

# RAO BULLETIN

## 1 August 2020

PDF Edition



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1. The page number on which an article can be found is provided to the left of each article's title
2. Numbers contained within brackets [ ] indicate the number of articles written on the subject. To obtain previous articles send a request to [raoemo@sbcglobal.net](mailto:raoemo@sbcglobal.net).
3. Recipients of the Bulletin are authorized and encouraged to forward the Bulletin to other vets or veteran organizations.

**\* ATTACHMENTS \***

Attachment – Florida Veteran State Benefits

Attachment - Military History Anniversaries 01 thru 15 AUG (Updated)

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## **NDAA 2021**

### **Update 04: House Burn Pits & Agent Orange Amendments**

House lawmakers voted on packages of hundreds of amendments proposed for the National Defense Authorization Act, a must-pass omnibus annual bill that sets the budget, and some policy, for the Defense Department. Since the bill is one of those all but guaranteed to pass in recent years, it's prime real estate for major military and veterans legislation, including on toxic exposure. Veterans exposed to toxic burn pits during service got several nods in the bill, while veterans exposed to Agent Orange who have bladder cancer, hypothyroidism and Parkinson's were nixed. The House Committee on Rules sent six amendments to the House floor 20 JUL for debate that specifically mentioned burn pits:

- An amendment to require the Pentagon/Department of Veterans Affairs to ask troops and veterans who tested positive for a pandemic virus such as if they were exposed to burn pits, so VA and DoD can address their medical needs. The measure also requires the federal agencies to enroll those veterans who say they were exposed to burn pits in the Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pit Registry unless they opt out. (Rep. Jared Golden, D-Me)
- An amendment that requires the Pentagon to provide a report to Congress about all the studies the department is conducting or funding on the health effects of burn pits and when they will be complete. (Rep. Raul Ruiz, D-Ca)
- An amendment requiring the Defense Department to establish mandatory training for all its medical providers on the health effects of burn pits. (Ruiz)
- An amendment requiring the Defense Department to include a separate, standalone question about burn pit exposure in the Post-Deployment Health Assessment (DD Form 2796) to increase reporting of burn-pit exposure. (Ruiz)
- An amendment requiring the Pentagon and VA to expand the burn pit registry to include Egypt and Syria. (Ruiz)
- An amendment requiring the history of respiratory illnesses and information from the burn pit registry on beneficiaries be included in the Tricare COVID-19 registry. (Rep. Peter Welch, D-Vt)

### **Agent Orange**

A bipartisan measure introduced by Rep. Josh Harder (D-CA), that would have forced VA to expand benefits to veterans exposed to Agent Orange who have bladder cancer, hypothyroidism or Parkinson's was cut from a massive list of amendments sent to the House floor Monday. A spokesman for Harder told Connecting Vets that the amendment was not ruled in order by the House Rules Committee, so it was not included in the package of hundreds of amendments sent to the floor. Sources with knowledge of negotiations said cost was a leading factor in the decision not to move the House version of the amendment forward, but said advocates hope the Senate version will get the 60 votes necessary when it heads to the floor of that chamber instead. The sources spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak publicly about the negotiations.

As lawmakers in both chambers reconcile their separate versions on the massive defense spending bill, that Senate amendment will have to survive long enough to be included in the final joint bill sent to the president later this year. Sen. Jon Tester, ranking member of the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee, and Minority Leader Sen. Chuck Schumer, are championing their chamber's version of the amendment, folding Tester's [Fair Care for Vietnam Veterans Act](#) into the massive bill. Schumer said earlier this month that the measure "will pass" and "we're about to win this fight" which could expand benefits to more than 22,000 veterans. So far, VA covers 14 illnesses linked to the toxic herbicide used during the Vietnam War. But VA leaders have resisted or delayed adding four additional illnesses -- hypertension (high blood pressure), bladder cancer, hypothyroidism and Parkinsonism, leaving thousands of aging and ill veterans without disability benefits for those issues.

The U.S. sprayed more than 20 million gallons of multiple herbicides over Vietnam from 1961 to 1971, including Agent Orange. Lawmakers advocating for the change have said they're also aiming to add a fourth illness -- hypertension, or high blood pressure -- to VA's list of covered Agent Orange-linked diseases, but that illness is one that has faced the most opposition from VA leaders and lawmakers concerned with cost. VA Secretary Robert Wilkie has said repeatedly he disagreed with National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine scientists' findings in 2016 and 2018 that link Agent Orange exposure to the four diseases, a decision VA says could cost from \$11.2 billion to \$15.2 billion.

Lawmakers and veterans' groups have for months repeatedly called on Wilkie and the White House to extend benefits and help an aging population of veterans and their families. So far, Wilkie has said he awaits the results of VA's in-house studies. The White House has been silent, lawmakers, Congressional staff and VSOs told Connecting Vets. Wilkie said he would likely not make a decision on his own on expanding benefits for the four illnesses until "late 2020." In 2017, then-VA Secretary David Shulkin decided to add more diseases to the VA's list of health concerns that qualify a veteran for Agent Orange disability benefits. According to documents obtained by a veteran through the Freedom of Information Act and provided to Connecting Vets, White House officials stood in Shulkin's way expressing concern about the cost of covering additional diseases and requesting more research. Military Times' Patricia Kime first reported on the documents. A list of the diseases currently linked to Agent Orange and eligible for benefits can be found [here](#). [Source: ConnectingVets.com | Abbie Bennett | July 20, 2020 ++]

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## **NDA 2021**

### **Update 05: House Passes \$740.5B Plan**

In a strong bipartisan vote, House lawmakers on 21 JUL passed their \$740.5 billion plan for the annual defense authorization bill, including provisions for a hefty military pay raise next year, new restrictions on the president's war powers and requirements that the Defense Department rename bases honoring Confederate leaders. That last item prompted another veto threat from President Donald Trump earlier in the day, echoing his comments in recent weeks that renaming the bases would dishonor troops who served at those locations. Democratic lawmakers have disagreed, saying the continued tributes to the Confederacy are offensive to minorities and Americans as a whole. The White House threat appeared to have little effect on House Republicans, as the measure passed with a veto-proof majority, 295-125. The tally saw Democrats split 187-43 and Republicans split 108-81.

The bill's passage came after two days of debate over additional budget and policy priorities for the department, including a push from progressives to reduce defense spending by 10 percent. The provision — seen as a potential signal to Democratic Party leaders of the need to divert military spending to the country's coronavirus response — failed by a wide margin, 93-324. A majority of Democrats (139) voted no. The \$740.5 billion top line would bring Defense Department spending in line with Senate and White House plans. The separate drafts of the defense budget outline also all call for a 3 percent pay raise for troops next year and an increase in service end strengths next year.

But hopes of an easy conference negotiation with Senate lawmakers over the measure were put in doubt by the president's latest veto threat of the legislation.

The 13-page list of complaints includes House plans for a basic needs allowance for the lowest paid troops (the White House says it's too expensive), a lack of money for military construction projects affected by Trump's southern border wall plans, and limits on U.S. troop moves out of Afghanistan and Germany. Trump's main concern, however, appears to be the issue of the Confederate base names, which include Fort Bragg in North Carolina, Fort Hood in Texas and Fort Benning in Georgia. The White House labeled the push (which gained support from both Democrats and Republicans) as "politically motivated attempts ... to rewrite history and to displace the enduring legacy of the American Revolution with a new left-wing cultural revolution."

The White House also objected to a raft of provisions in the House bill that would limit the Air Force's retirement plans for the A-10 Warthog attack planes, RQ-4 Global Hawk surveillance drones, and KC-135 and KC-10 tankers, citing the administration's efforts to shift resources toward competition with Russia and China. The Senate bill included provisions in the same vein. "The President's Budget divests or retires platforms to reinvest in leading-edge innovation, ensuring dominance across all domains: air, land, sea, space and cyber," the White House statement reads. "Limiting DOD's flexibility to prioritize resource investment delays modernization of capabilities, preparation for great power competition, and implementation of the [National Defense Strategy]."

House Democrats added fewer partisan provisions than they did in last year's bill, a move which drew significant Republican opposition during last summer's negotiations. However, lawmakers added limits to the Insurrection Act after Trump threatened to invoke it to deploy active-duty troops against recent civil unrest over racial injustice. The largely party-line vote was 215-190. The amendment, from Rep. Veronica Escobar (D-TX) would require the president to always consult with Congress before invoking the Insurrection Act. Republican critics said the amendment would unwisely tie the hands of future presidents. Similarly, another adopted amendment would establish a national cyber director at the White House, a key recommendation of the Cyberspace Solarium Commission, a group tasked by Congress with recommending changes to the federal government's cyber strategy.

