democrat that the 150 percent increase in prescriptions over 20 months was due to careful buying and "being real aggressive with new customers." As part of Gibson's plea deal, he agreed to repay all of the money and to make restitution payments in advance of his sentencing. When he was sentenced on 19 JAN, however, he had only repaid \$30,000 and had otherwise failed to account for the rest of the money he stole.

U.S. District Judge Staci M. Yandle, who oversaw the case, told Gibson she did not believe his expressions of remorse and refused to award him credit for acceptance of responsibility. "Talk is cheap," she said. "The remorseful or repentant criminal would want to do everything possible to rectify the harmful consequences of his crime, and so if he still has any of the loot he will return it." Yandle was also troubled by statements Gibson's wife had made on the pharmacy's public Facebook account that downplayed his criminal conduct, the release stated. Yandle said she took

that into account when sentencing Gibson. “Some people minimize these kinds of crimes,” she said. “This court does not.” Gibson was released on bond with special conditions pending the start of his prison term, the release stated. His sentence also includes two years of supervised release. Because of the large amount of restitution he still owes, Gibson was not ordered to pay a fine. [Source: Belleville News-Democrat | Hana Muslic | January 22, 2019 ++]

Prescription Drug Costs Update 22 ► Insulin Prices Doubled Over 5 Years

The cost of insulin for treating type 1 diabetes in the United States nearly doubled over a five-year period, underscoring a national outcry over rising drug prices, according to a new analysis shared with Reuters. A person with type 1 diabetes incurred annual insulin costs of \$5,705, on average, in 2016. The average cost was roughly half that at \$2,864 per patient in 2012, according to a report due to be released on 23 JAN by the nonprofit Health Care Cost Institute (HCCI). The figures represent the combined amount paid by a patient and their health plan for the medicine and do not reflect rebates paid at a later date.



Insulin supplies

The increasing cost of insulin has led some patients to put their own health at risk. In recent months, anecdotal stories have cropped up from family members and patients describing the rationing of the life-saving medication because they could not afford out-of-pocket expenses for insulin. That has also led to some protests outside company headquarters of insulin makers. HCCI said the jump in spending was driven primarily by higher insulin prices overall and, to a lesser extent, a shift toward more expensive insulin products. Average daily insulin use rose only 3 percent over the same five-year period, the report found. “It’s not that individuals are using more insulin or that new products are particularly innovative or provide immense benefits,” Jeannie Fuglesten Biniek, a senior researcher at HCCI and the report’s co-author said in a phone interview. “Use is pretty flat, and the price changes are occurring in both older and newer products. That surprised me. The exact same products are costing double,” she said.

Drugmakers say they periodically need to raise U.S. list prices of their medications to help offset steep rebates they must offer to get them covered by insurance plans. In the last two years, major pharmaceutical makers have limited annual price hikes of prescription medicines under growing pressure from the administration of U.S. President Donald Trump and Congress.

HCCI, based in Washington, D.C., tracks insurance claims data on about 80 million people, drawing on information from the government’s Medicare health plan for Americans aged 65 and older and four of the industry’s largest health insurers: UnitedHealth Group, Aetna, now owned by CVS Health Corp, Humana Inc and Kaiser Permanente. The insulin report analyzed commercial claims data for about 15,000 patients with type 1 diabetes annually who had at least one prescription for an insulin product during the year. From 2012 to 2016, the average price of insulin increased from 13 cents per unit to 25 cents per unit, according to the report. For the average patient using 60 units per day, the daily cost went from \$7.80 in 2012 to \$15 in 2016.

The findings come amid new outrage over the cost of prescription drugs in the United States, the highest in the world. This month, Democratic lawmakers introduced legislation aimed at lowering prescription medicine costs for consumers and sent letters to 12 drugmakers seeking information on price hikes. They included the top three insulin

manufacturers - Indianapolis-based Eli Lilly and Co, Danish drugmaker Novo Nordisk A/S and France’s Sanofi SA. In October, the Minnesota attorney general sued the three main insulin makers and accused them of deceptively raising prices. A similar proposed class action lawsuit on behalf of patients is pending in New Jersey federal court. “Different actors want to make an example of insulin now and how its cost is a huge barrier for millions of patients,” said Rachel Sachs, an associate law professor at Washington University in St. Louis.

So far in 2019, Sanofi raised prices on some insulin products between 4.4 percent and 5.2 percent, while Novo Nordisk raised prices on some of its insulins by 4.9 percent. As of 17 JAN, Lilly had not raised prices on its insulins. Sanofi told Reuters that about 85 percent of people who manage their diabetes with its insulin products pay less than \$50 a month. Novo Nordisk said a majority of people who manage their diabetes with its insulin products also pay less than \$50 a month. Lilly did not respond to a request for comment.

About 1.2 million Americans have type 1 diabetes, a chronic condition in which the pancreas stops producing insulin. Type 2 diabetes, a growing problem linked to the obesity epidemic, is far more common, affecting nearly 30 million people in the United States, according to the American Diabetes Association. While type 2 diabetes is treated with a variety of other medicines, those patients may also eventually become dependent on insulin as the disease progresses. [Source: Reuters | Robin Respaut & Chad Terhune | January 22, 2019 ++]

Prescription Drug Costs Update 23 ► International Pricing Index Proposal

President Trump recently announced a new proposal to bring down the cost of certain expensive Part B prescription drugs. The plan is meeting with skepticism from leading health policy experts, not to mention hot opposition from the deep-pocketed pharmaceutical lobby. President Trump proposed a new payment system for prescription drugs that are administered in a doctor’s office, such as injectable treatments for arthritis and cancer. Medicare would establish a new “international pricing index” based on prices more comparable to those paid in 16 other industrial nations, like Canada, the United Kingdom, and Germany, where drug prices are much lower.

The announcement came a few hours after the Department of Health and Human Services released a study that found Medicare was paying 80% more for prescription drugs than other advanced industrial countries. Medicare beneficiaries (or their supplemental plan) are responsible for 20% of the cost of Part B drugs, and high costs of prescription drugs in both Part B and Part D pose a serious threat to retirement savings. Trump’s proposal, however, is estimated to reduce U.S. spending on Part B drugs by just \$17.2 billion over 5 years, a fraction of the \$19 billion that is spent on Part B drugs annually.

Medicare beneficiaries would not see any immediate savings impact. The proposal would only affect the cost of Part B drugs and, would not apply to the cost of Part D drugs that Medicare beneficiaries purchase at the pharmacy. The proposal also would not start until at least 2020, and because it is a demonstration projection, would impact just half of the country. It would take up to five years to fully scale in and realize most of the projected savings. Once fully phased in, lower Medicare Part B drug prices are expected to translate into significant savings for older Americans receiving medicines by infusion (IV).

The Senior Citizens League (TSCL) believes that our nation needs to change how it pays for Part B drugs. Under the current system, Medicare reimburses doctors 106% of the average selling price of the drug — a price that is set by the drug manufacturer. It is little wonder that critics of this system point out that doctors have an incentive to prescribe the most expensive drugs, since doctors keep the extra 6% of the cost of the drug. The proposal to use an international pricing index is not without merit. This type of “reference pricing” is successfully used to negotiate drug prices in other nations where drug prices are much lower. If international index pricing would be adopted, the greatest potential savings would be in reducing prices not only for Part B but also at the pharmacy counter, for Part D.

Experts have raised concerns that the plan might run into roadblocks. Douglas Holtz-Eakin, a former director of the Congressional Budget Office, warned that the drug industry might opt to push higher costs onto private U.S. health insurers in order to compensate for lower Medicare reimbursements. Thus, adopting the system of international pricing would need to include Part D as well as Part B, to prevent drug manufacturers from shifting higher costs to Part D.

TSCL is taking a poll of senior's opinion on which major issue affecting older Americans the new Congress should prioritize. You can participate at <https://seniorsleague.org/frequently-asked-questions-faqs>. [Source: TSCL Advisor | Mary Johnson, editor | January 2019 ++]

Prescription Drug Costs Update 24 ► Pharmaceutical Execs Decline to Testify Before Congress

Senators railed against pharmaceutical executives 29 JAN for declining to testify before Congress about out-of-control drug prices, as lawmakers on both sides of the U.S. Capitol kicked off investigations sure to rattle one of the nation's most powerful industries. Sen. Chuck Grassley of Iowa, the Republican chairman of the Senate Committee on Finance, signaled he could compel drugmakers to appear before the committee, saying he was "extremely disappointed" that only two companies have agreed to testify at a later date. "We will extend the opportunity again in the future, but we will be more insistent the next time," Grassley said.

And in a blow to the pharmaceutical industry, Sen. Ron Wyden of Oregon, the committee's top Democrat, agreed with Grassley, suggesting the parties are largely united in their determination to address skyrocketing drug costs. "Nobody is going away, and even if it means using our power to compel the drug company CEOs to show up, they will come before this committee," Wyden said. While Congress has examined rising drug costs before, the issue has benefited from the attention of President Donald Trump, who has vowed to address the problem. The Trump administration has floated a handful of possible solutions, including a proposal to tie the price Medicare pays for some drugs to the prices paid for the same drugs overseas.

Across the Capitol on 29 JAN, the House Committee on Oversight and Reform also held the first hearing in its own "sweeping" investigation into drug prices. Rep. Elijah Cummings, the Maryland Democrat who took control of the committee this month, recently wrote to 12 drug companies demanding information about their pricing practices, Cummings has made it clear that he is interested in working with the Trump administration on drug prices. Cummings met with Trump in 2017, weeks after Trump was sworn in as president, to discuss how the parties could work together. Two weeks ago, Cummings discussed the issue with Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar. One Republican lawmaker close to Trump, Rep. Mark Meadows of North Carolina, on 29 JAN said he had spoken with Trump and agreed to pass along a message to Cummings: "On this particular subject, not only is he serious, but he's serious about working in a bipartisan way to lower prescription prices," Meadows said. Cummings asked Meadows to tell Trump "we are willing, ready and able to work with him to get it done."

Lawmakers heard heart-wrenching testimony Tuesday from two mothers about the impact of rising costs on their insulin-dependent children. Antoinette Worsham described how her daughter, a college student with Type 1 diabetes, began rationing her insulin because she couldn't afford it — and how her son later found her dead in her bed. Now, Worsham told the House committee, she worries about her younger daughter, who also has diabetes. "I fear the same is going to happen to her," Worsham said. On the Senate side, Kathy Sego — whose son with Type 1 diabetes was profiled by Kaiser Health News in 2017 — had a message for absent drug companies. "I don't know how any person would be OK with knowing that their medication is priced so high you have to make a decision between life or death," she said. "That should never be a decision a person needs to make."

It remains to be seen how drugmakers might react to mounting political scrutiny. Both Grassley and Cummings have the power to subpoena witnesses — such as drug company executives — to appear before Congress, though

Grassley told reporters afterward that he was not yet prepared to invoke that option. Grassley said several drug companies had declined to testify publicly, offering a variety of excuses. One company, for instance, argued their testimony would “create a language-barrier problem.” Unmoved, Grassley remarked that he “thought we all spoke English.” Wyden expressed his frustration with drug companies by comparing them to a more traditional villain, the tobacco companies. “Even the Big Tobacco CEOs were willing to come to Congress and testify, and they made a product that kills people,” he said. “They all lied to me, but at least they showed up. The drugmakers won’t even do that much.”

While lawmakers noted that both hearings were only the first of many, an early consensus emerged that something must be done about drug rebates, which provide discounts to middlemen in the supply chain but often push patients toward pricier brand-name drugs. Senators also targeted drug discount coupons, which lower the price for patients at the cash register but don’t address the larger struggle between manufacturers and insurance companies. “We know who’s winning. It’s the people who print the coupons,” said Peter Bach, director of the Center for Health Policy and Outcomes at the Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center. “Patients are entirely caught in the middle.”

The long political reach of the drug industry was on display Tuesday, though, suggesting it could be an uphill battle to hold pharmaceutical companies accountable. Drugmakers’ political action committees give millions of dollars to the campaigns of hundreds of members of Congress. The Project on Government Oversight, a nonpartisan watchdog group, noted even some of the experts who testified Tuesday have benefited from drugmaker cash. The Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America, which lobbies on behalf of drugmakers, has given millions to the advocacy arm of the American Action Forum — a conservative-leaning organization whose president, Douglas Holtz-Eakin, testified before senators. Bach has also received money from pharmaceutical companies directly, the watchdog group said. Bach said he was paid for giving speeches.

Another potential obstacle: House Republicans on Tuesday showed little interest in cooperating with the investigation, with some arguing that there were bigger fish to fry in the nation’s health care system. Rep. Jim Jordan of Ohio, the House committee’s top Republican, opened by enumerating several failings of the Affordable Care Act, noting Democrats are “eager to blame the private sector.” “The problem is not that the free market has failed us,” Jordan said. “It’s that government interventions in the market have distorted incentives, creating barriers to competition and left things in a mess.” [Source: Kaiser Health News | Emmarie Huetteman & Rachel Bluth | January 29, 2019 ++]

TRICARE Podcast 485 ► Pharmacy Program - Shutdown & Allotments – Emergency/Urgent Care

TRICARE Pharmacy Program -- The TRICARE Pharmacy Program provides the same prescription drug coverage with most TRICARE health plans. However, if you use the US Family Health Plan, you have a separate pharmacy coverage. Prescription drugs fall into four tiers: generic formulary drugs, brand-name formulary drugs, non-formulary drugs, and non-covered drugs. Your costs will vary depending on your drug category. Generic formulary drugs are widely available and have the lowest out-of-pocket costs. Brand-name formulary drugs are generally available with higher out-of-pocket costs. Non-formulary drugs may be less available with the highest out-of-pocket costs. Finally, non-covered drugs are excluded from TRICARE coverage and you pay the full cost of the drug. Express Scripts, the TRICARE Pharmacy Program contractor, can help you:

- Find nearby pharmacies.
- Register to have your prescription drugs mailed to you.
- Check your prescription drugs on the TRICARE Formulary, and more.

To learn more about your pharmacy benefit, visit [TRICARE.mil/pharmacy](https://www.tricare.mil/pharmacy) .

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Government Shutdown & Allotments -- The partial government shutdown that began on December 22nd affected allotments used by some TRICARE patients to pay enrollment fees and dental premiums. TRICARE isn't able to process these payments made through the U.S. Coast Guard pay center. However, TRICARE will continue to cover patients. This affects TRICARE health plans and TRICARE Dental Program allotments made on or after January 1st, 2019 by:

- Retirees of the U.S. Coast Guard, U.S. Public Health Service, and commissioned corps of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Agency; and
- Family members, survivors, and eligible former spouses

During this time you won't be disenrolled for nonpayment. You may be able to change your method of payment from allotment to electronic funds transfer or credit/debit card. For more information, check out the news article at TRICARE.mil/news.

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Emergency & Urgent Care -- Sometimes it's difficult to know what level of care you need. Especially when you're hurt or sick. Learning the difference between emergency and urgent care now, and the rules for your TRICARE plan will help you later.

- An emergency threatens life, limb, or eyesight. Examples include severe bleeding, spinal cord or back injury, chest pain, severe eye injury, or difficulty breathing. If you have an emergency, go to the nearest emergency room immediately or call 911. If overseas, call the emergency medical service for your area. You want to get in touch with your primary care manager or regional contractor within 24 hours or the next business day after you receive care. Find more information at TRICARE.mil/emergency.
- Urgent care is care you need within 24 hours for a non-emergency illness or injury that requires treatment. Examples include a rising fever or sprained ankle. Most TRICARE beneficiaries can visit an urgent care center whenever needed, but you should check the urgent care rules for your plan. For more information, visit TRICARE.mil/urgent.

If you're unsure whether to seek urgent care, emergency care, or routine care, contact the Military Health System Nurse Advice Line. You can call, chat online, or video chat with a registered nurse 24/7. Visit TRICARE.mil/na to learn more.

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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 18, 2019 ++]

TRICARE Podcast 486 ► 2019 TRICARE Benefit Resources - Winter Safety Tips - ECHO

2019 TRICARE Benefit Resources – Do you have old or outdated TRICARE brochures or handbooks laying around? If so, now is a great time to check out the new 2019 TRICARE benefit resources. TRICARE publishes handbooks, newsletters, brochures, fact sheets, and more. You can view, print, or download them at TRICARE.mil/publications. If you have questions about costs or your TRICARE medical benefit, there's the TRICARE "Costs and Fees Sheet" and "TRICARE Plans Overview." For questions about your TRICARE dental options, check out the "TRICARE Dental Options Fact Sheet." And find information about prescription drug coverage in the "TRICARE Pharmacy Program Overview" and "TRICARE Pharmacy Program Handbook." Don't miss changes related to your TRICARE medical, dental, and pharmacy benefits this year. New TRICARE publications are added and updated to reflect TRICARE changes frequently, so visit TRICARE.mil/publications often.

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Winter Safety Tips – Winter can be a hazardous time of year. Being prepared and knowing your TRICARE health care options will help you and your family remain safe this winter. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention provides a number of winter safety tips to help you prepare for freezing temperatures, and prevent injuries and illness. Prepare with TRICARE by having a health emergency kit. If you have chronic conditions, your kit should include a full list of your medications with dosing instructions. Don't forget to include contact information for TRICARE, your primary care provider, and an extra supply of drugs and supplies.

Another emergency kit to have is one for your home. Include flashlights, extra batteries, a first-aid kit, extra medicine, and baby items. If you lose power, your kit should also include food and water for three days for each family member, warm clothing, and toys and games for children. Make an emergency kit to keep in your car. Include water, snacks, a first-aid kit, blankets, and a flashlight. Keep extra batteries, a portable cell phone charger, and emergency flares. For more winter safety tips, read "Winter Safety Tips to Stay Safe and Healthy" at TRICARE.mil/news.

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ECHO - Do you have a family member who gets supplemental services through the TRICARE Extended Care Health Option, known as ECHO? As of January 1, 2019, the ECHO benefit cap applies to covered costs during a calendar year, January 1st to December 31st, and not fiscal year. ECHO provides services and supplies for active duty family members with special needs. These are services and supplies beyond those offered by your TRICARE program option. To be eligible for ECHO benefits, you must sign up for your service's Exceptional Family Member Program. Each service branch has its own enrollment process. Also, you have to register for ECHO with your regional contractor.

If you need help with ECHO benefits or want to see if you qualify, call your regional contractor. You must get prior authorization from your regional contractor for all ECHO services. Visit TRICARE.mil/echo to learn more about eligibility, benefits, costs, and coverage limits. Visit TRICARE.mil/echo to learn more about eligibility, benefits, costs, and coverage limit

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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 24, 2018 ++]

*** Finances ***



IRS 2018 Filing Season Update 05 ► Penalty Waiver for Underwithholding

The IRS on 16 JAN announced that it will waive a penalty for some taxpayers who didn't have enough money withheld from their paychecks last year, in an effort to aid people as they adjust to the tax-code changes made by President Trump's tax law. "We realize there were many changes that affected people last year, and this penalty waiver will help taxpayers who inadvertently didn't have enough tax withheld," IRS Commissioner Charles Rettig said in a news release. "We urge people to check their withholding again this year to make sure they are having the right amount of tax withheld for 2019."

In early 2018, the IRS released new guidance about tax withholding from people's paychecks that was designed to reflect Trump's 2017 tax law. The guidance reflected changes such as the lower tax rates and larger standard deduction. Most taxpayers across the income spectrum are expected to receive a tax cut for 2018 because of the tax law. When the withholding guidance came out, Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin said he expected 90 percent of wage earners to see more take-home pay due to the guidance. The IRS also expects most taxpayers to receive refunds this year when they file their tax returns for 2018. But the new withholding guidance did not account for all of the tax changes made in the 2017 law, so some taxpayers may have ended up having too little in taxes taken from their paychecks last year. Those people will end up owing money when they file their taxes in the coming weeks and months.

Taxpayers typically owe a penalty if they don't pay enough taxes during the year. Normally, the penalty wouldn't apply for 2018 if the taxpayer made payments throughout the year of at least 90 percent of their 2018 tax liability or at least 100 percent of their 2017 tax liability. But the IRS said that it will lower the 90 percent threshold to 85 percent for waiver purposes, to reduce the number of people who might have to pay a penalty this year. Lawmakers on both sides of the aisle had requested that the IRS waive penalties for taxpayers who didn't have enough withheld from their paychecks. Senate Finance Committee ranking member Ron Wyden (D-OR) had asked the IRS to waive underwithholding penalties in a letter earlier this month. Finance Committee Chairman Chuck Grassley (R-IA) said on the Senate floor Wednesday that he had "encouraged the IRS to be lenient on penalties, especially with this first time through a filing season under the new tax law." [Source: The Hill | Naomi Jagoda | January 16, 2019 ++]

IRS 2018 Filing Season Update 06 ► Credits & Deductions You Should Not Overlook

Americans love tax breaks. In the past, everybody knew they could deduct mortgage interest, medical expenses over a certain amount, gifts to charity — even the cost of preparing their tax return. However, federal tax reform means some deductions have now disappeared. Others aren't as valuable, thanks to an increased standard deduction that makes it less attractive to itemize. Those new standard deduction amounts are:

- \$12,000 for single taxpayers and married taxpayers who file separate returns
- \$24,000 for married couples filing jointly
- \$18,000 for taxpayers filing as "head of household"

Nonetheless, here are some credits and deductions you should not overlook. Some save you money if you itemize, but others are available even if you do not.

1. Charity

If you itemize, you can deduct the value of any cash or property donations to a legitimate charity, although you'll need receipts. That's common knowledge, but here's something that isn't: Volunteers can deduct 14 cents per mile traveled to and from charity work, plus out-of-pocket expenses from that work, including supplies and required uniforms. (Your time isn't deductible.) For more details, check out [IRS Publication 526](#).

2. State taxes

This tax break is not as generous as it once was. In the wake of the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017, taxpayers who itemize can deduct state individual income, sales and property taxes up to a limit of \$10,000. So, while this tax break has been trimmed back, it's still valuable to many — especially residents of the seven states with no state income tax, which are: AK, FL, NV, SD, TX, WA, and WY.

3. Child tax credit

Not only did the child tax credit survive tax reform, it also became more generous: The new rules double the credit to \$2,000 per child. However, the refundable part of the credit cannot exceed \$1,400. The tax overhaul also makes this credit available to more families. The income threshold drops by \$500, to \$2,500. And you can earn more income

before the credit is phased out. Remember, a credit is worth a lot more than a deduction; a credit reduces your taxes dollar for dollar, whereas a deduction only reduces the income you're taxed on. For example, if you're in the 25 percent tax bracket, a dollar of deduction reduces your tax by 25 cents. But a dollar of credit reduces your taxes by a full dollar.

4. Retirement

Retirement contributions often qualify for a deduction (which reduces your taxable income), but they also can net you a credit if your income is relatively modest. It's called the [Retirement Savings Contribution Credit](#) (RSCC) or Saver's Credit, and you may be eligible if you made contributions to an IRA, 401(k) or other qualified retirement plan. According to the IRS the amount of the credit is 50%, 20% or 10% of your retirement plan or IRA or ABLE account contributions depending on your adjusted gross income (reported on your Form 1040 series return). The maximum credit amount is \$2,000 (\$4,000 if married filing jointly). Check out the link to the IRS RSCC website above to find out if you qualify, and how much you can save.

5. School

Knowledge is power and lower taxes. The [American Opportunity Credit](#) is a great way to lower your taxes if you are attending school. You can claim the credit for eligible education expenses during your first four years of higher education. According to the IRS the amount of the credit is 100 percent of the first \$2,000 of qualified education expenses you paid for each eligible student and 25 percent of the next \$2,000 of qualified education expenses you paid for that student. This credit is especially valuable because it's partially refundable, meaning you can theoretically get more money back than you paid in. If the credit brings your tax down to zero, 40 percent of the remaining amount of the credit — up to \$1,000 — is refunded to you.

6. Medical expenses

Because of income limitations, medical expenses are tough to deduct. But do the math if you had big bills last year. This is another deduction that tax reform made more valuable. For both the 2017 and 2018 tax years, you can deduct medical expenses that exceed 7.5 percent of your adjusted gross income. Under the old tax law, you could not deduct expenses until they exceeded 10 percent of income. However, Uncle Sam's newfound generosity has limits — the threshold will jump back up to 10 percent when you file your taxes next year. For more on this check out, "[The 7 Most Valuable Deductions and Goodies That Survived Tax Reform](#)":

7. Health savings account

Tax reform did not eliminate or curb the deduction for health savings accounts, which allow you to deposit a certain amount of pretax earnings each year that you can use to reimburse yourself for eligible health care expenses. Individuals with an eligible high-deductible health insurance plan can deduct \$3,450 from their 2018 tax return. That amount jumps to \$6,900 for families. For more on this check out [Health Savings Account You Can Deduct](#).

[Source: MoneyTalksNews | Stacy Johnson & Chris Kissel | January 21, 2019 ++]

Social Security Taxation Update 11 ► What to Expect for Tax Year 2018

If you receive income from one or more sources in addition to Social Security, chances are that a portion of your Social Security benefits may be taxable. New retirees are often surprised to learn that Social Security benefits are taxable. Since 1984, Social Security beneficiaries with income exceeding certain thresholds are required to figure part of their Social Security benefits as taxable income. At the time, less than 10% of all Social Security recipients were subject to the tax.

While incomes have gone up significantly since then, the thresholds that subject a portion of Social Security benefits to tax have never been adjusted. That means, as incomes rose over time, an increasing number of retirees pay federal income taxes on a portion of their Social Security benefits. In fact, The Senior citizens League's (TSCL) Senior

Surveys have found that on average, 56% of Social Security households pay taxes on a portion of their Social Security benefits.

In order to learn if a portion of your benefits may be subject to tax, add your adjusted gross income, plus any nontaxable interest, and one half of your Social Security benefits to get your “combined income.” If your combined income is between \$25,000 and \$34,000 (individual) or \$32,000 and \$44,000 (joint) then up to 50% of your Social Security benefits may be taxable. If your income is more than \$34,000 (individual) or \$44,000 (joint) then up to 85% of your benefits may be taxable.

The recent tax law almost doubled the standard deduction, and increases the deduction for taxpayers age 65 and older. On the other hand, personal exemptions have been eliminated. Unless you are well versed in tax preparation, you may want to get help from a tax professional to help you through filing your taxes. To more precisely determine whether your Social Security benefits are taxable try the Interactive Tax Assistant [“Are My Social Security or Railroad Retirement Tier I Benefits Taxable?”](#) The IRS has a worksheet you can download to determine whether your benefits are taxable: <https://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/n703.pdf>. [Source: TSCL Q&A: <https://seniorsleague.org/q-january-2019> | January 2019 ++]

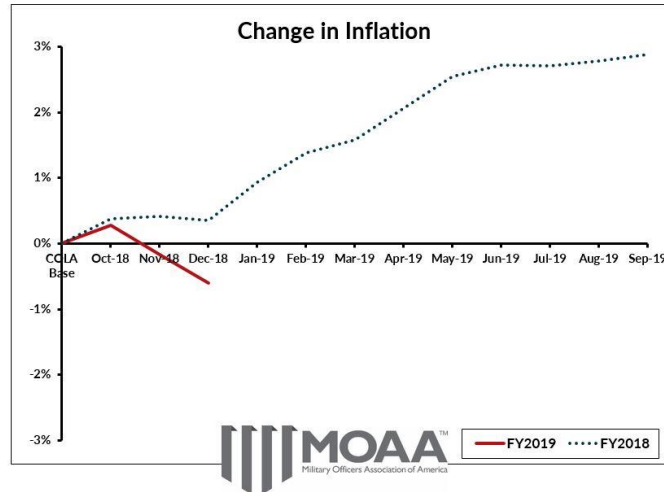
Bankruptcy Update 01 ► **Chapter 13 vs. Chapter 7 Impact on Handicapped Vets**

According to Mary Langsner, Ph.D. , when a person files for bankruptcy, it’s a sad day. Although the bankruptcy code was enacted to give a “fresh start to the honest but unfortunate debtor” and a single point of contact for creditors (and to keep our economy going), admitting that your debts are out of control is difficult. So why would Congress make it harder for disabled veterans who need bankruptcy protection? In 2005, Congress changed the bankruptcy code to force those with income levels at or above the median in their geographic area into Chapter 13 (reorganization), rather than Chapter 7 (liquidation). Chapter 7 is traditionally a fast process, but Chapter 13 takes three to five years.