Although the move did not receive opposition on the House floor, it's likely to be a sticking point in later negotiations, since the Trump administration eliminated its cybersecurity coordinator position in 2018. And House members adopted an amendment to bar live nuclear weapons testing following reports the Trump administration is mulling a resumption of such tests for the first time since 1992. The proposed Senate authorization bill included \$10 million to prepare for such tests. Once the Senate finishes debate on their measure, negotiators from both chambers will spend the rest of the summer working out a compromise measure for final consideration. Despite increased partisan infighting in recent years, the defense authorization bill has passed out of Congress for 59 consecutive years. [Source: Defense News | Leo Shane III & Joe Gould | July 22, 2020 ++]

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## **NDAA 2021**

### **Update 06: Senate Passes Amendment to Add 3 AO Linked Conditions**

Senate lawmakers voted overwhelmingly 22 JUL to force the Department of Veterans Affairs to add three serious illnesses — bladder cancer, hypothyroidism and Parkinson's-like symptoms — to the list of conditions presumed linked to chemical defoliant exposure in Vietnam. The move has the potential to extend veterans disability benefits to tens of thousands of veterans, but still faces a long legislative road ahead. The proposal was added to the Senate's draft of the annual defense authorization bill, which still must survive negotiations with the House in coming months.

But the 94-6 vote sent a strong message of support from lawmakers to administration officials, who have resisted the change in recent years because of the potential costs of the move. "They don't seem to think that exposure to these toxic chemicals in Vietnam is a cost of war," said Sen. Jon Tester (D-MT) and ranking member on the Senate Veterans'



Affairs Committee. “Let me tell you, they are wrong, and it is. The fact is this administration wants to outlive the Vietnam veterans and they don’t want to pay for it.” For the last four years — when the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine announced the three diseases could be credibly connected to Agent Orange exposure — veterans groups have pushed Veterans Affairs officials to include them on the list of presumptive conditions related to service in that war, allowing for fast-tracking of benefits claims.

VA officials had moved toward that step, but officials from the Office of Management and Budget objected before a final decision was made, citing cost concerns (the proposal could add several billion in new costs to the department in coming years) and what they called “limited scientific evidence.” According to VA data, at least 83,000 Vietnam veterans have been diagnosed with bladder cancer, hypothyroidism and Parkinson’s-like symptoms. Some of that group is already receiving veterans benefits for other war-related injuries.

Following Wednesday’s vote, veterans advocates praised the move as long overdue. “I’ve lived with Agent Orange and my body for more than 50 years, and it’s affected every part of me,” said Vietnam veteran Bill Garberg, who suffers from Parkinson’s-related symptoms. “The men that have survived this long should get some help, help that they deserve for the service that they rendered.” Shane Liermann, deputy national legislative director for benefits at Disabled American Veterans, said the illnesses serve as a reminder of the long costs of war. “Agent Orange exposure has caused years of suffering for thousands of Vietnam veterans, taken many of their lives and negatively impacted their families and survivors,” he said. “Yet, VA has taken no action, almost four years on.”

A similar measure proposed in the House was not included in that chamber’s draft of the annual authorization bill finalized earlier this week. But Tester said he is optimistic that the issue can survive conference negotiations. “If it doesn’t make it through conference, I’ll be surprised,” he said. The measure does not include hypertension, which could have added up to 200,000 more veterans to the potential list of eligible veterans and billions in additional costs each year. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | July 23, 2020 ++]

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## **NDAA 2021**

### **Update 07: Senate Passes \$740.5B Plan**

The Senate on 23 JUL overwhelmingly passed their version of the 2021 National Defense Authorization Act with a provision to strip 10 Army posts of Confederate-linked names, setting up a veto showdown with President Donald Trump who has objected to such name changes. The 86-14 passage of the \$740.5 billion bill that sets annual Pentagon spending and policy priorities comes just two days after the House easily passed its version of the NDAA, which also would force name changes of Army installations named for Confederate generals from the Civil War. The White House on 21 JUL, hours before the House passed the measure, issued a 13-page statement objecting to several provisions within the bill, but primarily the issue of Confederate names.

Senate leaders praised the bill as a step forward for the U.S. military, providing it critical funding to modernize its force as it eyes potential conflict with near peer rivals, such as China and Russia. “The [Senate’s] NDAA gives our military the personnel, equipment, training and organization needed to implement the National Defense Strategy and thwart any adversary who would try to do us harm,” said Sen. Jim Inhofe, R-Okla., chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee. “By fully investing in our military growth and modernization, we’re restoring deterrence so no country wants to challenge us. I don’t want a fair fight out there, I want to be superior — and this bill does that.”

The two chambers now must conference to reconcile differences in their versions of the legislation, an effort that traditionally takes months. Lawmakers have said they do not expect the NDAA to be finalized ahead of the new fiscal year on 1 OCT. Both chambers passed their versions of the NDAA with more than a two-thirds majority, which would be needed for each body to override a presidential veto and make the bill a law without Trump’s signature. Among the chief differences within the two chambers versions of the bill is the issue of the Confederate-named installations.

The House version forces the Army to remove such names within one year of the bill becoming law, while the Senate version would require the building of a commission to study the issue with the goal of stripping Confederate names within three years.

Trump has repeatedly vowed to veto any legislation that forced the military to change the names of those 10 posts, which include major installations such as Fort Bragg in North Carolina, Fort Benning in Georgia and Fort Hood in Texas. The posts, all in former Confederate states, were named during the Jim Crow era of the early 1900s during the lead up to World Wars I and II. Trump has defended the names as historically significant. “We won two world wars, beautiful world wars that were vicious and horrible, and we won them out of Fort Bragg,” Trump said in a Fox News interview that aired 19 JUL. “We won them out of all of these forts and now they want to throw those names away.”

Not every senator who voted for the bill on Thursday agreed with the provision about Confederate-named installations. That includes Inhofe. He has said he would prefer a process that includes local leaders to examine the names of the Army posts, and would not automatically force changes. Inhofe has also said he would bring up such issues as the two chambers worked to form a final NDAA. Both bill versions include key provisions sought by the Pentagon: A 3% pay hike for troops, an increase in the military’s end-strength, and investments in upgraded ships, aircraft and other weapons. The House and Senate versions also have provisions aimed at identifying and curbing groundwater contamination primarily via the use of firefighting foam containing perfluoroalkyl and polyfluoroalkyl substances, known as PFAS. And both versions would establish a new initiative aimed at checking China’s growing military power in the Indo-Pacific region.

Aside from the Confederate-named installations, there are other critical differences between the bills. The House version limits the president’s ability to remove troops from locations across the globe, including Germany, South Korea and Afghanistan. The Senate did not vote on an amendment presented with similar limitations. The White House in its veto threat said it “strongly objected” to such measures in the House version, and it accused lawmakers of including them to “micromanage” the president’s powers. The House version also would prohibit the use of Pentagon money for live testing of nuclear weapons, which the Senate version does not address.

In a statement, Inhofe and the Senate Armed Services Committee’s top Democrat, Sen. Jack Reed of Rhode Island, applauded the upper chamber’s passage of the bill for 60 consecutive years. “I’m pleased the vast majority of my colleagues joined Sen. Reed and me in voting for this bill,” Inhofe said in the statement. “And now, I look forward to working with the House to get an NDAA enacted for the 60th straight year in a row.” [Source: Stars & Stripes | Corey Dickstein | July 23, 2020 ++]

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## **Military Racial Disparities**

### **Update 04: Air Force Survey Results Overwhelming**

When the U.S. Air Force introduced a new survey earlier this month that asked airmen to describe racial injustice or bias they'd witnessed or experienced during their careers, leaders figured they'd get a lot of feedback. But they didn't expect that thousands would come forward with stories. Now, the survey -- part of a larger intraservice study -- is on track to shatter response rate records, according to the Air Force's top general. "I can tell you right now that the response has been overwhelming," Air Force Chief of Staff Goldfein said in a July 22 interview with Military.com. "Literally thousands and thousands of airmen have responded to this survey and participated."

The Air Force Inspector General’s independent review into the service's history of racial inequities in [military punishment](#) and shortfalls in developmental opportunities given to African American service members was [launched](#) last month. Officials also asked what airmen were feeling amid nationwide protests following the 25 MAY death of George Floyd in police custody, as well as how these events affected them personally. Goldfein said the response is timely; the service is addressing racial disparities across the force as the entire nation grapples with the realities of



systemic racism and injustice. "There's a lot of frustration -- a lot of it's been pent up over many years," Goldfein said. "And we're not going to wait until the end [of the study] before we put out what we're hearing."

Airman Mason Bassett-Graves, an A-10 Warthog crew chief at Osan Air Base, South Korea, recently [sat down](#) in front of a camera to talk about how vulnerable, frustrated and scared he felt after he learned his two sisters were attacked during a protest back home in Nebraska. A car struck them twice during what started as a peaceful demonstration, he said. Both of Bassett-Graves' sisters sustained injuries, but recovered; days later, at another protest, he said, one of his sisters was thrown to the ground by law enforcement officers and detained.