The rationale was that debtors who could pay part of their debts in Chapter 13 were getting fast discharges in Chapter 7 instead. Although there had been abusive Chapter 7 filings, these amendments have created unintended consequences, especially for disabled veterans. Here’s how: “Payments to victims of war crimes or crimes against humanity . . . , and payments to victims of international terrorism . . . or domestic terrorism . . .” are excluded from the “current monthly income” calculation. Social security benefits are also excluded. That’s fair. But veterans’ military disability benefits **are included** in calculating their current monthly income. That’s unfair. [Source: U.S. Veteran Compensation Programs | January 26, 2019 ++]

COLA FY 2019 Update 01 ► **December's Numbers Show Downward Trend**

The final FY 2018 COLA, which took effect Jan. 1, 2019, is 2.8 percent. For context, this means that for every \$1,000 you currently receive in retired pay, you will receive \$28 more starting Jan. 1, 2019. The calculation is made by comparing the average CPI from July through September of the current fiscal year to the average for the same months of the year prior. Remember, active duty pay raises are calculated differently. The December 2018 CPI is 244.786, 0.6 percent below the FY 2019 COLA baseline. The Consumer Price Index for January is scheduled to be released Feb. 13. The CPI baseline for FY 2019 is 246.352.



[Source: MOAA Newsletter | January 17, 2019 ++]

Health Saving Account Update 02 ► 401K for Medical Expenses

Future medical expenses haunt the imaginations of millions of Americans. In fact, paying for health care costs during one’s golden years is Americans’ No. 1 retirement worry, according to Franklin Templeton Investments. The firm’s latest annual Retirement Income Strategies and Expectations (RISE) survey — for which 2,000 adults were polled — was released earlier this year. It found that the top three retirement concerns are:

- Paying for medical and pharmaceutical expenses — cited by 31 percent of respondents
- Paying off debt — 18 percent
- Funding assisted-living care — 15 percent

Perhaps we should not be surprised. After all, costly health problems tend to strike later in life. And it has been projected that a 65-year-old couple who both retire in 2018 would need an estimated \$280,000 to pay for their health care expenses throughout retirement. As it turns out, many Americans are not doing all they can to prepare for health care costs in retirement. The Franklin Templeton survey found that 76 percent of folks who were still working weren’t using a health savings account (HSA), or didn’t have access to one.

Of course, you can’t be faulted for not contributing to an HSA if you are not eligible for one. To be eligible, you must have a high-deductible health insurance plan. If you are not allowed to contribute to an HSA, you need to check out other options for cutting costs. If you are eligible for an HSA, though, opening and contributing to one is perhaps the best way to save money to pay for your medical costs in retirement — or before. HSAs are often thought of as IRAs or 401(k) accounts for medical expenses. This is true in that HSAs are a tax-advantaged account in which you can save money for medical expenses. From the tax perspective, though, an HSA is better than any retirement account. They offer a unique hat trick of tax benefits:

- Contributions are tax-deductible in the year they are made.
- Gains on contributions grow tax-free.
- Withdrawals are tax-free if you spend the money on qualified medical expenses.

[Source: MoneyTalksNews | Karla Bowsher | December 29, 2018 ++]

Military Travel Discounts & Offers 2 ► DoD/Priceline New Leisure Travel Site

The United States Department of Defense has enlisted the online travel agency Priceline to create a new leisure travel site for current and retired U.S. military personnel. The new website, [American Forces Travel](#), will give the military community access to hotel, flight, car rental and cruise deals. There will also be negotiated prices on vacation homes, apartments and packages for savings up to 60 percent. More than 1 million hotel deals will be available in more than 71,000 destinations around the world. The Department of Defense has about 1.3 million people in active service around the world. But at launch, American Forces Travel will be open to more than 6.5 million active and retired members of the U.S. military community.

All five branches of the U.S. armed forces – including the Army, Marine Corps, Navy, Air Force, and Coast Guard – will be part of the program. Others who are eligible to become users are Medal of Honor recipients and American Red Cross and USO paid personnel serving outside of the USA. Department of Defense civilians serving within and outside of the USA will also be able to sign up. Family members of all of these groups will be able to use the site. First-time users will have to verify their eligibility with the Department of Defense through a secure process.

Previously, employees could use travel agents on military bases to book their leisure travel. The Department of Defense says it wanted to create an online platform that would be more modern, fast and accessible. Priceline, which is part of Booking Holdings, was selected after a competitive bidding process among many of the largest online travel agencies. Priceline will continue to offer “opaque” pricing on hotels, flights and rental cars that can often yield discounts on its own website. But on American Forces Travel, users will not get deals in which they would have to book without knowing the name of the hotel. All travel suppliers on American Forces Travel will be fully disclosed, Priceline says. Members of the military “have dedicated themselves to service, and deserve our thanks and our respect. To honor that service, we have negotiated deep discounts for personal travel, across flights, hotels, car rentals, cruises and more,” says Brett Keller, CEO of Priceline.

American Forces Travel will also feature “bundled” booking options, which could mean savings of hundreds of dollars. Bundled options combine private rates that are usually only available with packages and that travelers can’t book on their own. All transactions will generate a commission. The Department of Defense and Priceline would not disclose the commission percentage but said it will be used to support quality of life programs within each service branch. Such programs include family and youth activities, fitness centers, athletic venues and games, and entertainment programs. Active, Reserve and Guard members, and their families, are eligible to use them. A portion of commissions will also go toward Morale, Welfare and Recreation programs on military bases. Those programs are used to enhance unit cohesion and improving individual and family readiness for service. [Source: USA TODAY | Nancy Trejos | January 22, 2019 ++]

Social Security Q & A ► 190116 thru 190131

(Q) I haven't worked in a long time, can I get SSI benefits?

A: The SSI federal program is for individuals who have a limited income and resources. There are things you need to know to apply for SSI benefits.

- Adults who are disabled or totally or partially blind may be eligible.
- Children who are disabled who have limited income and resources may be eligible.
- Adults who are 65 or older who have limited resources may be eligible.

The amount payable usually changes each year. The benefits are not large but may be life-saving for some. For example for one person for 2018, the maximum benefit is \$750. For a couple, the maximum is \$1125. For more information on your situation refer to <https://www.ssa.gov/pubs/EN-05-11069.pdf>. The amount of benefits may be adjusted depending on if you or a family member has other income. Usually once approved for SSI benefits, you will be eligible for Medicaid.

The disability rule for adults seeking SSI benefits is the same as the Social Security Disability Insurance program. The rule is generally that you are unable to work at a substantial gainful activity. Your impairments must prevent you from doing any past work or other work. SGA is a monthly amount. Social Security may adjust the amount each year. For 2018, the amount is \$1180 per month. Guidelines for determining if a child meets the physical or mental impairments are different. Income and gifts can reduce your benefits. In some cases, benefits are eliminated entirely. Included as income are money you earn, Social Security benefits, and pensions. Things of value from other people like food and shelter are included.

If you own too much you cannot get SSI benefits. A single person's resources must be no more than \$2000 and a married couple can have \$3000 in resources. Some things are not counted as resources. Your house is usually not counted provided you live in the house. Usually, your car is not counted. Things counted include cash, bonds, bank accounts, settlements, workers compensation, contest winnings, and inheritances. For more about resources refer to <https://www.ssa.gov/pubs/EN-05-11011.pdf>.

When you apply for SSI benefits you will be asked for your Social Security number, birthday, marriage information, medical information, and Income/resource information. When you apply for SSI benefits you are not able to do so online. To apply you must contact your local Social Security office to set up an appointment. You may call toll-free 1-800-772-1213. For more information about SSI benefits, you can go to www.socialsecurity.gov.

[Source: Louisiana Social Security Lawyer | Hallman Woods | November 30, 2018 ++]

USPS COA Scam ► Moving Soon? Look Out for This Trick

Changing your address through the United States Postal Service is an inexpensive and straightforward process that can be done online. Recently though, scammers have been creating websites that look like the USPS site and tricking consumers into paying steep prices for no service at all.

How the Scam Works

- You type "address change" or a similar query into a search engine. Several results pop up. You click on the one that looks official and says USPS. When the site loads, everything looks normal, you fill out the forms and make a payment with your credit or debit card. Shortly after, you notice a hefty charge from a business that is not the USPS. When you call the company to find out what happened, they claim, at best, that they can only offer you a partial refund.
- One consumer reported this experience to BBB.org/ScamTracker: "They set up their site to perfectly mimic the USPS website and charge \$80 for an address change that they never actually perform." In most cases, these fake companies get away with your money and your address is left unchanged.

How to Avoid Falling Victim to a Fake Website

- Double check the URL before you enter personal and payment information. It can be easy to click on a sponsored ad or imposter website without noticing. Before you enter any sensitive information, double check that you are on the right website and that the link is secure. (Secure links start with "https://" and include a lock icon on the purchase page... learn more at www.BBB.org/BBBSecure.)

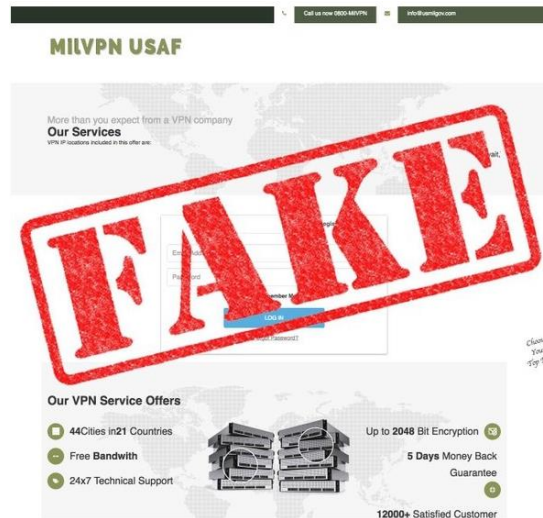
- Be wary of third-party websites. Some websites appear to offer a legitimate service but are only fronts for a scam. Be suspicious of websites with no working customer service number and no physical address. Typos and grammatical errors can be indications of a scammer's handiwork too.
- Make online purchases with your credit card. Fraudulent charges made on a credit card can usually be disputed, whereas that might not be the case with other payment methods.

For More Information

To learn more about other kinds of scams, go to BBB.org/ScamTips. To learn more about secure websites, go to BBB.org/BBBSecure. If you have been the victim of this or another scam, make others aware by filing a report on BBB.org/ScamTracker. If you have been the victim of identity theft, get a personalized recovery plan at www.IdentityTheft.gov, a service of the Federal Trade Commission. [Source: BBB Scam Alert | January 18, 2018 ++]

Deployment Letter Scam ► Payment Solicitation to Contact Loved Ones Overseas

A fake deployment letter urging friends and families to make a payment in order to contact loved ones overseas is making the rounds on Fort Bragg, North Carolina. “This is a scam,” post officials said in a Facebook post 24 JAN. “It was brought to our attention that a fake deployment letter signed by the Fort Bragg Garrison Commander Col. Kyle Reed is making its rounds encouraging Families and friends of deployed service members to subscribe to a website called MilVPN-USaf,” the social media post reads. "The scam website attempts to deceive families/friends to register, select a plan, and make a payment in an effort to contact service members while deployed.”



Army officials said family members who want to send letters or connect with loved ones while deployed should do so through official channels. “Online offenders will go to great lengths to deceive unsuspecting users out of money and their identity,” the Fort Bragg Facebook post reads. "For family members who would like to get more information about contacting their service members while abroad, contact your spouse’s unit Family Readiness Liaison or chain of command.” U.S. Army Criminal Investigation Command says it receives hundreds of reports each month from individuals who have fallen victim to scams involving criminals impersonating U.S. soldiers over the internet. Never send money to someone claiming to be a soldier, CID said. Oftentimes these scams involve a romance or dating angle to the grift.

However, the scam could also be perpetrated through extortion, blackmail, or — as appears to be the case with this Fort Bragg letter — taking advantage of families new to deployment situations. “The most common scheme involves criminals, often from other countries — most notably from West African countries — pretending to be U.S. soldiers serving in a combat zone or other overseas location,” CID’s social media scam website reads. “These crooks often present documents and other ‘proof’ of their financial need when asking their victims to wire money to them.” [Source: ArmyTimes | Kyle Rempfer | January 24, 2019 ++]

Shark Tank Scam ▶ Look Out for Phony Claims about TV Endorsements

Recently, BBB has received reports of consumers falling prey to pitches for products that claim to be endorsed by the popular TV program, "Shark Tank." This is a new twist on fraudulent "free trial offers," a common scam that costs consumers millions of dollars each year.

How the Scam Works

- You see an ad on the internet about a new product, often a diet supplement promising to help you lose weight, get perfect skin, cleanse your digestive tract, or even prevent cancer. In fact, the product is so great, it's endorsed by the TV program "Shark Tank." What's more, the manufacturers are willing to send you a free sample. All you have to do is pay a small shipping and handling fee.
- If you do offer up your credit card information for the "free trial offer," you're in for a surprise. The trial isn't really free, as you are supposed to receive the supplements, try them, and – if they don't work – send them back before the trial ends. But the supplements arrive late, so you won't have time to send them back before you are charged full price. Not only that, you've inadvertently signed up for an expensive monthly "subscription." Contacting customer service is a real challenge. The original website may disappear, leaving you without many options. If you do manage to speak to a representative, they often say there is nothing they can do. If you don't notice the charges right away, you could end up making monthly recurring payments for a product that doesn't work.

How to Avoid Subscription Scams

- Be especially wary of ads with extravagant claims. Free trial offer scams often use celebrity endorsements (even claiming the star is leaving show business to focus on the new company!), offer fake endorsements like "Shark Tank," and make claims that are beyond reasonable belief.
- Read the fine print. Most subscription sites, even the fraudulent ones, have fine print that reveals the "catch" to the great deal you are being offered. Make sure to read the fine print carefully to make sure you understand what you are signing up for.
- Be cautious when making online payments. Before making any purchase online, double check you are on the right website and have a secure connection. Make sure the URL starts with "https://" and includes a lock icon on the purchase page. (Learn more about secure websites at BBB.org/BBBSecure.)
- Only use your credit card online. Purchases made with your credit card can be disputed. You may not be able to recover funds spent with another payment method.

For More Information

To learn more about subscription and "free trial" scams, read [this BBB report](#). To learn about other kinds of scams, go to BBB.org/ScamTips. If you have been the victim of this or another scam, make others aware by filing a report on the BBB.org/ScamTracker.

[Source: BBB Scam Alert | January 25, 2019 ++]

Tax Burden for Missouri 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 Missouri:

Sales Taxes

State Sales Tax: 4.225% (prescription drugs exempt; food is taxed at 1.225%) Cities and counties as well as special taxing districts (such as fire districts) may impose a local sales and use tax that may raise the total tax to 10.1%.

Gasoline Tax: 35.70 cents/gallon (Includes all taxes)

Diesel Fuel Tax: 41.70 cents/gallon (Includes all taxes)

Cigarette Tax: 0.17 cents/pack of 20

Personal Income Taxes

Tax Rate Range: Low – 1.5%; High – 5.90%

Income Brackets: Nine. Lowest – \$100; Highest – \$9,073

Personal Exemptions: Single – \$2,100; Married – \$4,200; Dependents – \$1,200

Standard Deduction: Single – \$12,000; Married filing jointly – \$24,000.

Medical/Dental Deduction: Federal amount. Individuals may subtract from their federal adjusted gross income, qualified health insurance premiums and long-term care premiums, to the extent their premiums paid were not reimbursed by their employer, or excluded from their federal adjusted gross income.

Federal Income Tax Deduction: The state allows a deduction on your individual income tax return for the amount of federal tax you paid. The deduction is for the amount actually paid as indicated on your federal tax form. For individual filers the amount cannot exceed \$5,000. For joint filers the ceiling is \$10,000.

Retirement Income Taxes: Missouri resident taxpayers are allowed a state income tax deduction for Social Security benefits received by individuals 62 years of age or older, Social Security disability benefits, and non-private retirement system benefits received by individuals 62 years of age or older, to the extent these benefits are included in federal adjusted gross income. To view the Social Security/Social Security Disability deduction chart and the public pension exemption eligibility chart for tax year 2017 go to <http://dor.mo.gov/personal/whatsnew/index.php#ssd>

Public Pension Exemption: Married couples with Missouri adjusted gross income less than \$100,000 and single individuals with Missouri adjusted gross income less than \$85,000, may deduct up to 65 percent of their public retirement benefits, to the extent the amounts are included in their federal adjusted gross income. The deductible percentage of their public retirement benefits will increase each year. Married couples with Missouri adjusted gross income greater than \$100,000 and single individuals with Missouri adjusted gross income greater than \$85,000, may qualify for a partial exemption. Taxpayers who also qualify for the Social Security or Social Security Disability Deduction, must reduce their public pension exemption by the amount of the Social Security or Social Security Disability Deduction.

Retired Military Pay: The state allowed 15 percent of military pension income to be exempt from Missouri state tax. This tax deduction increased 15 percent annually until January 1, 2016, when all military pension income will be tax free.

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

Residential property is assessed at 19% of its fair market value. Personal property is assessed at rates ranging from 5% to 33.3%. [The Missouri Property Tax Credit Claim](#) gives credit to certain senior citizens and 100 percent disabled individuals for a portion of the real estate taxes or rent they have paid for the year. The credit is for a maximum of \$750 for renters (Note: If renting from a facility that does not pay property taxes, you are not eligible for a Property Tax Credit) and \$1,100 for owners who occupied their home during the period being claimed. The actual credit is based on the amount of real estate taxes or rent paid and total household income.

- If a Veteran is 100% disabled (NOT due to military service) payments and benefits are included into Property Tax Credit household income. Veteran payments and benefits include education or training allowances, disability compensation, grants, and insurance proceeds. A letter from the Veterans Administration detailing the amount of your benefits needs to be attached to the Property Tax Credit form.
- If a Veteran is 100% disabled as a result of military service, you are not required to include your veteran payments and benefits on the Property Tax Credit form. A letter from the Veterans Administration indicating the disability is 100% from military service needs to be attached to the Property Tax Credit form.
- People needing proof of their Social Security or Supplemental Security Income benefits can get verification letters online instantly through a *my* Social Security account at www.socialsecurity.gov/myaccount. You can also get one mailed to you by calling toll-free, 1-800-772-1213.

To see if you are eligible go to <https://dor.mo.gov/personal/ptc/documents/proptax.pdf>.

Inheritance and Estate Taxes

Since the IRS will no longer allow a state death tax credit for deaths occurring on or after January 1, 2005, no Missouri estate tax is imposed. Therefore, no estate tax return must be filed for deaths occurring on or after January 1, 2005.

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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Tax Assistance Offices formerly were available at 5 locations throughout the state in Kansas City, Jefferson City, St. Louis, Joplin, and Springfield. As services vary by office location, it was recommended that you review the services offered before visiting an office by going to https://dor.mo.gov/tax_assistance_office.php.

However a notice posted at https://dor.mo.gov/taxpayer_assistance_offices.php states, “the offices located in St. Louis, Kansas City, Springfield, St. Joseph, Joplin, Cape Girardeau, and Jefferson City are permanently closed. Please consider searching our website <https://dor.mo.gov/faq/personal> for answers to your questions or you may call (573) 751-3505. Correspondence and packages may be mailed to the address provided on any notice received or return filed.

If no return address was provided, mail to Missouri Department of Revenue, Harry S Truman State Office Building, Taxation Division, 301 West High St. PO Box 3366, Jefferson City, MO 65101”.

The drop off location for mail in the Truman Building in Jefferson City is Room 330, Truman Building from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. The mailing address for Express/Overnight packages is 301 West High St, Room 102, Jefferson City, MO 65101. Do not enclose cash with mail delivered to the Missouri Department of Revenue. For more contact information including e-mail addresses, visit <http://dor.mo.gov/contact>. Assistance with individual income tax preparation may be available from a volunteer program in your area. You may also contact the Department to inquire about your refund at 573-751-3505 or by e-mail at income@dor.mo.gov. For further information on the state of Missouri income tax requirements visit:

- Department of Revenue site <http://dor.mo.gov/new2mo.php>
- https://dor.mo.gov/forms/index.php?formName=mo-1040&category_id=&year=99&sub=

[Source: <http://www.retirementliving.com/taxes-kansas-new-mexico#Minnesota> | JAN 2019 ++]

*** General Interest ***



Notes of Interest ► 16 thru 31 JAN 2019

- **Russia.** The Russian defense ministry is reportedly seeking the approval of new rules that would give the military permission to shoot down passenger planes deemed dangerous in emergency situations. Existing legislation offers contradictory statements on how the military should respond to, for example, a 9/11 situation.
- **News False Labeling.** According to Retired Navy SEAL Don Shipley’s ‘Phony Navy Seal of the Week’ editor, Nathan Phillips a.k.a. Nathan Stanard, Native American Drummer Dude highlighted in recent news stories was NOT a Vietnam Vet as reported. He was in the Marines Corps during the Vietnam Era serving as an electrician and reefer (icebox) mechanic. Check out <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CIXIzvyAILA>
- **Tuition Assistance.** Service members from most military branches are using tuition assistance at a steady rate, Pentagon data show. Army troops are the exception -- records show that their participation in the program since fiscal 2014 has dropped more than 30%.
- **Stamps.** The price of a first-class stamp — the postage needed to mail a 1-ounce letter — has jumped from 50 cents to 55 cents.
- **Taiwan Strait.** The US Navy sailed two ships through the Taiwan Strait on 24 JAN. The guided missile destroyer USS McCampbell and the USNS Walter S. Diehl "conducted a routine Taiwan Strait Transit" that was "in accordance with international law," US Pacific Fleet spokesman Lt. Cmdr. Tim Gorman told CNN. "The ships' transit through the Taiwan Strait demonstrates the US commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific. The US Navy will continue to fly, sail and operate anywhere international law allows," Gorman added.
- **FOIA.** Phony Navy Seal of the Week explains how anyone can obtain military records on anyone else at <https://youtu.be/URLHwbnIDYA>. Note: These do not include DD-214’s which contain information prohibited to reveal under the Privacy Act of 1974.
- **Cost of Government Shutdown.** The U.S. economy lost at least \$6 billion during the record-long partial government shutdown, S&P Global Ratings said 25 JAN. The economic hit stems from a loss of productivity

and economic activity lost to outside business during the shutdown during the 35 day shutdown, Reuters reported. Subsequently the CBO reported the shutdown cost the U.S. economy \$11 billion.

[Source: Various | January 15, 2018 ++]

DPRK Nuclear Weapons Update 26 ► **Assessment | Unlikely To Dismantle Its Arsenal**

Directly contradicting President Donald Trump, U.S. intelligence agencies told Congress on 29 JAN that North Korea is unlikely to dismantle its nuclear arsenal, that the Islamic State group remains a threat and that the Iran nuclear deal is working. The chiefs made no mention of a crisis at the U.S.-Mexican border for which Trump has considered declaring a national emergency. Their analysis stands in sharp contrast to Trump's almost singular focus on security gaps at the border as the biggest threat facing the United States.

Top security officials including FBI Director Christopher Wray, CIA Director Gina Haspel and Director of National Intelligence Dan Coats presented an update to the Senate intelligence committee on Tuesday on their annual assessment of global threats. They warned of an increasingly diverse range of security dangers around the globe, from North Korean nuclear weapons to Chinese cyberespionage to Russian campaigns to undermine Western democracies. Coats said intelligence information does not support the idea that North Korean leader Kim Jong Un will eliminate his nuclear weapons and the capacity for building more — a notion that is the basis of the U.S. negotiating strategy. "We currently assess that North Korea will seek to retain its WMD (weapons of mass destruction) capabilities and is unlikely to completely give up its nuclear weapons and production capability because its leaders ultimately view nuclear weapons as critical to regime survival," Coats told the committee.

Coats did note that North Korean leader Kim Jong Un has expressed support for ridding the Korean Peninsula of nuclear weapons and over the past year has not test-fired a nuclear-capable missile or conducted a nuclear test. The "Worldwide Threat Assessment" report on which Coats based his testimony said U.S. intelligence continues to "observe activity inconsistent with" full nuclear disarmament by the North. "In addition, North Korea has for years underscored its commitment to nuclear arms, including through an order in 2018 to mass-produce weapons and an earlier law — and constitutional change — affirming the country's nuclear status," it said.

The report said Kim's support at his June 2018 Singapore summit with Trump for "complete denuclearization of the Korean peninsula" is a formulation linked to an end to American military deployments and exercises involving nuclear weapons. Trump asserted after the Singapore summit that North Korea no longer poses a nuclear threat. However, Coats and other intelligence officials made clear they see it differently. "The capabilities and threat that existed a year ago are still there," said Lt. Gen. Robert Ashley, the director of the Defense Intelligence Agency. Plans for a follow-up Trump-Kim summit are in the works, but no agenda, venue or date has been announced.

More broadly, the intelligence report on which Coats and the heads of other intelligence agencies based their testimony predicted that security threats to the United States and its allies this year will expand and diversify, driven in part by China and Russia. It says Moscow and Beijing are more aligned than at any other point since the mid-1950s and their global influence is rising. The report also said the Islamic State group "remains a terrorist and insurgent threat" inside Iraq, where the government faces "an increasingly disenchanted public." The intelligence assessment, which is provided annually to Congress, made no mention of a crisis at the U.S.-Mexico border, which Trump has asserted as the basis for his demand that Congress finance a border wall. The report predicted additional U.S.-bound migration from El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras, with migrants preferring to travel in caravans in hopes of a safer journey.

In Syria, where Trump has ordered a full withdrawal of U.S. troops, the government of Bashar Assad is likely to consolidate control, with Russia and Iran attempting to further entrench themselves in Syria, the report said. Asked for her assessment, Haspel said of the IS group: "They're still dangerous." She added that they still command

"thousands of fighters in Iraq and Syria." The intelligence agencies said Iran continues to work with other parties to the nuclear deal it reached with the U.S. and other Western nations. In doing so, they said, it has at least temporarily lessened the nuclear threat. In May 2018, Trump withdrew the U.S. from that accord, which he called a terrible deal that would not stop Iran from going nuclear.

The intelligence assessment of Afghanistan, more than 17 years into a conflict that began after the 9/11 attacks on the U.S., projected a continued military stalemate. Without mentioning prospects for a peace deal, which appear to have improved only in recent days, the report said, "neither the Afghan government nor the Taliban will be able to gain a strategic military advantage in the Afghan war in the coming year" if the U.S. maintains its current levels of support. Trump has ordered a partial pullback of U.S. forces this year, although no firm plan is in place.

Coats told the committee that Russia and perhaps other countries are likely to attempt to use social media and other means to influence the 2020 U.S. presidential election. "We expect our adversaries and strategic competitors to refine their capabilities and add new tactics as they learn from each other's experiences, suggesting the threat landscape could look very different in 2020 and future elections," the intelligence report said. The report specifically warned about Russia, which U.S. intelligence agencies determined had interfered in the 2016 election to sway voters toward Trump. "Russia's social media efforts will continue to focus on aggravating social and racial tensions, undermining trust in authorities, and criticizing perceived anti-Russia politicians," it said. [Source: The Associated Press | Robert Burns | January 29, 2019 ++]

Emergency Preparations ► Top 10 Steps to Take in Advance

Preparing now for an emergency or evacuation helps you act quickly when danger threatens. With severe weather, floods and wildfires growing more common, it's important to have an emergency plan in place for evacuating your home. Advance planning gives you peace of mind. When you're prepared, you won't forget to pack essential items, and you can avoid a last-minute dash for the car, unsure if you have what you need. These 10 steps will help you prepare for emergencies.