Bassett-Graves "didn't know what to think," when he learned of the incidents, he said in the nearly four-minute video. But he turned to his chain of command to discuss what was going on in his personal life. Two commanders listened to his story, he said, and knew he needed to see a chaplain or counselor to "get the weight off my shoulders." "Every time I think about it, I am thankful for that reaction, because if it were anything different, I don't know how I would have been open to my leadership in the future," Bassett-Graves said. The airman's story, posted 20 JUL, is one of many that Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force Kaleth O. Wright and other Air Force leaders have shared on their official public social pages as part of a series called "Dialogue on Race" begun following Floyd's death.

"Our intent, really, is to have an important, lasting, meaningful dialogue," Goldfein said. "Whether that happens in the media spaces or not, that's not really our overall intent." Goldfein said the goal is to have uninterrupted, "raw and uncomfortable" discussions. He said he hopes those initial conversations seed even more communication among airmen and their leaders. "What's important is that there's a forum for this conversation to happen, as uncomfortable as it may be," he said. "That's what we're trying to get after. Diversity is important; so is inclusiveness and belonging." That culture is formed "at the squadron level," Goldfein said.

The outgoing Air Force Chief of Staff Goldfein who is set to retire 6 AUG described the squadron as "the beating heart of the Air Force," and the lowest level of command where airmen should feel comfortable pushing and discussing their ideas. "How do we build that? How do we ensure that? How do we measure that? Those are all the things that we're getting after," he said. Alongside Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force Wright, who was the first member of senior military leadership to speak out publicly on events surrounding deaths of black men at the hands of law enforcement, Goldfein he's working to ensure these issues "have staying power" in the Air Force.

The conversations come at a historic moment, internally, for the service. Gen. Charles "CQ" Brown, who will succeed Goldfein, was confirmed last month in a historic Senate vote as the first African American to serve as the top uniformed officer for a military service branch. And Chief Master Sergeant JoAnne Bass -- appointed as the first woman to serve as the top-ranking enlisted member of a U.S. military branch -- will be Brown's senior enlisted adviser. "This is for all of our airmen of color, it's for the women in our Air Force. It's to [uproot] unconscious bias. It's all those things that we know exist. We know we have to get after it, and that's the opportunity we've been given," Goldfein said. [Source: Military.com | Oriana Pawlyk | July 25, 2020 ++]

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## Hypersonic Weapon Program

### Trump's "Super Duper" New Missile



Defense officials have revealed details about the hypersonic missile President Donald Trump has long touted as a "super duper" new military weapon -- part of a major effort to catch up to Russian and Chinese hypersonic weapons programs. Pentagon officials acknowledged for the first time some of the capabilities of the hypersonic missile, which the president has described as traveling 17 times the speed of sound. A senior defense official has said that the president has taken a special interest in the missile, revealing that Trump's oft-cited "17 times" faster figure derives from a test of a "hypersonic glide body" over the Pacific in March, a test that the Pentagon officially described as "successful" while revealing little additional information.

Hypersonic missiles are traditionally defined as missiles that travel at least five times the speed of sound, which is more than 3,800 miles per hour, and are considered highly maneuverable and capable of operating at varying altitudes. The president has touted the missile being developed by the Pentagon on at least three separate occasions, referring to it as "a super duper" missile capable of traveling 17 times faster than anything currently in the US missile arsenal. "We have a -- I call it the 'super-duper missile.' And I heard the other night, 17 times faster than what they have right now," Trump said in May.

Given their tremendous speed and ability to maneuver in the atmosphere, hypersonic missiles are seen as particularly hard to defend against using conventional missile defense systems, which are designed to counter and intercept traditional ballistic missile threats, the trajectory of which are much more predictable than their hypersonic counterparts. "Trying to defend against a hypersonic vehicle, that uncertainty in trajectory, becomes very difficult to deal with and defenses become very difficult because you've coupled very high speed with uncertainty in flight trajectory," the official said. The official said that Trump "does get briefed" on the details of the hypersonic weapons program, saying "he is aware of and supportive of the progress we're making. There's presidential level support and interest in what we're doing."

The US military is still several years away from fielding a hypersonic weapon, however, with a target date of 2023 at the earliest, while America's adversaries, Russia and China, claim they have already fielded such weapons. Russia said it placed its nuclear capable hypersonic missile known as "the Avangard" on "combat duty" late last year. The Russian military has also tested an air launched version of a hypersonic missile known as the Kinzhal and has said it could field it this year. And China recently showcased its hypersonic weapon, the DF-17, during a recent military parade. The US has acknowledged that it needs to catch-up to Moscow and Beijing and the Pentagon has requested billions for the weapon's development. "I have full confidence that we'll catch up, and we're investing in hypersonics," Assistant Secretary of Defense for Strategy, Plans, and Capabilities Vic Mercado told reporters, saying that the Russian and Chinese capabilities were a major planning factor for the Pentagon.

The official said that the reason the US fell behind China and Russia in the hypersonic arms race is that the US made a conscious decision to avoid adapting hypersonic technology to weapons until relatively recently, a change spurred on by Moscow and Beijing's embrace of the armaments. For four or five decades, "the United States has been a world leader in hypersonic technology. But we've always shied away from making the decision to transition that technology to war fighting applications. What helped us make the decision is that, you know, hey, the adversaries have made that decision to develop their hypersonic systems, and that really creates a potential asymmetry in war-fighting capability that we just can't allow to stand if we want to make sure we maintain our military dominance," he said. The US hypersonic weapons program is primarily focused on two types of missiles, a "boost glide system" derived from a traditional ballistic missile and a hypersonic cruise missile.

The boost glide system, which was the system tested in March, places a maneuverable glide vehicle atop a ballistic missile, giving the missile much enhanced maneuverability at hypersonic speed. The weapon is seen as having tremendous range, 1,000 miles or greater, but is more expensive and larger than the cruise missile variant. The other kind of hypersonic missile the US is working on is a hypersonic cruise missile and is much more like a traditional cruise missile such as the Tomahawk missile, a weapon long used by the military to strike enemy targets. The hypersonic missiles would travel up to ten times faster than the Tomahawk missile currently in the military's arsenal. The defense official said a test of the cruise missile would take place later this year.

He said both weapons could work in concert with one another, with the longer range boost glide missiles taking out an enemy's air defense systems, allowing US warplanes armed with hypersonic cruise missiles to fly in closer and strike a greater number of enemy targets. One major difference between the planned US weapons and the Chinese and Russian variants is that the American missiles are not designed to be nuclear capable according to US officials. [Source: CNN | Ryan Browne & Barbara Starr | July 16, 2020 ++]

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## **DoD Fraud, Waste, & Abuse**

### **Reported 16 thru 31 JUL 2020**

**Universal Health Services** -- United States Attorney William M. McSwain on 10 JUL announced that Universal Health Services, Inc. and UHS of Delaware, Inc. (together, UHS) have agreed to pay \$117 million to resolve alleged violations of the False Claims Act for billing for medically unnecessary inpatient behavioral health services and failing to provide adequate and appropriate services. UHS, which is headquartered in King of Prussia, Pennsylvania, owns and provides management and administrative services to nearly 200 acute care inpatient psychiatric hospitals and residential psychiatric and behavioral treatment facilities nationwide.

The resolution of these claims in the Eastern District of Pennsylvania is part of a comprehensive settlement between the Department of Justice and UHS, which arose out of UHS's billing practices in multiple healthcare institutions across the United States. UHS will pay the United States and participating states a total of \$117 million to resolve allegations that its hospitals and facilities knowingly submitted false claims for payment to the Medicare, Medicaid, TRICARE, Department of Veterans Affairs, and Federal Employee Health Benefit programs for inpatient behavioral health services that were not reasonable or medically necessary and/or failed to provide adequate and appropriate services for adults and children admitted to UHS facilities across the country.

The government alleged that between January 2006 and December 2018, UHS facilities admitted as patients federal healthcare beneficiaries who were not eligible for inpatient or residential treatment because their conditions did not require that level of care, while also failing to properly discharge appropriately admitted beneficiaries when they no longer required inpatient care. The government further alleged that UHS facilities billed for services not rendered, billed for improper and excessive lengths of stay, failed to provide adequate staffing, training, and/or supervision of staff, and improperly used physical and chemical restraints and seclusion. In addition, UHS facilities allegedly failed to develop and/or update individual assessments and treatment plans for patients, failed to provide adequate discharge

planning, and failed to provide required individual and group therapy services in accordance with federal and state regulations.