1. Keep the gas tank filled

As soon as you learn that your home may be threatened by a natural disaster such as hurricane, flood or fire, take your vehicle to a gas station and fill up the tank. In California, many people strive to keep their tanks filled throughout wildfire season, to keep from running out of fuel while stalled in traffic during an evacuation.

2. Make a list of things to take

It's important to identify in advance the things you plan to take when evacuating. This planning allows you to avoid a frantic hunt for photos, documents and keepsakes. List things in order of importance, noting where they are located. That'll prevent wasting time searching for them. You'll be able to quickly grab the essentials when there's little time to pack. Make financial plans for an emergency, too. For some ideas and inspiration, read "[How to Prepare for an Income Emergency](#)."

3. Pack a grab-and-go bag

Everyone should have a grab-and-go bag or box. Fill it with the important documents you'll want to have with you if you're evacuated. Even with no time to pack, you'll have the critical essentials. [Ready.gov](#) tells what to include in your kit, such as:

- Insurance documents
- Computer thumb drives containing copies of important papers and photos
- Safe deposit box keys
- A list of computer passwords
- Cash and a debit card

If you learn that your home is threatened, immediately throw in any medications you'll need, spare glasses or contact lenses and a flashlight with batteries. While creating your grab-and-go bag, take a moment to read your homeowners insurance policy, so you'll know what is and is not protected.

4. Have a portable radio

A portable radio with fresh batteries is basic emergency equipment for every home. If the power goes out, a radio keeps you connected with your local news channel. You'll learn of important developments, such as route closures and the availability of emergency shelters. A radio with NOAA weather alerts will provide updates on natural disasters such as hurricanes and flooding. While a portable radio is best, you also may be able to use a smartphone to tune into streaming news broadcasts. You'll also need a portable charger with plenty of storage capacity to keep phones charged during power outages.

5. Line up a place to stay in advance

Don't wait for an emergency to locate a place to stay in case you're forced to evacuate. Right now, ask friends or relatives outside your immediate community if you may stay with them in an emergency. Think of people who live within driving distance but are unlikely to be affected by the flood, fire, power outage or earthquake that could strike you. Having a place to go when evacuated means you'll avoid sleeping on a cot in a public shelter. While they provide a great public service, these temporary shelters offer no privacy and few conveniences.

6. Plan for your pets

When you evacuate, you'll need to bring your pets, too. Make sure to have strong carriers to keep them safe and under control in the car. Have an emergency stock of food, medications and extra water for all animals (as well as humans). Keep pet supplies in one place, so you know where to find them quickly. Put identification tags with your mobile telephone number on pets' collars now. Your veterinarian can explain how to have a small chip with your contact information implanted under a dog or cat's skin. That way, even if an ID tag is lost, you and your pet are more likely to be reunited if separated.

7. Plan how to meet up and stay in touch

Make a plan for reconnecting, in case you need to evacuate when your household members are separated. In a natural disaster, you may be unable to return home for days, or the dwelling could be destroyed. Also:

- Keep mobile telephone numbers handy.
- Designate a friend or relative outside your community who will receive and relay messages for you and your loved ones in case you are separated and can't connect.

8. Prepare a first aid kit

If you're hurt, you may not be able to get immediate medical care. A first aid kit prepares you to deal with minor injuries. Familiarize yourself with everything in the kit. If an off-the-shelf kit seems inadequate, build your own. Avoid the temptation to borrow from the kit in non-emergencies. You don't want to be without the supplies you need in a real emergency.

9. Don't forget about your neighbors

Communities handle emergencies better when people work together. If you watch out for neighbors and they look out for you, no one will be left behind. As you learn of an emergency, reach out to neighbors. If you have a neighborhood organization, such as a homeowners association or Neighborhood Watch group, get a contact list and keep it updated, so you can find neighbors when you need them.

10. Leave promptly

If you feel you are in a threatening situation, you don't have to wait for word from the authorities to evacuate. Sometimes public safety warnings are too late, or they don't reach everyone. Leaving earlier gives you options. Start packing the car as soon as you feel you are in danger. Delaying can mean getting caught in heavy traffic.

[Source: MoneyTalksNews | Emmet Pierce | January 26, 2019 ++]

Government Shutdown Update 23 ► The Stop STUPIDITY Act

With the government shutdown appearing to have no end in sight, one member of Congress allegedly is already looking to make sure that the next one doesn't happen at all. Sen. Mark Warner (D-VA) was reported to have introduced the Stop Shutdowns Transferring Unnecessary Pain and Inflicting Damage in The Coming Years Act on 22 JAN, which would ensure that all parts of government, except the legislative branch and Executive Office of the President, would be funded at previous levels in the event of a lapse in appropriations. However, as of the end of the January it has not appeared on the Congress.gov list of bills introduced in the 116th Congress website <https://www.congress.gov/search?q=%7B%22source%22%3A%22legislation%22%7D>.

“The Stop STUPIDITY Act takes the aggressive but necessary step of forcing the president and Congress to do the jobs they were elected to do,” said Warner in a news release. “It is disturbing that the daily lives of hundreds of thousands of workers are at the mercy of dysfunction in Washington. Workers, business owners and tax payers are currently paying the price of D.C. gridlock and my legislation will put an end to that.”

Historically, the failure of Congress and the president to enact annual appropriations has not always led to a government shutdown. Prior to 1980, federal agencies generally continued to operate during a funding gap but minimized nonessential operations to keep spending levels as low as possible. According to a Congressional Research Service report updated Dec. 10, 2018, then-U.S. Attorney General Benjamin R. Civiletti issued two opinions in 1980 and 1981 that strictly interpreted the Antideficiency Act. “In brief, the opinions stated that, with some exceptions, the head of an agency could avoid violating the Antideficiency Act only by suspending the agency’s operations until the enactment of an appropriation,” the report said. “In the absence of appropriations, exceptions would be allowed only when there is ‘some reasonable and articulable connection between the function to be performed and the safety of human life or the protection of property.’”

According to Warner, his legislation would force Congress and the White House to come to the negotiating table without jeopardizing the functions or employees of federal agencies. [Source: Federal Times | Jessie Bur | January 22, 2019 ++]

Subic Bay Philippines Update 01 ► Philippines' Largest Shipyard Has Chinese Firms Interest

Two Chinese firms are interested in the Philippines' largest shipyard, once the US's largest naval base in the Pacific, raising new alarm about Chinese expansion. The firm that runs the shipyard, Hanjin Philippines, a local unit of a South Korean firm, has declared bankruptcy, defaulting on \$412 million in loans. It also owes \$900 million to South Korean creditors. The firm asked the Philippine government for help to find someone to take over the business, and Manila wants a new investor to safeguard thousands of jobs. Two Chinese firms, one of which is state-owned, have contacted the Philippines about the facility. A Chinese takeover would give it a commercial presence in what was once Naval Base Subic Bay, the US's largest naval facility in the Pacific until it departed in 1992.

Strategically located on the South China Sea, Subic Bay still a regular stop for US and foreign forces. Zambales, the province of which Subic Bay is part, also hosts US-Philippine military exercises, including a recent training that saw Japan deploy armored vehicles to foreign soil for the first time since World War II. The Hanjin's Subic Bay facility covers nearly 750 acres, building vessels like oil tankers and container ships. But the shipbuilding industry has struggled, and only about 3,800 workers are left at the site, down from about 30,000, officials said. China already has a presence around Subic Bay with liquefied natural gas and railway projects. The Chinese firms' interest has

prompted concern about Beijing’s ambitions in the South China Sea, where it has made expansive claims and constructed military facilities, often clashing with neighbors, including the Philippines.

“Let’s be aware that this Hanjin shipyard issue is not just about business, financial and other economic issues. This is a VERY SIGNIFICANT NATIONAL SECURITY ISSUE!” Alexander Pama, a retired Philippine navy vice admiral, wrote in a Facebook post on 12 JAN. Pama was Philippine navy chief from 2011 to 2012, a period during which Manila was in a standoff with China over Scarborough Shoal, a group of rocks about 120 miles off the coast of Zambales. Scarborough remains a point of contention, as it could give China a strategically valuable outpost in the northeast corner of the South China Sea; both Manila and Washington have warned Beijing about seeking a foothold there. “The ownership of Hanjin shipyard in Subic Bay will give the owners unlimited access to one of our most strategic geographic Naval and Maritime asset. Although it is a commercial shipyard, nothing can prevent the owners from making it into a de-facto Naval base and a maritime facility for other security purposes!” added Pama, who held government positions overseeing civil defense and maritime security after retiring in 2012.

The Philippine government, headed by President Rodrigo Duterte, has downplayed the concerns. A presidential spokesman said 14 JAN that such reports were still “speculations,” and that if a Chinese company the government has dealt with before assumes control “there’s no issue with it.” If it’s a different company, the spokesman added, “we have to vet.” Greg Poling, director of the Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, told Business Insider, “It’s way too early to know who is going to end up taking over Hanjin’s Subic shipyard,” noting that investors from Japan and Singapore have also reportedly expressed interest. The shipyard “would be a far cry from a naval base,” Poling added, “but it would undoubtedly raise some concerns in the security sectors in both Manila and Washington. There would be worries over potential intelligence gathering by Chinese entities targeting the nearby Port of Subic Bay, including the regular visits by US naval vessels.” But the facility isn’t a port, Poling said, and the ability to build commercial vessels there wouldn’t “necessarily translate into any greater access for visiting Chinese ships.”

Beijing’s interest in the small deep-water port at Davao City in the southern Philippines — part of its sprawling Belt and Road Initiative — could be more concerning, potentially leading to dual use by commercial and military ships. Duterte comes from a powerful family in Davao, and was mayor there prior to taking office in 2016, after which he expressed interest in better ties with China and spurned longstanding ties between the US and the Philippines, who are bound by a mutual defense treaty.

“The Chinese are dangling money, but Filipinos are mainly loyal to the US,” Patricio Abinales, an expert on the Philippines at the University of Hawaii, told Stars and Stripes. “There’s sentimental loyalty of Filipinos about Subic, but probably the President will just ignore that.” But US-Philippine ties have improved since 2016, and the nature of the two countries’ longstanding relationship likely means Chinese forces won’t be taking station in Subic Bay any time soon, Poling said. “Ship visits are not the same as a base,” he said, “and there is little to no chance that the Philippines would accept a Chinese military presence, for legal and political reasons.” [Source: Business Insider | Christopher Woody | January 15, 2019 ++]

Border Wall Update 07 ► GoFundMe Campaign Change

A GoFundMe campaign to raise \$1 billion for President Donald Trump’s wall on the southern U.S. border must refund the more than \$20 million it has raised so far, after the campaign changed the way it intends to use the donations. Brian Kolfage — a 37-year-old Air Force veteran who received the Purple Heart after losing three limbs in Iraq — set up the GoFundMe. He posted on the campaign’s page 11 JAN that the approximately \$20,480,000 raised by more than 340,000 donors would no longer be donated to the federal government. Instead, the funds would go toward a non-profit organization he has set up to build the wall without the government’s help. Bobby Whithorne, director of

North America Communications for GoFundMe, announced not long after the funding change that all donations will be refunded unless donors specifically choose otherwise.

“When the campaign was created, the campaign organizer specifically stated on the campaign page, ‘If we don’t reach our goal or come significantly close we will refund every single penny,’” Whithorne said in a statement to Air Force Times. “He also stated on the campaign page, ‘100% of your donations will go to the Trump Wall.’” Because that is no longer happening, all donors will receive a refund on 11 APR unless they elect to redirect their donation to Kolfage’s new non-profit, Whithorne said. “Eight days before Christmas I started this GoFundMe campaign because I was tired of watching the U.S. government’s inability to secure our southern border,” Kolfage wrote on his campaign page. “The plan of action was simple and straightforward — to raise money to construct a wall.” However, Kolfage’s team eventually determined that the federal government would not be able to accept the donations anytime soon due to inaction within the legislative branch. “Do you really think the Democrats in Congress will take the money you donated and put it toward the southern border wall?” Kolfage said in a video update over the weekend. “I doubt it. That’s why we are changing our mission from ‘we fund the wall,’ to ‘we build the wall.’”

Kolfage has since created a Florida-based non-profit called “[We Build the Wall Inc.](#) to take donations. This site provides a means to automatically transfer any fund donated via GoFundME to the new endeavor. “We are better equipped than our own government to use the donated funds to build an actual wall on the southern border,” he wrote. “Our highly experienced team is highly confident that we can complete significant segments of the wall in less time, and for far less money, than the federal government, while meeting or exceeding all required regulatory, engineering and environmental specifications.” Kolfage said his team believes it can complete its segments of the wall for less than half of the government’s estimated costs on a per mile basis. He added that he consulted with leading experts on U.S. border security and construction prior to making this decision. Kolfage has not said whether he is coordinating this new endeavor with the Trump administration. The new non-profit is already identifying the most densely crossed areas of the border and soliciting affected landowners along the border, according to Kolfage. He said it is studying the most feasible solutions based on terrain, barrier styles, environmental impact and efficacy, and ascertaining the willingness of border landowners to provide no or low-cost easements on their property for wall construction. [Source: AirForceTimes | Kyle Rempfer | January 14, 2019 ++]

Border Wall Update 08 ► Wall That Nobody Wants to Talk About



This is not Donald Trump’s desired border wall between the USA and Mexico, nor is it Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán’s fence which stops the flow of migrants into Europe – this is a 764 kilometer wall between Turkey and Syria, funded by none other than the European Union. Turkey shares an 822 kilometer border with Syria, a country which has suffered bombardment from all angles since 2011, including several EU member states. The wall runs through the provinces of Sanliurfa, Gaziantep, Kilis, Hatay, Mardin and Sirnak and incorporates physical, electronic and advanced technology layers. The physical layer includes modular concrete walls, patrol routes, manned and unmanned towers and passenger tracks. While the EU and its loyal followers persistently preach that any form of

borders are racist, many will be shocked to learn that the construction of this wall was largely funded by the 28-member state union. [Source: I am Awake | <http://www.iamawake.co/the-eu-funded-wall-that-nobody-wants-to-talk-about-turkey-syria> | June 12, 2019 ++]

Trump Foreign Policy Update 01 ► America’s Endless Wars Must Stop

President Donald Trump on 13 JAN said America must “stop the endless wars” and has begun the withdrawal of troops and equipment from Syria, in keeping with his recent pledges to end U.S. involvement in that conflict. The comments came two days after Pentagon officials confirmed they have begun moving military equipment out of the region and begun planning the extraction of about 2,000 U.S. troops from the country. Military officials have said they will not reveal exact timetables or withdrawal details for security reasons. Trump, in a series of tweets on 13 JAN, said the “long overdue pullout from Syria” would not disrupt American efforts to stabilize the region. He said despite the moves, American forces are still “hitting the little remaining ISIS territorial caliphate hard, and from many directions” and said remaining U.S. forces in the region would protect Kurdish allies from Turkey

“Russia, Iran and Syria have been the biggest beneficiaries of the long term U.S. policy of destroying ISIS in Syria - natural enemies,” he wrote. “We also benefit but it is now time to bring our troops back home. Stop the ENDLESS WARS!” White House officials have worked to defend the sudden shift in Syria policy for weeks, since it became public last month. The planned rapid withdrawal of forces appeared to be a factor in the resignation of Defense Secretary Jim Mattis, who in his departure letter voiced concerns about America abandoning foreign allies. U.S. troops have been operating in Syria for the last four years under the larger mission of combating Islamic State militants in the Middle East. Pentagon and intelligence officials have said that while friendly forces have made significant progress in the fight, the group still remains a threat.