The government's investigation included 19 lawsuits filed under the whistleblower provision of the False Claims Act, which permits private citizens to file suit on behalf of the United States for false claims and share in a portion of the government's recovery. The global settlement with UHS involved 18 cases that are currently pending in the Eastern District of Pennsylvania, Western District of Michigan, the Eastern District of Michigan, and Northern District of Georgia. As part of the resolution with UHS, the whistleblowers will receive \$15,862,457.03, from the federal share of the settlement. In connection with the settlements, UHS has entered into a Corporate Integrity Agreement with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Inspector General (OIG), which will remain in effect for five years. UHS must retain an independent monitor, selected by the OIG, which will assess UHS's Behavioral Health Division's patient care protections and report to the OIG. In addition, an independent review organization will perform annual reviews of UHS inpatient behavioral health claims to federal health care programs. [Source: DoJ Eastern Dist. of Penn. | U.S. Attorney's Office | July 20, 2020 ++]

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**Vista Manufacturing Company --** A U.S. District Court judge in Fort Worth on 23 JUL sentenced a man to 55 months in prison for lying to the U.S. Department of Defense about the type of metal his company used inside aircraft parts. **Richard Hyde**, the owner of Vista Manufacturing Company, pleaded guilty in August to making a false claim against the United States, the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Northern District of Texas said. U.S. District Judge Mark Pittman also sentenced Hyde, 64, to pay a \$100,000 fine and to three years of supervised release. Hyde invoiced the Navy for aircraft components that DOD later found were constructed from a metal different than the one the company said it would use, according to a description of stipulated facts filed in the case.

In August 2014, Vista Manufacturing submitted a bid to the government to provide parts for a Naval Air Warfare Center aircraft, according to the stipulated facts filing. In the \$12,897.50 bid, the company included a diagram noting measurements, specifications and descriptions of aluminum alloy 2024. The government accepted Vista's bid, and Hyde began seeking manufacturers for 22 wiper back retainers included in the bid. Hyde found a company that offered to manufacture the parts with a different, weaker aluminum alloy, 6061, for \$8,492. Although Vista's contract with the Navy required that the company use aluminum alloy 2024, Hyde admitted that he accepted the offer and allowed the part to be manufactured with alloy 6061.

Hyde admitted that in January 2015, he had the parts delivered to a Defense Logistics Agency distribution facility, the U.S. Attorney's Office said. He invoiced the DOD for \$12,897.50 and received the payment. (Pittman also sentenced Hyde to pay that amount in restitution.) Tests showed that Hyde's company had substituted 6061 alloy for 2024 alloy. [Source: Fort Worth Star-Telegram | Emerson Clarridge | July 19, 2020 ++]

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## **TRICARE Changes 2020**

### **Jan thru Jul Summary**

#### **Temporary Expansion of Telehealth Services**

TRICARE recently revised its policy on [telehealth services](#). These changes are temporary during the national health emergency due to the pandemic. TRICARE will now:

- Cover audio-only telehealth visits
- Waive cost-shares and copayments for all covered telehealth services. These services must be from a military provider or TRICARE network provider.
- Allow more providers to offer telehealth services

[Learn more.](#)

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### **Catastrophic Cap Credit for Some Households**

- You'll receive a letter from your regional contractor or designated provider if you or your family:
- Exceeded the annual catastrophic cap in 2018, 2019, or 2020, and
- Paid enrollment fees for some TRICARE plans.

The letter tells you about your options regarding your overpayment. [Learn more.](#)

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### **3D Mammography Coverage**

On Jan. 1, 2020, TRICARE expands coverage for breast cancer screenings to include digital breast tomosynthesis, or 3-D mammography. 3-D mammography is currently covered for diagnostic purposes. TRICARE will cover 3-D mammography as a preventive health care service through the [provisional coverage](#) program. For more information about mammograms in general, visit the [mammography](#) page.

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### **TRICARE Reserve Select Reinstatement Request Extension**

Have you lost your TRICARE Reserve Select (TRS) coverage for [failure to pay](#)? You'll now have five months from your last paid-through date to request reinstatement. If your TRS coverage is reinstated, you're still responsible for paying all past due premiums. You'll also have to pay your current premiums, including fees. This is a temporary change during the national health emergency.

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### **Referral and/or Authorization Extension for Some Services**

Humana Military, Health Net Federal Services, and International SOS Assistance extended some already-approved referrals and authorizations that expire(d) between March 1, 2020 and June 30, 2020. This automatic extension is for an extra 180 days from the expiration date. You don't need to take action. View your [referrals and/or authorizations](#). Questions? Contact your [regional contractor](#). If overseas, call your [regional call center](#).

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### **Resumption of Elective Procedures at MTFs and DTFs**

Be sure to contact your Military Treatment Facility or Dental Treatment Facility to find out if you can proceed with your elective procedure. MTF and DTF commanders or directors may now determine if elective procedures may resume. They must use factors from the Department of Defense before deciding. The factors include the following:

- Risk Assessment
- Installation HPCON levels, healthcare capacity including the TRICARE network
- Medical and dental facility staffing levels
- Personal Protective Equipment availability

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### **Updated Quantity Limits for Certain Inhalers\***

TRICARE is removing temporary quantity limits on inhalers and restoring pre-COVID-19 limits. Patients with asthma and other conditions can get up to six inhalers at once for a 90-day supply at participating pharmacies. Non-Active Duty Service Members must pay the full copaymentIf you get your medications from:

- A [military pharmacy](#), you can get a maximum of six inhalers to cover 90 days.
- [TRICARE Pharmacy Home Delivery](#), you can get a maximum of six inhalers to cover 90 days.
- [TRICARE retail network pharmacy](#), you can get Two inhalers to cover 30 days. Patients can pick up: Four inhalers to cover 60 days or Six inhalers to cover 90 days

*\*This includes: Albuterol, Levalbuterol, Proair, Proventil, Ventolin, and Xopenex.*

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## TRICARE Select Enrollment Fees for Group A

Note: If you or your sponsor's initial enlistment or appointment occurred before January 1, 2018, you are in Group A. Retired Beneficiaries

You and your family members must now pay a TRICARE Select monthly enrollment fee. Your monthly enrollment fee payment will start on Jan. 1, 2021.

- For an individual plan, you'll pay \$12.50 per month or \$150 annually.
- For a family plan, you'll pay \$25.00 per month or \$300 annually.

Learn More about [TRICARE Select Enrollment fees](#).

[Source: TRICARE West Region | July 17, 2020 ++]

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## POW/MIA Recoveries & Burials

Reported 16 thru 31 JUL 2020 | Four

"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 as of FEB 2019 are: World War II 73,025 of which over 41,000 are presumed to be lost at sea, Korean War 7665, Vietnam War 1589 (i. e. VN-1,246, Laos-288, Cambodia-48, & Peoples Republic of China territorial waters-7), Cold War 111, 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 <https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Year/2019> for a listing and details of those accounted for in 2019. 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**



-- **Air Force 1st Lt. Alva R. Krogman**, 25, was a pilot assigned to the 504th Tactical Air Support Group, 7th Air Force, on temporary duty with the 23rd Tactical Air Support Squadron operating out of Nakhon Phanom Royal Thai Air Force Base, Thailand. On Jan. 17, 1967, he was flying an O1-F Birdog aircraft as part of a flight of two planes conducting a visual reconnaissance mission in Savannakhet Province, Laos. Krogman's aircraft was hit by enemy fire in the left wing and went down. He was never recovered and was declared killed in action. Interment services are pending. [Read about Krogman.](#)

-- **Army Pfc. Glenn E. Collins**, 21, of Tucson, Arizona, was a member of Heavy Mortar Company, 1st Battalion, 32nd Infantry Regiment, 7th Infantry Division. He was reported missing in action on Dec. 2, 1950, when his unit was attacked by enemy forces near the Chosin Reservoir, North Korea. Following the battle, his remains could not be recovered. Collins will be buried in his hometown at a date yet to be decided by the family. [Read about Collins.](#)

-- **Marine Corps Pfc. John P. Langan**, 18, was a member of Company C, 1st Battalion, 6th Marine Regiment, 2nd Marine Division, Fleet Marine Force, which landed against stiff Japanese resistance on the small island of Betio in the Tarawa Atoll of the Gilbert Islands, in an attempt to secure the island. Over several days of intense fighting at Tarawa, approximately 1,000 Marines and sailors were killed and more than 2,000 were wounded, while the Japanese were virtually annihilated. Langan died on the third day of battle, Nov. 22, 1943. Interment services are pending. [Read about Langan.](#)

-- **Marine Corps Reserve Pfc. John E. Gillen**, 20, of Champaign, Illinois, was a member of Company D, 1st Battalion, 6th Marine Regiment, 2nd Marine Division, Fleet Marine Force, which landed against stiff Japanese resistance on the small island of Betio in the Tarawa Atoll of the Gilbert Islands, in an attempt to secure the island. Gillen died on the third day of battle, Nov. 22, 1943. Gillen will be buried Aug. 12, 2020, in his hometown. [Read about Gillen.](#)

[Source: <http://www.dpaa.mil> | July 31, 2020 ++]

\* VA \*



## HUD-VASH

### Update 10: VA Adds \$400M to Homeless Vet Program

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) today announced it is allocating an additional \$400 million of its coronavirus relief funding to enhance the department's emergency relief response for Veterans experiencing or at risk of homelessness during the coronavirus pandemic. The Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act (CARES Act) allocated \$17.2 billion for the Veterans Health Administration of which \$700 million is devoted to expanding services for and addressing the challenges faced by Veterans who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. "The additional allocation of CARES Act funding will support the continuity of care of vulnerable Veterans during the COVID-19 pandemic," said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. "With this additional funding, VA's Homeless Programs Office can provide more homeless prevention assistance and emergency housing to make it possible for Veterans to maintain appropriate physical distancing and to ensure they are living in safe conditions."