Last week, national security adviser John Bolton said American troops will not fully leave Syria until ISIS is defeated and allies are assured protection. That seemed to hint at a slowdown in Trump’s initial plans for a rapid withdrawal from the region, but administration officials have downplayed reports of internal conflict over the issue. In recent weeks, Trump has said multiple times that ISIS has been nearly completely wiped out because of policy changes made after he took office.

Senators briefed on the Syria plans last week voiced continued concerns about the withdrawal plan, saying it could give a boost to both ISIS fighters and foreign adversaries still operating in the area like Iran and Russia. Trump in his 2016 presidential campaign promised more American military spending but less U.S. involvement in foreign fights. Since his election, however, he has deferred to military officials who have requested more military personnel in the Middle East, Afghanistan and other overseas conflict areas. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | January 14, 2019 ++]

Trump Foreign Policy Update 02 ► AP Poll Shows Low Marks



A majority of Americans disapprove of the way President Donald Trump is handling U.S. foreign policy and about half think the country's global standing will deteriorate during the next year, according to new poll that highlighted the nation's partisan divide on foreign issues. The poll, conducted by Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research, also found the public split about the president's plan to remove U.S. troops from Syria and possibly Afghanistan — and about a quarter don't have an opinion one way or the other.

Overall, the president receives low marks from the public for his job handling foreign policy — 35 percent approve, while 63 percent disapprove. Like other issues, the partisan divide is startling. While 76 percent of Republicans approve, just 8 percent of Democrats say the same. "I just think that any time you buddy up with Russia or North Korea, it's going to be bad business," said Samantha Flowers, a 30-year-old third-grade teacher from Columbia, Missouri. "Also, the way that he's handling our neighboring countries — Mexico in particular. I think it just goes against our American values in general. We've been a welcoming and compassionate country," she said before starting to recite words emblazoned on the Statue of Liberty, which reads in part: "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free."

Richard Cleaveland, a 65-year-old truck driver from Ogden, Utah, disagrees and wholeheartedly backs Trump and his foreign policy. "I think he's doing a good job with North Korea. He's done better than anybody else has ever done. Nobody else has even got it this far with North Korea," he said referring to Trump's meeting last year in Singapore with the North Korean leader to discuss Pyongyang's nuclear weapons program.

Turning to U.S. involvement in foreign wars, the poll showed 39 percent of Americans approve of pulling the 2,000 American troops from Syria, and 35 percent say they disapprove. The president's decision is supported by 56 percent of Republicans and 26 percent of Democrats. "I think it's time for our troops to come home — Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria," said Cleaveland, who was interviewed on speaker phone as he drove his semitrailer through western Kansas. "I lost a lot of good friends when I was in Vietnam. I think that was a stupid war too."

Last month, Trump announced that Islamic State militants had been defeated in Syria and that American troops would be brought home "now." The plan triggered the resignation of Defense Secretary Jim Mattis and criticism from U.S. allies and national security experts. Later, Trump and others appeared to adjust the timeline, saying it will likely take several months to safely withdraw American forces from Syria. Americans have similar views about the president's expected decision to pull at least some U.S. troops out of Afghanistan. Forty-one percent said they would approve of a pullout from Afghanistan versus 30 percent who disapprove. "Our military shouldn't be the world's police," said Robert Granger, a 44-year old sales representative from Bristol, Tennessee. "We don't belong in all of these other countries. We need to pull our troops home and let the other countries take care of themselves."

The nation's partisan divide is evident when it comes to Americans' views of the United States' role in the world, its global standing and its relationships with other nations. Democrats are far more likely than Republicans to say the U.S. should play a more active role in solving the world's problems. Forty-three percent of Democrats think the U.S. should be more active, compared with 23 percent who think it should be less active; another 32 percent of Democrats say the nation's current role is about right. Republicans see it differently. Four in 10 Republicans say the U.S. should be less active in solving the world's problems, while 46 percent think the current role in world affairs is right. Just 13 percent of Republicans think the U.S. role abroad should be more active. Republicans also think the nation's global standing and relationships with other countries will improve or stay the same during the next year. Democrats largely expect U.S. relations with other nations will worsen.

Forty-four percent of Republicans say the nation's standing in the world will improve and another 35 percent say it won't change. By comparison, 77 percent of Democrats think the country's global standing will get worse. "I feel like right now, with the way things are going with our current president, that we will be seen as a joke," said Tamika Allen, a 25-year-old medical claims trainer from Houston, adding that America's reputation around the world wouldn't diminish immediately, but slowly over time. In assessing global threats to the United States, the poll found:

- Fifty-five percent of Americans consider militant extremist groups to be very or extremely concerning, with another 29 percent calling the threat moderately concerning.

- About half say they are significantly concerned over the threats of North Korea’s nuclear program (52 percent) and Iran’s nuclear program (48 percent).
- While nearly half of Americans — 47 percent — consider Russia’s influence around the world to be extremely or very concerning, slightly fewer — 40 percent — say the same of China’s influence around the world. Still, most consider both countries' influence around the world to be at least moderately concerning.

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The AP-NORC poll of 1,062 adults was conducted 16 to 20 JAN using a sample drawn from NORC's probability-based AmeriSpeak Panel, which is designed to be representative of the U.S. population. The margin of sampling error for all respondents is plus or minus 4.1 percentage points. Respondents were first selected randomly using address-based sampling methods, and later interviewed online or by phone. [Source: The Associated Press | Deb Riechmann & Hannah Fingerhut | January 28, 2019 ++]

Trump NATO Policy Update 01 ► Credited For Obtaining \$100B More in Defense Spending

Jens Stoltenberg, the secretary general of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) said on 27 JAN that President Donald Trump "is committed to NATO" and deserves credit in obtaining \$100 billion more in defense spending for the alliance. "President Trump has been very clear: He is committed to NATO. He stated that clearly just a few days ago and also at the NATO summit in July," Stoltenberg said on "Fox News Sunday." Stoltenberg's comment stands in contrast to Democrats who fear Trump wants to pull out of NATO, and some who have expressed concern he could be undermining the military alliance because it benefits Russian President Vladimir Putin.

A New York Times report earlier this month said Trump repeatedly told aides he wanted to pull out of the alliance. In response to the report, Democrats pushed for legislation requiring congressional approval of any move to leave NATO. Trump has also been criticized for his aggressive approach in insisting America's "delinquent" allies pay a greater share toward the collective defense agreement. At the summit in July, he demanded the other members "immediately" increase their contributions. Stoltenberg said the tough approach paid off. "We agreed to do more to step up – and now we see the results. By the end of next year, NATO allies will add \$100 billion extra toward defense," he said. "So we see some real money and some real results. And we see that the clear message from President Donald Trump is having an impact."

When asked if he was concerned that Trump was "helping Putin splinter NATO," Stoltenberg said, "What I see is that actually NATO is united because we are able to adapt to deliver. North America and Europe are doing more together now than before." Stoltenberg said Trump is helping "us adapt the alliance, which we need, because we live in a more unpredictable world." "And you have to remember that the increase we now see in defense spending by European and NATO allies comes after years of decline. So before they were cutting billions. Now they're actually adding billions," he said. [Source: USA Today | William Cummings | January 28, 2019 ++]

Iran Space Program ► Satellite Fails to Reach Orbit After Launch that Worried US

An Iranian satellite-carrying rocket blasted off into space on 14 JAN, but scientists failed to put the device into orbit in a launch previously criticized by the United States as helping the Islamic Republic further develop its ballistic missile program. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo has alleged that Iran’s space program could help it develop a missile capable of carrying a nuclear weapon to the mainland U.S., criticism that comes amid the Trump administration’s maximalist approach against Tehran after withdrawing from the nuclear deal. Iran, which long has said it does not

seek nuclear weapons, maintains that its satellite launches and rocket tests do not have a military component. Tehran also says they don't violate a United Nations resolution that only "called upon" it not to conduct such tests.

The rocket carrying the Payam satellite failed to reach the "necessary speed" in the third stage of its launch, Telecommunications Minister Mohammad Javad Azari Jahromi said. Jahromi said the rocket had successfully passed its first and second stages before developing problems in the third. That suggests something went wrong after the rocket pushed the satellite out of the Earth's atmosphere. He did not elaborate on what caused the failure, but promised that Iranian scientists would continue their work. Iran had said that it plans to send two nonmilitary satellites, Payam and Doosti, into orbit. The Payam, which means "message" in Farsi, was an imagery satellite that Iranian officials said would help with farming and other activities. It's unclear how the failure of the Payam will affect the launch timing for the Doosti, which means "friendship." Jahromi wrote on Twitter that "Doosti is waiting for orbit," without elaborating.

The 14 JAN launch took place at Imam Khomeini Space Center in Iran's Semnan province, a facility under the control of the country's Defense Ministry, Jahromi said. Satellite images published last week and first reported by CNN showed activity at the launch site. Given the facility's launching corridor, the satellite likely fell in the Indian Ocean. Iranian state television aired footage of its reporter narrating the launch of the Simorgh rocket, shouting over its roar that it sent "a message of the pride, self-confidence and willpower of Iranian youth to the world!" The TV footage shows the rocket becoming just a pinpoint of light in the darkened sky and not the moment of its failure. The Simorgh, meaning "phoenix" in Farsi, has been used in previous satellite launches. It is larger than an earlier model known as the Safir, or "ambassador," that Iran previously used to launch satellites. Ahmad Motamedi, the chancellor of Tehran Amirkabir University of Technology, which designed the satellite, told the semi-official Mehr news agency that Jahromi already has ordered them to design another satellite. "Now, we have earned plenty of experience and we will be able to make a new satellite quicker," he said.

Over the past decade, Iran has sent several short-lived satellites into orbit and in 2013 launched a monkey into space. Iran usually displays space achievements in February during the anniversary of its 1979 Islamic Revolution. This year will mark the 40th anniversary of the revolution amid Iran facing increasing pressure from the U.S. under the administration of President Donald Trump. Pompeo has said that Iran's plans for sending satellites into orbit demonstrate the country's defiance of a U.N. Security Council resolution that calls on Iran to undertake no activity related to ballistic missiles capable of delivering nuclear weapons. There was no immediate American reaction to the launch Tuesday. In Israel, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu promptly slammed Iran over the launch, accusing Tehran of lying and alleging that the "innocent satellite" was actually "the first stage of an intercontinental missile" Iran is developing in violation of international agreements.

Iran denies wanting nuclear weapons. A 2015 nuclear deal it struck with world powers limited its enrichment of uranium in exchange for the lifting of economic sanctions. However, Trump pulled America out of the deal in May. While United Nations inspectors say Iran has honored the deal up to this point, the country has threatened to resume higher enrichment. On 14 JAN, Iranian state television aired footage of nuclear chief Ali Akbar Salehi apparently from a previous interview warning Tehran could raise the its enrichment of uranium "instantly." "In a matter of four days we (are able) to start," he said. [Source: The Associated Press | Nasser Karimi & Jon Gambrell, | January 15, 2019 ++]

DPRK Biological Weapons ► Lesser Known Military Threat

Pound for pound, the deadliest arms of all time are not nuclear but biological. A single gallon of anthrax, if suitably distributed, could end human life on Earth. Even so, the Trump administration has given scant attention to North Korea's pursuit of living weapons — a threat that analysts describe as more immediate than its nuclear arms, which Pyongyang and Washington have been discussing for more than six months. According to an analysis issued by the

Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterey last month, North Korea is collaborating with foreign researchers to learn biotechnology skills and build machinery. As a result, the country's capabilities are increasing rapidly. "North Korea is far more likely to use biological weapons than nuclear ones," said Andrew C. Weber, a Pentagon official in charge of nuclear, chemical and biological defense programs under President Obama. "The program is advanced, underestimated and highly lethal."



Supreme leader, Kim Jong-un touring the Pyongyang Bio-Technical Institute in 2015 (left) and a light micrograph of anthrax bacteria (right). A single gallon of anthrax, properly distributed, could wipe out all of humanity.

The North may want to threaten a devastating germ counterattack as a way of warding off aggressors. If so, its bioweapons would act as a potent deterrent. But experts also worry about offensive strikes and agents of unusual lethality, especially the smallpox virus, which spreads person-to-person and kills a third of its victims. Experts have long suspected that the North harbors the germ, which in 1980 was declared eradicated from human populations. Worse, analysts say, satellite images and internet scrutiny of the North suggest that Pyongyang is newly interested in biotechnology and germ advances. But compared to traditional weapons, biological threats have a host of unsettling distinctions: Germ production is small-scale and far less expensive than creating nuclear arms. Deadly microbes can look like harmless components of vaccine and agricultural work. And living weapons are hard to detect, trace and contain.