The newly allocated funds will be used for the Supportive Services for Veteran Families Program (SSVF). SSVF offers several ways to secure housing for Veterans experiencing or at risk of homelessness. In total, \$602 million of coronavirus relief funding has now been allocated for this program, which will also help the Housing and Urban Development-VA Supportive Housing Program place Veterans in safe housing to isolate them from the virus. Other coronavirus relief funding devoted to providing emergency shelter and supportive services for Veterans includes \$88 million for the Grant and Per Diem Program and \$10 million for the Health Care for Homeless Veterans Program. [Source: VA News Release | July 16, 2020 ++]

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## VA Malpractice Claims

### Bills to Protect Veterans Who Experience VA Medical Malpractice



One Marine veteran is working to protect 20 million veterans from the pain he experiences every day. Brian Tally has been working for years since he was irreparably injured by near-fatal Department of Veterans Affairs medical malpractice to ensure what happened to him does not happen to any other veterans. Two bills in Congress are named for Tally, and on 23 JUL, the House Veterans Affairs Committee for the first time brought one of those to a hearing. "We have come a very long way in our efforts in changing an outdated law that has dishonored veterans and their families for generations," Tally said. "We have fought for two years for a hearing. Our mission has been clear, consistent and positive from the very beginning, and that's protecting all veterans who seek treatment at all VA hospitals and clinics."

The Brian Tally VA Employment Transparency Act (H.R.4526) would allow any veteran or family member who has filed a claim against VA for damage, injury or death to be entitled to receive, within 30 days, a notice from VA about legal council, the employment status of anyone involved in the claim (including whether they work for VA or are a contractor) and the statute of limitations for the claim. "Brian has been a tireless advocate for veterans who sought care through VA and were harmed through negligence," Chairman Rep. Mark Takano, D-Calif. said during the hearing, adding that those veterans should have the right to know "who caused the harm and what legal remedies are available so they can be made whole." "It is unacceptable that any veteran be denied the right to pursue a claim because of a lack of transparency by VA," said Rep. Mike Levin (D-CA), a sponsor of the bill. "Brian Tally has been a tireless and effective advocate for this cause."

Levin asked VA officials during the 23 JUL hearing if there are policies in place at VA to communicate about their malpractice claims, including whether the medical professional was a contractor or VA staff before the statute of limitations expires. Only one VA official present was able to answer the question at the hearing, but she could not be heard because of technical difficulties and was not physically present at the hearing. "The answer is no and you know that," Levin said, in lieu of an answer. "It appears to be VA's position that it is acceptable for veterans to be denied legal recourse because VA did not provide them the information in a timely manner ... VA is unable to provide an

unbiased opinion on what is in the veteran's best interest because it is in direct conflict with what is in the VA's best interest."

VA's written testimony said it would be difficult for the department to keep track of claims and statutes of limitations for those malpractice claims. "VA, a federal agency with a budget of over \$200 billion," Levin said. "What makes you think it's easier for a veteran to keep track of this information, especially without legal counsel?" VA officials were unable to provide any answers to Levin's questions during the hearing.

Tally woke up one morning in 2016 with debilitating back pain that left him unable to stand or walk. Like many other veterans before him, he headed to the VA -- a decision that changed his life forever. A doctor Tally said he thought worked directly for VA, but was actually an independent contractor, botched his diagnoses, delaying or denying critical care for months. His family was forced to pay out-of-pocket for private care that eventually prompted a battery of tests and surgeries to discover, and then fight, a bone-eating staph infection that was destroying his spine and threatening his life. "If I waited, I would have died," Tally says now, practiced in retelling his own brush with death and his family's hardships.

VA officials admitted that Tally received second-rate care at the VA emergency room in Loma Linda, Calif., about 56 miles outside of Los Angeles, according to documents obtained by Connecting Vets. But a 73-year-old legal loophole allows VA to deflect responsibility for the malpractice, leaving Tally with no legal recourse, no way to seek recompense for losing his family car, his small business and putting him out of work for years. VA deferred Tally's federal tort claim, saying the VA employee responsible for the malpractice was a contractor and he had to file a state claim. Information they failed to pass along to Tally until it was too late and the statute of limitations in his state had expired, he said.

"We nearly lost everything," Tally told Connecting Vets while walking steadily from one Congressional office to the next to promote his bills. "My life changed in ways I never imagined or saw coming. I live and feel it every day." But Tally has never given up. He knows what happened to him could happen to anyone -- with VA contractors nearly indistinguishable from normal VA employees, working "behind the VA veil," he says. "I've been called to serve," the former football and baseball coach said, grimacing slightly in pain but with a ready smile for the next Congressional staffer, Senator or anyone else walking the halls around him in one of his last trips to Washington, D.C. to promote the bills. "Hopefully this shows other people that one person can make a difference. If I can just help one person, it will be worth it."

The second bill in Congress named for Tally is the Brian Tally VA Medical Care and Liability Improvement Act (H.R.3813) which would ensure that VA health care contractors are subject to federal tort claims, to improve the accountability of VA physicians. At <https://www.facebook.com/rallyaroundtally> you can follow Tally's efforts on Facebook. [Source: ConnectingVets.com | Abbie Bennett | July 23, 2020 ++]

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## **VA Claim Denials**

### **Update 18: 20,000 Improperly Denied During COVID-19 pandemic.**

An internal Department of Veterans Affairs memo obtained by Minnesota's Minneapolis KARE 11 TV News shines new light on the number of veterans who may have been wrongly denied benefits for missing appointments the VA itself had already cancelled due to the COVID-19 crisis. At first, the VA claimed KARE 11 had identified an isolated example of the problem, but the memo indicates thousands of veterans may have been impacted. "VBA (Veterans Benefits Administration) has identified approximately 20,000 denied claims with one or more cancelled examinations, potentially indicating premature or improper denial" states the June 19th memorandum addressed to all Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) Regional Offices. The effort to identify improper benefits denials was launched by the federal agency after members of Congress began demanding action in the wake of a KARE 11 investigation.

An angry and frustrated Harry Payne said, “That’s a total lie!” after receiving a benefits denial letter in May from the VA claiming he failed to show up for a required exam. Payne, of Kempner, Texas, is one of thousands of veterans who had disability claims pending with the Department of Veterans Affairs when the COVID-19 pandemic struck the nation in force in March. He had been scheduled for an in-person Compensation and Pension (C&P) exam with a VA medical contractor in late April. However, before his scheduled appointment, a prior KARE 11 investigation exposed how veterans were being told to report to exams – even to exams in New York City – as the coronavirus crisis worsened. Veterans said they should not be forced to choose between the risk of exposure to the coronavirus and having their benefits claims denied or drastically reduced.

On April 3rd, VA ordered that in-person benefits exams be cancelled due to health risks during the coronavirus crisis. Veterans were promised on the VA website that, “We won’t deny a claim solely for failure to report for an exam at this time.” But that’s exactly what happened to Harry Payne. “The VA sent me a letter saying my claim was denied,” Payne said when he reached out to KARE 11 Investigates asking for help. “And then you read the reason why, and I get even madder because it’s a flat out lie!” Records show he was scheduled for a C&P exam on April 21st by VA contractor QTC. However, after VA put a stop to in-person exams on April 3rd, Payne says he received a phone call from QTC informing him his appointment was cancelled. He thought his claim was just on hold until it was safe to do the exam. He was wrong.

The Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) sent him a letter informing him his PTSD claim had been denied. The letter conceded he has PTSD caused by his service, but stated he was denied because, “We received notification from QTC Medical Services, Inc. that you declined to participate in the examination process for your claim.” “I in no way refused to cooperate,” exclaimed Payne. He was concerned the denial would force him to go through a lengthy appeals process. Once KARE 11 began asking questions, both VBA and QTC made things right for Mr. Payne. At the time, KARE 11 was told Payne’s case was “an anomaly,” an “isolated case,” and the VA staff involved with issuing his benefits denial were “being retrained.”