The North's great secrecy makes it hard to assess the threat and the country's degree of sophistication. Today, the North might well have no bioweapons at all — just research, prototypes, human testing, and the ability to rush into industrial production. Still, Anthony H. Cordesman, a former Pentagon intelligence official now at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, said the North "has made major strides" in all technical areas needed for the production of a major germ arsenal. In unclassified reports, the Trump administration has alluded to the North's bioweapons program in vague terms. President Trump did not broach the subject of biological weapons during his meeting with Mr. Kim in Singapore, according to American officials. The lack of detail and urgency is all the more surprising given that John R. Bolton, Mr. Trump's national security adviser, has long described it as a regional and even a global threat. In 2002, as undersecretary of state for arms control and international security in the George W. Bush administration, Mr. Bolton declared that "North Korea has one of the most robust offensive bioweapons programs on Earth."

Last century, most nations that made biological arms gave them up as impractical. Capricious winds could carry deadly agents back on users, infecting troops and citizens. The United States renounced its arsenal in 1969. But today, analysts say, the gene revolution could be making germ weapons more attractive. They see the possibility of designer pathogens that spread faster, infect more people, resist treatment, and offer better targeting and containment. If so, North Korea may be in the forefront. South Korean military white papers have identified at least ten facilities in the North that could be involved in the research and production of more than a dozen biological agents, including those that cause the plague and hemorrhagic fevers. United States intelligence officials have not publicly endorsed those findings. But many experts say the technological hurdles to such advances have collapsed. The North, for instance, has received advanced microbiology training from institutions in Asia and Europe.

Bruce Bennett, a defense researcher at the RAND Corporation, said defectors from the North have described witnessing the testing of biological agents on political prisoners. Several North Korean military defectors have tested

positive for smallpox antibodies, suggesting they were either exposed to the deadly virus or vaccinated against it, according to a report by Harvard Kennedy School's Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs. Smallpox claimed up to a half billion lives before it was declared eradicated. Today, few populations are vaccinated against the defunct virus.

Starting three years ago, Amplyfi, a strategic intelligence firm, detected a dramatic increase in North Korean web searches for "antibiotic resistance," "microbial dark matter," "cas protein" and similar esoteric terms, hinting at a growing interest in advanced gene and germ research. According to the Middlebury Institute analysis, at least 100 research publications that were jointly written by North Korean and foreign scientists have implications for military purposes, such as developing weapons of mass destruction. The collaborations may violate international sanctions. Joseph S. Bermudez, Jr., a North Korean military analyst, said it is entirely likely that the North has already experimented with gene editing that could enhance bacteria and viruses. "These are scientists, and scientists love to tinker," he said.

Western concerns about the North's program jumped in June 2015, after Mr. Kim posed in a white lab coat alongside military officers and scientists in a modern-looking pesticide facility called the Bio-Technical Institute, his arms outspread toward shiny lab equipment. The plant allegedly produced pesticides. The photos showed enormous fermenters for growing microbes, as well as spray dryers that can turn bacterial spores into a powder fine enough to be inhaled. Mr. Kim was beaming. Melissa Hanham, a scholar who first identified the site's threatening potential, said equipment model numbers showed that the North had obtained the machinery by evading sanctions — laundering money, creating front companies or bribing people to buy it on the black market. She said the evidence suggests the North succeeded in building a seemingly harmless agricultural plant that could be repurposed within weeks to produce dried anthrax spores.

Arms-control analysts say intrusive inspections are needed to see whether a facility is intended for peaceful aims or something else. "A nuclear weapons facility has very visible signals to the outside world," Mr. Bermudez said. "We can look at it and immediately say, 'Ugh, that's a nuclear reactor.' But the technology for conducting biological weapons research is essentially the same as what keeps a population healthy."

Americans felt the sting of bioweapons in 2001 when a teaspoon of anthrax powder, dispatched in a handful of envelopes, killed five people, sickened 17 more and set off a nationwide panic. The spores shut down Congressional offices, the Supreme Court and much of the postal system, and cost about \$320 million to clean up. Federal budgets for biodefense soared after the attacks but have declined in recent years. "The level of resources going against this is pitiful," said Mr. Weber, the former Pentagon official. "We are back into complacency." Dr. Robert Kadlec, the assistant secretary for preparedness and response at the Department of Health and Human Services, said, "We don't spend half of an aircraft carrier on our preparedness for deliberate or natural events."

The National Security Council's top health security position was eliminated last year, so biological threats now come under the more general heading of weapons of mass destruction. Still, on the Korean Peninsula, troops gird for a North Korean attack. According to the Belfer report, American forces in Korea since 2004 have been vaccinated against smallpox and anthrax. Recently, Army engineers sped up the detection of biological agents from days to hours through Project Jupitir, or the Joint United States Forces Korea Portal and Integrated Threat Recognition, a Department of Defense spokeswoman said. The comptroller general of the United States, after a request from the House Armed Services Committee, is currently conducting an evaluation of military preparedness for germ attacks.

"If you're a country that feels generally outclassed in conventional weapons," Ms. Hanham said, a lethal microbe such as anthrax might seem like a good way "to create an outsized amount of damage." Such an attack would maximize casualties, she said, while terrorizing the uninfected population. For North Korea, Ms. Hanham added, "That would be the twofold goal." [Source: New York Times | Emily Baumgaertner & William J. Broad | January 15, 2019 ++]

Japan*China Dispute Update 02 ► New Weapons, Military Roles Surge to Meet China's Rise

Most Japanese military officials won't name the potential adversary that has spurred rapid Japanese modernization across its ground, maritime and air Self Defense Forces, in a nod to sensitive diplomatic relations. But it's not Russia that has spurred Japan's recent commitment to purchase up to 147 F-35s, or moved Japan to produce the country's first aircraft carrier since World War II. It's not North Korea that's caused Japan to rapidly train, for the first time ever, an amphibious assault brigade to seize or retake the Senkaku Islands to its southwest if they have to. It's China. But among many U.S. and Japanese military officials in Japan, it's "a competitor," or "that country."

"We have some weakness to defending Japan, especially on the southwest islands," Maj. Gen. Shinichi Aoki, commander of the Amphibious Rapid Deployment Brigade, said. "So that's why our Self Defense Force is now trying to set up a strong posture toward that country." Japan's new amphibious rapid deployment brigade has 2,100 troops now and is on track to have more than 3,000 trained by March, Aoki told Military Times during a December visit to Okinawa. The surge comes amid an intensifying internal discussion in Japan on what types of capabilities are allowed under Japan's constitution, which "renounce[s] war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force as means of settling international disputes." By literal reading it seems to forbid Japan from maintaining forces at all, but in the 1950s Japan determined self-defense only was allowed.



Japanese Maritime Self Defense Forces Capt. Katsuyoshi Motoyama, left, commanding officer of the JS Izumo, and Capt. Toshiyuki Hirata, deputy director of plans and programs, stand on the Izumo's flight deck in port at Naval Base Yokosuka in December. Japan is planning to convert the Izumo into an aircraft carrier and outfit it with F-35s in response to China's rapid military expansion.

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and the ruling LDP party have pushed for a rewrite of that Article 9 clause to wording that says the Self Defense Forces are constitutional. But Japan's constitution has never been amended, and political analysts who spoke with Military Times and other visiting reporters in Japan through a trip sponsored by the Sasakawa Peace Foundation USA said it was unlikely Abe would risk the political capital on an Article 9 vote in the near future. Instead, in some respects, Japan's military is moving ahead — constitutional revision or not. From some military officials' point of view, the changes are still about the defense of Japan and its interests in the Pacific, even if that means it is also about becoming a more expeditionary force that also looks out for its allies.

On board the Izumo, Japan's three-year-old helicopter destroyer that will be converted to carry F-35Bs, Japanese Maritime Self Defense Forces briefed reporters on their expanding role, which calls not just for a regional presence in the East and South China Seas, but also for a regular presence off the coast of Djibouti, where China established a military base in 2017. "We will never accept a compromise with any attempt to prevent us from keeping the Indo-Pacific free and open," said Japanese Maritime Self Defense Forces deputy director of plans and programs, Capt. Toshiyuki Hirata, without naming China specifically. Other Japanese officials are more direct. "Actually this trigger ... to be straight out [is] China. The expansion of China. I think it's clear," said Keitaro Ohno, parliamentary vice minister for defense for Japan's ruling Liberal Democratic Party. "There is no need for us to operate such kind of aircraft carrier if we don't have to respond to China in the Pacific Ocean."

Those Japanese officials emphasized that they do not seek conflict with China, and some pointed to a recent warming of diplomatic relations between the two countries after the U.S. launched a trade war with China. But Japan's Self Defense Forces are still responding to a rising number of Chinese military aircraft incursions, regular and expanded reach of Chinese warships, including submarines, and other activities that are irritants, such as the regular presence of Chinese civilian fishing craft lingering by the Senkakus. Japanese defense officials call them "little green fishermen." "It's just ... face to face that we are smiling, but under the table that we are some sort of, like, kicking each other," Ohno said.

On 15 JAN, the U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency released a new assessment of China's military power and concluded that the sheer numbers of advanced ships, forces, aircraft, satellites and missiles China has fielded over the last 15 years has increased the risk it will engage in a regional conflict. However, it's likelier that conflict would arise with Taiwan, not Japan. "It's obviously a different situation [than Taiwan] because Japan ... has a significant capability to defend their territory," a defense intelligence official said as he briefed reporters on the condition of anonymity. "I think ... neither side has an interest or an intention to escalate the conflict at this point, although there's a lot of air and naval activity on a small confined space, so there's always potential for something."

In response to the increased activity by Chinese aircraft, Japan moved a second squadron to the military side of Naha Airport to be able to more rapidly sortie against aircraft incursions over Japan's Air Defense Identification Zone. In 2016, Japanese fighters sortied 1,168 times — 70 percent of those were against Chinese jets. The numbers for 2017 and 2018 fell a bit, but were an "unbelievable climb" from just a few years before, said U.S. Forces Japan commander Air Force Lt. Gen. Jerry Martinez. You can see the activity in person on Okinawa, where Japanese fighters take regular flight and have the primary responsibility for conducting intercepts in the South China Sea and East China Sea, said Air Force Brig. Gen. Case Cunningham, who commands the 18th Wing at Kadena Air Base. "Every time I fly out of Naha and see [Japan's] 15s take off, it's very likely they are headed out to an intercept of some type or other," Cunningham said. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Tara Copp | January 15, 2019 ++]

China's Offensive Capability Update 07 ► Pentagon Intelligence Report

China in recent years has poured billions of dollars into developing advanced weapons, some of which outclass U.S. weapons, but with an inexperienced military it remains years away from challenging American security interests globally, the Pentagon's intelligence agency concluded in a report released 15 JAN. China has spent increasingly more money each year for more than a decade – including some \$200 billion in 2018 – to modernize its weaponry and professionalize its People's Liberation Army, which has roughly 2 million troops, Defense Intelligence Agency officials determined in the report, "China Military Power." U.S. defense officials wrote China is building its force to ensure its regional prowess and work toward its No. 1 goal – the reunification of mainland China and Taiwan. The report is DIA's first-ever unclassified, comprehensive assessment of the Chinese military.

What alarms DIA officials is the increasing confidence China's military has displayed in its own abilities in recent years, and **whether that could signal the country is inching toward striking or invading Taiwan**, a senior defense intelligence official said 15 JAN ahead of the report's release. "The biggest concern is that they are going to get to a point where the [Chinese military] leadership may actually tell [Chinese President] Xi Jinping that they are confident in their capabilities," the official said on condition of anonymity. "We know in the past that they have ... considered themselves a developing, weaker power. ... As these technologies mature, as their reorganization of their military comes into effect, as they become more proficient with these capabilities, our concern is we'll reach a point where internally, within their decision-making, they will decide that using military force for a regional conflict is something that is more imminent."

Top American defense officials have long viewed China's military as a rising power that eventually seeks parity with the U.S. military force, leading the Pentagon to list it – alongside Russia – as the top potential security threat in

its latest National Defense Strategy released last year. The growing military might of China is said to be the primary focus for acting Defense Secretary Patrick Shanahan, who defense officials said has repeatedly raised China as a topic in closed-door meetings in the Pentagon since he took the Defense Department's reins Jan. 1.

On Tuesday, just as the DIA report was released, a top Chinese military official warned Adm. John Richardson, the U.S. Navy's top officer, that the United States should not support an independent Taiwan, according to the South China Morning Post newspaper. "If anyone wants to separate Taiwan from China, the Chinese military will safeguard the national unity at all costs so as to protect China's sovereignty and territorial integrity," Gen. Li Zuocheng, the PLA's chief of the Joint Staff Department, told Richardson during a meeting in Beijing, according to the newspaper. Though China's primary focus remains on defending its homeland and increasing its regional power, it has worked to establish military relationships with countries across the world, including building its first base outside of China in Djibouti on the Horn of Africa in 2017. It might seek such relationships elsewhere in the coming years, the DIA report states. "As it continues to grow in strength and confidence, [U.S.] leaders will face a China insistent on having a greater voice in global interactions, which at times may be antithetical to U.S. interests," it reads.

While DIA is most concerned about an eventual military action against Taiwan, in the near future its primary concerns rest in the South and East China Seas, where the Chinese military has built up and militarized artificial islands in areas claimed by China and other nations. American officials have routinely scolded China's militarization of the Spratly and Parcel islands, which China claims outright, and tensions have grown in recent years as the United States regularly sails warships through the region on freedom of navigation operations. Those operations are seen as provocative by China. Such interactions carry the potential for miscalculation, the senior defense intelligence official said.

"Now that [China has] built out this infrastructure down there, they're able to be present in a more persistent manner than they might have been before if they had to come all the way down from the mainland ... to get into some conflict with a regional claimant or with the U.S.," the official said. "And so the danger comes from them being present in more places at more times, and you always have to worry about potential for miscalculation, although I think we've seen, over the past several years, there have been close interactions between U.S. naval forces and the Chinese forces." On the technology front, DIA is concerned about advances the Chinese have made in modern weaponry including the unmatched anti-satellite capabilities that it has demonstrated recently and the development of directed-energy weapons and hypersonic weapons, which can travel at least five times the speed of sound. They are "on the leading edge of technology in that area," the official said.

China has also outpaced competitors in its ballistic missiles systems, creating more precise systems to carry conventional or nuclear weapons than others including the United States and Russia, largely because those nations were bound by treaty obligations that China was not, according to the DIA assessment. The official called such advancements "concerning," but concluded the Chinese military as a whole remained "a long way" from being in a position to truly challenge the U.S. military. "I think in a lot of ways, they have a lot that they need to do," the official said. "The challenge, of course, is for measuring against a globally active U.S. military that has many different missions and many different tasks, so I think there's a very long way for the PLA to reach that level." [Source: Stars & Stripes | Corey Dickstein | January 15, 2019 ++]

Iraq War Study ► Iran Was the Only Winner | Many Lessons for Future Wars

A two-volume Army study of the Iraq war is a deep examination of the mistakes and success of the war effort that also takes aim at critics who would slough off the conflict as they shift to near-peer threats. The study, commissioned by former Army Chief of Staff Gen. Ray Odierno in 2013 and continued under current chief Gen. Mark Milley, was delayed for release since 2016, when it was completed. Some said it was due to concerns over airing "dirty laundry" about decisions made by some leaders during the conflict. The 1,300-page, two volume history, complete with more

than 1,000 declassified documents, spans the 2003 invasion through the U.S. withdrawal, the rise of ISIS, and the influence of Syria and Iran. “At the time of this project’s completion in 2018, an emboldened and expansionist Iran appears to be the only victor,” authors wrote in the concluding chapter. Col. Joe Rayburn and Col. Frank Sobchak, both retired, authored the study.

They note the damage to the political-military relationship that the war has caused, even to the American public. “The Iraq War has the potential to be one of the most consequential conflicts in American history. It shattered a long-standing political tradition against preemptive wars,” authors wrote. “In the conflict’s immediate aftermath, the pendulum of American politics swung to the opposite pole with deep skepticism about foreign interventions.” They also bluntly address naysayers who see the war as an aberration, and look only for the Army to move back to its traditional large-scale warfighting role, as a quick path to losing the hard-earned lessons of counterinsurgency warfare, portions of which will no doubt be part of future conflicts whether with terrorist groups or with nation state near-peers.

“The character of warfare is changing, but even if we face peer or near-peer competitors in future conflicts, they are likely to employ a blend of conventional and irregular warfare — what is often called ‘hybrid warfare’ or ‘operations in the gray zone,’ ” authors wrote. In his foreword to the work, Odierno wrote that “those who rejected the idea that there is an operational level of war in counterinsurgency were wrong.” He notes that following the war, the United States has entered “another historical cycle” like wars past, where civilian and military leaders debate the utility of land power. And he points directly to an overtaxed Army at even higher troop levels than they are now. One issue raised repeatedly in the study is the lack of troops — within the deployed brigade combat teams, available for other operations such as the war in Afghanistan, and lack of an operational reserve in theater for responses to major events.

However, the study doesn’t just focus on the military’s failures in seeing the changing nature of the war. Odierno calls the work an “astonishing story of an Army that reached within itself to learn and adapt in the midst of a war the United States was well on its way to losing.” Milley’s forward calls the study a “waypoint” on the Army’s “quest to comprehend the OIF experience.” He sees the analysis as a start of what will be a lengthy analysis of the conflict. “OIF is a sober reminder that technological advantages and standoff weapons alone cannot render a decision; that the promise of short wars is often elusive; that the ends, ways, and means must be in balance; that our Army must understand the type of war we are engaged with in order to adapt as necessary; that decisions in war occur on the ground, in the mud and dirt; and that timeless factors such as human agency, chance and an enemy’s conviction, all shape a war’s outcome,” he wrote.

Highlights of the study include validations of criticisms made at the time the war was being fought, and others that were not foreseen and only understood in the years that followed. Study authors note that technology could not always make up for manpower shortages, that coalition warfare was “largely unsuccessful” for several reasons, that failing to account for a lack of understanding of the inner workings of Iraqi politics and group struggles meant some military unit actions did exacerbate problems. And those battlefield commanders who did find innovative solutions to ground-level problems were not only often not commended or heeded in their innovations, they were often penalized for their work that inverted policy to adapt to real time needs of the battlefield.

The “short war assumption” and overly optimistic thinking drew out problems by pushing funding and manning to future projects because victory was always 18 months away. The transformation of the Army to create more BCTs resulted in fewer units available for deployment, stretching the active units thin and requiring National Guard units to deploy in a large-scale conflict for the first time since the Korean War. Half of all brigades in Iraq at the time of the 2005 election were Guard units. While the authors commended the Guard units for their service, they noted that, at the time, they were less experienced soldiers thrust into a critical time of the war without proper resourcing.

And how leaders assessed their own performance during the war suffered from a lack of clear understanding of what mattered. They leaned too much on “inputs” rather than “outputs,” for example, money spent, Iraqis trained or insurgents killed or captured — rather than whether there was more cooperation with locals or reduced attacks. “Army leaders have become too enamored with the ‘fetishization’ of statistics and metrics, when they only provide a snapshot

in time of a portion of the situation,” authors wrote. Additional highlights include the following, as highlighted in previous reporting:

- **The need for more troops:** At no point during the Iraq war did commanders have enough troops to simultaneously defeat the Sunni insurgency and Iranian-backed Shiite militias.
- **The failure to deter Iran and Syria:** Iran and Syria gave sanctuary and support to Shiite and Sunni militants, respectively, and the U.S. never developed an effective strategy to stop this.
- **Coalition warfare wasn’t successful:** The deployment of allied troops had political value but was “largely unsuccessful” because the allies didn’t send enough troops and limited the scope of their operations.
- **The National Guard needs more training:** While many National Guard units performed well, some brigades had so much difficulty dealing with insurgents that U.S. commanders stopped assigning them their own battlespace to control. The study found that Guard units need more funding and training.
- **The failure to develop self-reliant Iraqi forces:** The U.S.-led effort to train and equip Iraqi forces was under-resourced for most of the war. A premature decision to transfer sovereignty to the Iraqis made it harder to blunt political pressure by Iraqi officials on Iraqi commanders.
- **An ineffective detainee policy:** The U.S. decided at the outset not to treat captured insurgents or militia fighters as prisoners of war and then never developed an effective way to handle detainees. Many Sunni insurgents were returned to the battlefield.
- **Democracy doesn’t necessarily bring stability:** U.S. commanders believed the 2005 Iraqi elections would have a “calming effect,” but those elections instead exacerbated ethnic and sectarian tensions.

The report praises the 2007 surge and other COIN efforts, many of which have been attributed to leaders such as Odierno, retired Gen. David Petraeus and retired Lt. Gen. H.R. McMaster, who most recently served as President Trump’s national security adviser. At the same time, some of its critiques can be levied at specific decisions of past Army leaders, including former Army Chief of Staff Gen. Peter Schoomaker’s decision to move ahead with the BCT restructuring as part of the Army transformation. Also, the consolidation of U.S. forces on large bases, leading to a security vacuum around Baghdad, can be attributed to then-Gen. George Casey. [Source: Business Insider | Ryan Pickrell | January 4, 2019 ++]

Interesting Ideas ► No Ice chest!



One Word Essays ► Security



Have You Heard? ► Stuff You Didn't Know You Didn't Know | Q&A's | What's Your Handicap

Stuff You Didn't Know You Didn't Know

- In the 1400's a law was set forth in England that a man was allowed to beat his wife with a stick no thicker than his thumb. Hence we have 'the rule of thumb'
- Many years ago in Scotland, a new game was invented. It was ruled 'Gentlemen Only...Ladies Forbidden'.. and thus, the word GOLF entered into the English language.
- The first couple to be shown in bed together on prime time TV was Fred and Wilma Flintstone.
- Every day more money is printed for Monopoly than the U.S. Treasury.
- Men can read smaller print than women can; women can hear better.
- Coca-Cola was originally green.
- It is impossible to lick your elbow. ?? WHY WOULD YOU WANT TO?
- The State with the highest percentage of people who walk to work is Alaska.
- The percentage of Africa that is wilderness: 28% (now get this...) The percentage of North America that is wilderness: 38%
- The cost of raising a medium-size dog to the age of eleven: \$16,400
- The average number of people airborne over the US. in any given hour: 61,000 ??
- Intelligent people have more zinc and copper in their hair.
- The first novel ever written on a typewriter, Tom Sawyer.
- The San Francisco Cable cars are the only mobile National Monuments.
- Each king in a deck of playing cards represents a great king from history: Spades - King David
- Hearts - Charlemagne Clubs -Alexander, the Great Diamonds - Julius Caesar
- $111,111,111 \times 111,111,111 = 12,345,678,987, 654,321$

- If a statue in the park of a person on a horse has both front legs in the air, the person died in battle. If the horse has one front leg in the air, the person died because of wounds received in battle. If the horse has all four legs on the ground, the person died of natural causes
- Only two people signed the Declaration of Independence on July 4, John Hancock and Charles Thomson. Most of the rest signed on August 2, but the last signature wasn't added until 5 years later.
- Half of all Americans live within 50 miles of their birthplace
- Most boat owners name their boats. What is the most popular boat name requested? Obsessio
- In Shakespeare's time, mattresses were secured on bed frames by ropes. When you pulled on the ropes, the mattress tightened, making the bed firmer to sleep on. Hence the phrase...'Goodnight , sleep tight'
- It was the accepted practice in Babylon 4,000 years ago that for a month after the wedding, the bride's father would supply his son-in-law with all the mead he could drink. Mead is a honey beer and because their calendar was lunar based, this period was called the honey month, which we know today as the honeymoon.
- In English pubs, ale is ordered by pints and quarts... So in old England, when customers got unruly, the bartender would yell at them 'Mind your pints and quarts, and settle down.' It's where we get the phrase 'mind your P's and Q's'
- Many years ago in England, pub frequenters had a whistle baked into the rim, or handle, of their ceramic cups. When they needed a refill, they used the whistle to get some service. 'Wet your whistle' is the phrase inspired by this practice.
- Believe it or not, you can read this: I cdnuolt blveiee taht I cluod aulaclyt uesdnatnrd waht I was rdanieg The phaonmneal pweor of the hmuan mnid Aoccdrnig to rscheearch at Cmabrigde Uinervtisy, it deosn't mttar in waht oredr the lteers in a wrod are, the olny iprmoatnt tihng is taht the first and last lteer be in the rghit pclae. The rset can be a taotl mses and you can still raed it wouthit a porbelm. This is bcuseae the huamn mnid deos not raed ervey lteter by istlef, but the wrod as a wlohe. Amzanig huh?

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Q&A's

Q. If you were to spell out numbers, how far would you have to go until you would find the letter 'A'?

A. One thousand

Q. What do bulletproof vests, fire escapes, windshield wipers and laser printers have in common?

A. All were invented by women.

Q. What is the only food that doesn't spoil?

A. Honey

Q. Which day are there more collect calls than any other day of the year?

A. Father's Day

Q How do you know you are living in 2019?

A. When:

- You accidentally enter your PIN on the microwave.
- You haven't played solitaire with real cards in years.
- You have a list of 15 phone numbers to reach your family of three.
- You e-mail the person who works at the desk next to you.
- Your reason for not staying in touch with friends and family is that they don't have e-mail addresses.

- You pull up in your own driveway and use your cell phone to see if anyone is home to help you carry in the groceries.
- Every commercial on television has a web site at the bottom of the screen
- Leaving the house without your cell phone, which you didn't even have the first 20 or 30 (or 60) years of your life, is now a cause for panic and you turn around to go and get it
- You get up in the morning and go on line before getting your coffee
- You start tilting your head sideways to smile - :
- You're reading this and nodding and laughing.

-o-o-O-o-o-

What's Your Handicap

A businessman was attending a conference in Africa. He had a free day and wanted to play a round of golf and was directed to a golf course in the nearby jungle. After a short journey, he arrived at the course and asked the pro if he could get on. "Sure," said the Pro, "What's your handicap?" Not wanting to admit that he had an 18 handicap, he decided to cut it a bit. "Well, its 16," said the businessman, "But what's the relevance since I'll be playing alone?"

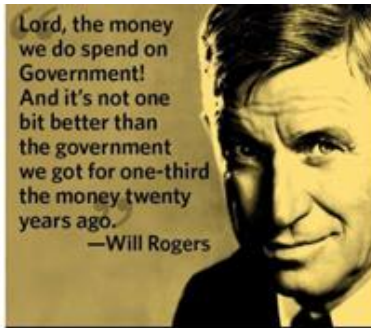
"It's very important for us to know," said the pro, who then called a caddy. "Go out with this gentleman," said the pro, "his handicap is 16." The businessman was very surprised at this constant reference to his handicap. The caddy picked up the businessman's bag and a large rifle; again the businessman was surprised but decided to ask no questions.

They arrived on the 1st hole, a par 4. "It's wise to avoid those trees on the left," said the caddy. Needless to say, the businessman duck-hooked his ball into the trees. He found his ball and was about to punch it out when he heard the loud crack of the rifle and a large snake fell dead from a tree above his head. The caddy stood next to him with the rifle smoking in his hand. "That's the Black Mamba, the most poisonous snake in all Africa. You're lucky I was here with you."

After taking a bogey, they moved to the 2nd hole, a par 5. "Good to avoid those bushes on the right," says the caddy. Of course, the businessman's ball went straight into the bushes. As he went to pick up his ball, he heard the loud crack of the caddy's rifle once more, and a huge lion fell dead at his feet. "I've saved your life again," said the caddy.

The businessman continued to play bogeying every hole until he came to the 17th hole which was a par 3 with a lake in front of the green. The businessman's ball came up just short of the green and rolled back to the edge of the water. To take a shot, he had to stand with one foot in the lake. As he was about to swing, a large crocodile emerged from the water and bit off much of his right leg. As he fell to the ground bleeding and in great pain, he saw the caddy with the rifle propped at his side, looking on unconcernedly. "Why didn't you kill it?" asked the man incredulously.

"I'm sorry, sir," said the caddy. "This is the 17th handicap hole. You don't get a shot here." And that, my golfing friends, is why you should never lie about your handicap!



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