It was not an anomaly. Veterans from across the country began reaching out to KARE 11 with similar denials for not showing up to exams that VA itself cancelled. Members of both bodies of Congress expressed dismay over the wrongful denials KARE 11 exposed. “We should not allow a single veteran’s claim to fall through the cracks during this pandemic,” said Congresswoman Elaine Luria, (D-VA) Chair of the House Veterans’ Affairs Subcommittee on Disability Assistance during the Congressional forum. “Now you tell me, that don’t even make sense!” exclaimed U.S. Senator Joe Manchin of West Virginia. “That’s when we say C’mon!” “We’ll get this corrected,” Manchin told KARE 11 during a May interview, “I really believe we will.”

Veterans advocates tied the obvious errors to the VA’s decision to abruptly end a decades-old practice of giving veterans service representatives 48 hours to review benefits decisions for accuracy before they become final and are sent to veterans. The VA’s decision to do away with the 48-hour review came despite a direct appeal by veterans groups to President Trump to block it. Before that change was made, the nation’s largest veteran service organizations (VSOs) and members of Congress in a bipartisan letter argued that ending the 48-hour review would result in delays, create confusion, and undermine a veteran’s right to competent representation when applying for VA benefits. “The 48 review is extremely important,” said Ron Quade, the Director of Claims and Field Operations for the Minnesota Dept. of Veterans Affairs (MDVA). MDVA is the local state agency that helps Minnesota veterans navigate the complex VA claims process. “On a regular basis we find even simple errors that we can help the VA with,” Quade explained.

Within weeks of the VA ending the 48-hour review period, KARE 11 began hearing from veterans around the country claiming they’d been unfairly denied benefits. A few days after his interview with KARE 11, Manchin and a group of Democratic Senators introduced legislation to restore the 48-hour review process. Under the legislation, VSOs, as well as attorneys and claims agents, would be permitted to review benefits decisions before they are final. That legislation is still pending.

The VA itself launched a review of all benefits claims denied during the COVID pandemic based on a veteran allegedly missing their exam. “This is a priority for VBA,” said spokesperson Randal Noller in mid-June, “and we are working to get it done as quickly as possible.” Days later, the internal VA memo was sent to the Regional VBA offices outlining the approximately 20,000 claims VBA had identified as being potentially denied improperly. Those claims are all now being reexamined. Impacted veterans are receiving the following notification letters:

*The Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) has undertaken a review of all claims decided since March 1, 2020 in which an examination was cancelled or not completed as a result of complications from the COVID-19 pandemic. Because your recent claim falls into this category, we will be conducting a review of our decision. You will be notified of any additional information we may require of you and will receive a new decision upon completion of our review.*

The VA has not provided a timetable for when their review will be completed. If you’re one of the veterans impacted by VA scheduling benefits exams during the COVID-19 crisis, contact the team working on this investigation at: [investigations@kare11.com](mailto:investigations@kare11.com). [Source: NBC KARE-11 | A.J. Lagoe / Steve Eckert | July 20, 2020 ++]

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## **VA Sexual Harassment**

### **Update 01: Lawmakers Blast VA’s Policies as Inadequate**

Following a new report highlighting that more than one-quarter of women working as Veterans Affairs employees experienced sexual harassment, congressional leaders on 15 JUL demanded immediate changes in department policies to ensure that such claims are investigated and addressed instead of being overlooked. “The department must make the prevention and addressing of sexual harassment a top priority,” a bipartisan group of House and Senate lawmakers stated in a letter to VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “As an institution that is charged with providing healthcare and benefits to survivors of sexual violence, VA must lead on all fronts ... on addressing this issue.”

The letter — signed by the chairmen and ranking members of the House and Senate Veterans’ Affairs committees, as well as Iraq War veteran Sen. Joni Ernst (R-IA) — came just a few hours after a new Government Accountability Office report lamenting shortfalls in VA training, reporting and oversight of sexual harassment events. “Absent additional action, some VA employees may continue to distrust VA’s handling of sexual harassment allegations,” the report stated. “Further, VA’s core values, which include integrity, advocacy, and respect, along with its ability to deliver the highest quality services to the nation’s veterans, may be compromised.”

According to federal survey data from 2014 to 2016 — the latest year the survey was conducted — 26 percent of women who worked at VA reported some form of sexual harassment, and 14 percent of male employees said they were subject to similar unwelcome workplace behavior. Government-wide, the number of women reporting workplace sexual harassment was 21 percent. Among men, it was 9 percent. In response to the report, VA press secretary Christina Noel said that much of the report is based on years-old information and “since then, VA has championed several efforts aimed at preventing harassment in all forms while improving employee experiences, retention and morale.”

VA officials told GAO that many of their recommendations have already been fully or completely implemented in recent years, and that they are focused on finding ways to end problems of harassment among employees. But lawmakers pointed to several overdue changes that need to be made to strengthen department policies. For example, VA does not currently require reporting of all sexual harassment complaints, which critics say could lead to under-reporting of cases and inefficient response to the problem. The GAO also noted a potential problems with how the VA’s Equal Employment Opportunity office is structured, saying it should not oversee both harassment complaints and other personnel functions. VA officials have rejected calls for that change. And lawmakers for months have complained about “incomplete and outdated policies” regarding sexual harassment training and awareness programs, saying they have lead to cultural problems within the agency.

VA leaders said they expect to have a new reporting and training system in place to deal with those concerns by fall 2021. But that's not fast enough for the congressional critics. They asked for a briefing on potential changes within 60 days to ensure the issue is being taken seriously, and to detail which of the numerous GAO recommendations are still not completed. VA leaders have sparred with House Veterans' Affairs leaders in recent months over the issue of sexual assault and harassment policies, after a committee staffer alleged she was assaulted at a Washington, D.C., VA medical center last fall. Inspector General investigators could not prove or disprove that claim, but opened a second inquiry into whether top VA officials worked to discredit her amid an investigation into those allegations. [Source: MilitaryTimes Leo Shane III | July 15, 2020 ++]

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## **VA Surgery**

### **Update 02: Care Outperforms/Matches Neighboring Non-VA Hospitals**

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs on 20 JUL announced their hospitals outperform or match neighboring non-VA hospitals in surgical quality and overall patient safety satisfaction. The finding comes from a study conducted by VA and university researchers that was published 26 JUN, in the Journal of Surgical Research. "The prospect of having surgery can be stressful," said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. "For Veterans, who often have choices in where they receive care, it is in their best interest to make fully informed health care decisions. This study provides valuable information when faced with such an important choice."

Researchers at the White River Junction VA Medical Center in Vermont and the Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center in New Hampshire completed the study. They identified VA medical centers with at least one non-VA hospital within 25 miles in three U.S. regions: West-Southwest, New England and Deep South. With a sample of 34 VA facilities and 319 neighboring non-VA hospitals, the researchers used benchmarks created by the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality. They also used scores from the Hospital Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems. The results showed VA facilities performed better or as good as non-VA hospitals in overall patient safety indicators (PSIs), which measure potential hospital complications and adverse events following surgeries and other procedures. VA hospitals performed much better in surgery specific PSIs.

The researchers also found VA and non-VA hospitals were about equal in patient satisfaction with overall hospital experience. The data was collected from [Hospital Compare](https://www.research.va.gov), a publicly available database that helps consumers decide where to seek health care. The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services runs the database. You can visit VA's Office of Research and Development at <https://www.research.va.gov>. [Source: VA Press Release | July 20, 2020 ++]

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## **Covid-19 Vet Craft Kit**

### **Free to Quarantined Vets**

Veterans confined to their homes because they've tested positive for COVID-19 can get a free quarantine kit thanks to a partnership between the Department of Veterans Affairs and the nonprofit Help Heal Veterans. The kits are designed to keep the vets occupied while they are isolated in their homes or a health or long-term care facility, according to a release from the nonprofit. "Lockdown equals depression and anxiety," a news release from the department says. "Heal Vets has increased therapy kit production for those military/veteran personnel in quarantine and is shipping as many pallets of therapeutic craft kits as quickly as possible to VA centers across the nation that are being used in the quarantine efforts."

Since the start of the pandemic in March, Help Heal Veterans has provided nearly 50,000 of the kits to more than 90 VA medical facilities, according to a VA release. "Part of VA's charge is to support the positive mental health of



veterans and these crafts and leisure activities will benefit that effort,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie in a statement. The kits contain craft supplies, reading and educational materials as well as items that veterans can use to make their own face masks. Under the partnership, supplies for the kits are given to local groups, who then assemble and distribute the kits. The nonprofit added that the kits are also “utilized in restoring coordination and impaired motor skills, improving concentration or relieving symptoms of depression and PTSD.” To learn more, click [here](https://www.healvets.org/how-we-heal/heal-vets-craft-kits) and check out <https://www.healvets.org/how-we-heal/heal-vets-craft-kits>. [Source: VA News Release | July 1, 2020 ++]

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## VA Dental Care

### Update 07: Some Congressmen Want to Expand Eligibility



About 534,000 veterans qualify for dental care from the Department of Veterans Affairs. But that leaves about 94 percent of veterans without dental care from VA. Members of Congress want to change that, but VA leaders objected, arguing the department doesn't have the capacity, staff or money to provide more dental care, which they said could cost tens of billions. VA officials argued they don't have the resources to provide dental care to more veterans.

Rep. Julia Brownley (D-CA) introduced a bill, H.R. 96, which would require VA to furnish dental care to eligible veterans like any other medical care. "94 percent of veterans enrolled at VA ... don't have dental care at VA, leaving many veterans with no dental care at all," or forced to pay for private dental care, Brownley said during a legislative hearing of the House Veterans Affairs Committee 23 JUL. A previous VA report also showed that providing dental services "could result in a reduction of overall medical costs," Brownley said. That report noted that neglecting oral health can contribute to health problems, cardiovascular diseases, some cancers and other health concerns. "We must treat veterans' dental care just as integrally to their overall health" as standard health care, Brownley said.

But VA's written testimony submitted to Congress said VA opposed expanding dental care to more veterans. "I'm puzzled why VA is not looking at this holistically," Brownley said, considering VA's internal report showed possible overall cost savings on veteran medical care if oral health needs were also addressed. "VA has a report that actually says the VA can save money when you look at the whole health of a veteran."

Dr. Maria Llorente, Assistant Deputy Undersecretary for Health for Patient Care Services at the Veterans Health Administration, said that while Brownley's proposed bill was "in keeping with our desire and mission to serve the needs of our veterans ... in a nutshell, VA does not have the resources to be able to expand dental care services," even just by priority group. Llorente said VA does not have the capacity or money to provide dental care for more veterans. "Most of our clinics nationwide are already at or near capacity," Llorente told lawmakers Thursday. Expanding dental care would require more clinical staff, space and costly equipment. Brownley asked if VA would be willing to seek feedback

from the "entire veteran population" on whether veterans would like VA to expand dental care. "VA is always willing to accept feedback, information and opinion from our veterans," Llorente said.

To find out if you are eligible for VA dental care, [contact](#) your local VA. Other bills discussed by the committee 23 JUL included:

- [The Brian Tally VA Employment Transparency Act](#) would allow any veteran or family member who has filed a claim against VA for damage, injury or death to be entitled to receive, within 30 days, a notice from VA about legal council, the employment status of anyone involved in the claim (including whether they work for VA or are a contractor) and the statute of limitations for the claim.
- H.R. 6039, which would require VA to take over the Mare Island Naval Cemetery from the city of Vallejo, Calif.;
- The [Forgotten Vietnam Veterans Act](#), which would extend VA benefits to thousands of "forgotten" Vietnam veterans by changing the cutoff dates for the war to match the Pentagon's;
- The Native American PACT Act, which would prohibit VA from collecting healthcare copays from a veteran who is also a member of a Native American tribe;
- The Department of Veterans Affairs Tribal Advisory Committee Act, which would establish such a committee to advise VA on matters related to tribes and Native veterans;
- H.R. 3582, which would expand the scope of the Advisory Committee on Minority Veterans to include LGBTQ veterans;
- The Access to Contraception Expansion for Veterans Act, which would require VA to fill prescriptions for a year's supply of contraceptive pills or other forms of contraception;
- The Honoring All Veterans Act, which would [alter the VA motto to be more inclusive](#);
- The VA FOIA Reform Act, which would require the department to reduce its backlog of Freedom of Information Act requests by 75 percent within three years and make frequently requested information publicly available;
- The Veterans Economic Recovery Act, which would require VA to carry out a retraining assistance program for unemployed veterans;
- The Accelerating Veterans Recovery Outdoors Act, which would require VA to establish a task force on the use of public lands to provide medical treatment and therapy to veterans;
- H.R. 7287, which would clarify license requirements for contracted medical professionals to perform disability exams for VA;
- The VA Mission Telehealth Clarification Act, which would allow health professional trainees to provide treatment via telemedicine;
- The Protecting Moms Who Served Act, aimed at improving maternity care coordination provided by VA;
- The Veterans Benefits Fairness and Transparency Act, which would require VA to publish its disability benefits questionnaire form in a central location on the VA website;
- H.R. 7445, which would expand VA home loan eligibility to some members of the Reserve;
- The Burial Equity for Guards and Reserves Act, which would extend VA burial benefits to those service members;
- A draft bill that would extend certain employment and reemployment rights to certain activated National Guard members;
- A draft bill to clarify the rights of service members and their employment and reemployment rights.

[Source: ConnectingVets.com | Abbie Bennett | July 23, 2020 ++]

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## **VA Nursing Homes**

### **Update 18: Currently Only 2 Residents are Covid-19 Positive**

While some nursing homes are being ravaged by COVID-19, the total number of patients currently in Department of Veterans Affairs nursing homes [nationwide](#) who've tested positive for the virus can be counted on one hand. That's according to the United States Secretary of the VA Robert Wilkie. "We have two veterans who are positive in our

nursing homes out of 75-hundred,” said Secretary Wilkie in a one-on-one interview with News Channel 11’s Josh Smith. The President’s pick to oversee veteran care says that stunningly low number of 2 current Covid-19 cases across the VA’s 340 nursing homes could serve as a model for other health care providers on how to stop the spread of the virus. “That’s because we took emergency measures early on,” he said.

Secretary Wilkie said the VA continues its deployment of “The Fourth Mission” first initiated earlier this year as the Covid-19 pandemic began to worsen. That’s the VA’s term for supporting the national response to a crisis or disaster. He said the VA already has deployed staff and resources to healthcare facilities across the country, and he says hospitals stand ready to accept civilian patients if local hospitals can’t handle the demand for Covid-19 care. “We are prepared to do more as the Governor’s request,” said Secretary Wilkie. He said about 700 veterans are being treated for COVID-19 in VA hospitals nationwide. About 2000 of the nation’s 9.5 million veterans have died. As of 28 JUL, three of the deceased veterans have received care through the Mountain Home VA Hospital network based in Johnson City. “If anything good has come out of this its allowed us to increase our reach particularly in rural America. That is where most veterans reside,” he said.

Secretary Wilkie said the pandemic set the stage for a rapid increase in tele-health improving access to caregiver for veterans forced to stay home. “We’re doing tele-health appointments in numbers we never thought possible. And that is actually the way of the future.” He said the increase of tele-health capabilities has helped to reduce the backlog of veterans waiting for claims. Secretary Wilkie said he’s very concerned about the mental health impact on America’s veterans. He said in normal month before the pandemic, VA hospitals conducted an average 40,000 mental health appointments. As of now, he says the VA is on track to do more than 900,000 mental health visits this month alone. That’s why he says the VA’s post-pandemic goal is to help restore normal life for veterans who depend on the VA for care. “We want them to return. We want them to return when it’s safe. And get back into their regular rhythm. [Source: Johnson City, Tenn | News Channel 11 | July 28, 2020 ++]

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## VA Deaths

### Update 03: COVID-19 Related Surpasses 2,000



The number of patients dying because of complications of the coronavirus at the Department of Veterans Affairs continues to grow, and on 28 JUL surpassed 2,000. But the number of patients infected with the virus who need hospitalization continues to fall, VA officials said. In March, VA saw 38 percent of its COVID-19 patients hospitalized, 24 percent in April, 21 percent in May and 18 percent in June, according to VA Press Secretary Christina Noel. At least 2,041 VA patients had died of the quick-spreading virus as of 28 JUL, according to department data, meaning about 5.5% of people infected with the virus eventually die because of complications related to it. The mortality rate at VA has fallen in the last month, after reaching as high as 8.5% in June.

Among all Americans, though, the death rate is about 3.5%, according to the most recently available data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Though VA has seen hotspots for active cases and hospitalizations in Texas, Florida, Arizona, South Carolina and California, the VA hospitals with the highest number of deaths remain New York, New Jersey and other areas that saw early spikes during the first months of the pandemic. The number of

active COVID-19 cases across the department increased significantly in June and July, climbing more than 407% from a low point of 1,252 active cases June 3, to 6,356 July 20. On the evening of July 27, VA recorded 6,213 active cases. By the morning of July 28, that number was 5,633, and active cases were fluctuating daily, showing some signs of leveling, though those cases were still up nearly 350% since the beginning of June.

VA data shows that at least 14 medical centers have more than 100 active cases of the virus. Testing at the department has also steadily increased, reaching more than 456,000 tests nationwide as of 28 JUL. In May, Noel said the department was testing about 2,745 individuals per day. In June, VA was averaging closer to 4,356 tests per day. VA has released little demographic data about its COVID-19 cases, but department data shows that Black and Hispanic veterans make up nearly half of all VA's cases. As of mid-July, 34% of veterans who tested positive at VA were Black and 13% were Hispanic, according to department data provided to Connecting Vets last week. About 46% of positive tests were white and 7% were "some other race or unknown." The data was limited to veterans tested and treated at VA medical facilities nationwide.

Black veterans make up about 17% of all Veterans Health Administration users and Hispanic veterans comprise about 6%, compared to 72% white veterans and 5% "other." But not all veterans qualify for or receive care at VA. Black veterans represent about 12% of the overall veteran population and about 7% are Hispanic, compared to 77% white veterans and 4% other, according to the department. The mortality rate for veterans at VA infected with the fast-spreading virus "does not differ by race," Noel said previously, though she did not provide any data.

In May, VA officials warned that Black and Hispanic veterans could be at higher risk for COVID-19, though the department refused to share the data it based that warning on. Officials said the data was not "statistically significant" enough to share publicly at the time. VA still is not publicly releasing a breakdown of its COVID-19 cases by race. Its public-facing data shows overall cases, convalescent cases, active cases, deaths and cases by location, but does not provide any demographic data on those cases, recoveries or deaths. VA's data is similar to national trends that have shown Black and Hispanic veterans are disproportionately affected by the virus. [Source: ConnectingVets.com | Abbie Bennett Niki | July 28, 2020 ++]

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## **VA C&P Exams**

### **Resuming In some Locations**

The COVID-19 pandemic halted VA's practice of in-person C&P exams. Now, in select locations across the country, these disability compensation and pension exams have resumed. Naturally, Veterans have been asking not only [where](#) they are conducting exams, but what they are and who is completing them.

For some Veterans, the C&P exam is a critical component of the VA disability claim [process](#). Though not all Veterans need or receive an exam, it's one of the ways VA evaluates the disability or medical condition a Veteran claims was caused or aggravated by active service. And for those already receiving compensation, a C&P exam is how VA evaluates changes to that existing service-connected disability. Veterans are able to submit an electronic claim at [VA.gov](#) by attaching Acceptable Clinical Evidence ([existing medical documents](#)). Others can take advantage of a Tele-C&P exam. But for many claims, VA will need to conduct an in-person C&P exam using a VA contracted medical examination provider.

Veterans need not worry about selecting which is right for them: VA will determine the type of exam that it needs. VA will notify you of what is needed and where, if necessary, to report.

- **For disability compensation** -- Disability compensation exams help VA determine if your disability is related to your military service or if your existing service-connected disability rating should be updated due to changes in your condition.

- **For pension** -- For pension claims, which are for wartime Veterans with non-service-connected disabilities and their survivors, this exam documents the level of disability experienced by the Veteran, regardless of whether the condition is related to military service.

The examination is not a care appointment. The C&P examiner will only perform an examination necessary to evaluate disabilities claimed in your compensation or pension application. They will record the findings and provide them to a VA claims processor to complete the claim process. A C&P exam is not the same as a healthcare appointment. You won't receive treatment or medicine from the provider, but you will get your VA claim well on its way to completion. If VA determines that you require a C&P exam to complete a claim, don't worry, one of our medical examiners will reach out to you to get your in-person exam scheduled. Work with them. Even during COVID-19, we are scheduling and safely conducting exams all over the country through the assistance of contracted medical facilities established to ensure the safety of Veterans and providers. For more on the resumption of in-person C&P exams:

- Watch a video about your exam at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KgiFXnzUH0w&list=PLrrh23QvVVYhAJ6t3vr81YvDypkezZ2yI&index=2&t=0s>
- Read more about C&P exams and find answers to common questions at <https://www.va.gov/disability/va-claim-exam>.

[Source: Vantage Point | Brianna McFarland | July 29, 2020 ++]

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## **VA Fraud, Waste & Abuse**

**Reported 16 thru 31 JUL 2020**

**West Palm Beach, Fla.** -- On 6 JUL federal district judge Kenneth A. Marra committed a man who fired gunshots inside a West Palm Beach VA Medical Center to the custody of the U.S. Attorney General for 25 years of mental health care and treatment at a suitable medical facility. The commitment is a provisional sentence for sixty-year old defendant **Larry Ray Bon**, a former West Palm Beach resident. If during Bon's commitment, it is determined that he no longer needs treatment, Bon will reappear in federal court, where a judge will sentence him to a federal prison term of between 12.5 and 25 years. Lawyers for the U.S. and Bon jointly recommended this provisional sentence arrangement for the defendant.

According to court records, Bon brought the firearm and ammunition to the emergency room of the Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center in West Palm Beach, Florida. When he became frustrated with medical staff, Bon retrieved the firearm from his wheelchair, and fired several shots. He placed VA Medical Center employees in fear for their lives, including two employees who were near Bon. An emergency room doctor attempted to disarm Bon, who fired the gun again, hitting the doctor in the neck. Despite being injured, the doctor was still able to disarm Bon. VA Medical Center staff then subdued Bon. The doctor survived the gunshot wound. On March 13, 2020, Bon pleaded guilty to three counts of Assaulting, Resisting, or Impeding Federal Employees, and one count of Possession of a Firearm in a Federal Facility with Intent to Commit a Crime. Federal law allows for a provisional sentence that commits a defendant to the custody of the Attorney General for treatment where a judge "finds by a preponderance of the evidence that the defendant is presently suffering from a mental disease or defect and that he should, in lieu of being sentenced to imprisonment, be committed to a suitable facility..." 18 U.S.C. §4244 (d).

- "When U.S. military veterans walk through the doors of a VA medical clinic for healing, they should feel comfort and hope, not fear of violence," said Ariana Fajardo Orshan, U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of Florida. "We are committed to protecting our cherished veterans and the dedicated employees of the South Florida VA medical clinics who treat them."



- “As detailed in the plea agreement and subsequent sentence, Bon’s dangerous actions injured VA employees and risked the safety and well-being of veterans. VA OIG is committed to holding accountable anyone who commits an act of violence at a VA facility and ensuring that both veterans and employees have a safe environment to obtain quality healthcare,” said David Spilker, Special Agent in Charge, Veterans Affairs Office of Inspector General.

Related court documents and information may be found on the website of the District Court for the Southern District of Florida at [www.flsd.uscourts.gov](http://www.flsd.uscourts.gov) or at <http://pacer.flsd.uscourts.gov>. [Source: DoJ Southern Dist. of Fla. | U.S. Attorney’s Office | July 20, 2020 ++]

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**Chalfont, Penn.** -- United States Attorney William M. McSwain announced that **Richard Meleski**, 58, of Chalfont, PA, pleaded guilty to multiple charges, including healthcare fraud, mail fraud, stolen valor, and aiding and abetting straw purchases of firearms. In November 2019, Meleski was charged by Indictment for his scheme to defraud the government of hundreds of thousands of dollars in benefits. To perpetrate the scheme, Meleski faked serving in the U.S. military, specifically the Navy SEALs, and falsely represented that he had been a Prisoner of War, in order to secure healthcare benefits from the Veterans Administration (VA) worth over \$300,000. Due to his false representation as a POW, the defendant received healthcare from the VA in Priority Group 3, effectively receiving healthcare before other deserving military service members. In reality, Meleski never served a single day in the United States military.

Meleski also filed for monetary compensation from the VA for PTSD he supposedly suffered during an armed conflict in Beirut in which he rescued injured service members. In his application for disability benefits for PTSD, Meleski falsely represented that he had been awarded the Silver Star for heroic actions during his time as a Navy SEAL. Again, Meleski never served a single day in the United States military and of course was never awarded any service medals. Meleski also submitted another application to the VA for monetary compensation in which he included obituaries of actual Navy SEALs alongside whom he had supposedly served. In short, he traded on the actions of true heroes in an attempt to bolster his false application for monetary benefits.

The defendant also filed for disability benefits from The United States Social Security Administration (SSA) for injuries he claimed to have received during his time in the service. Meleski falsely testified under oath in connection with an SSA Disability proceeding. After being arrested for fraud, it was discovered that the defendant had also engaged in aiding and abetting the straw purchase of two separate firearms; he also pleaded guilty to this conduct. “Meleski faked a record as a decorated U.S. Navy SEAL in order to steal numerous forms of compensation,” said U.S. Attorney McSwain. “Everything about this case is profoundly offensive. Our veterans fought for the freedoms we hold dear, and we owe them a debt that we can never fully repay. But holding individuals like Meleski accountable for their crimes is one small way that we can honor our veterans’ service.” [Source: DoJ Eastern Dist. of Penn. | U.S. Attorney’s Office | July 22, 2020 ++]

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**Atlanta, Georgia** -- **William Dorsey, Jr.**, has been arraigned for embezzling over \$200,000 from his father’s beneficiary account funded by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. “We must be diligent in protecting our elderly citizens, especially our veterans,” said U.S. Attorney Byung J. “BJay” Pak. “We are focused on preventing and punishing the exploitation and abuse of our most vulnerable citizens.” “Fiduciaries assume a solemn duty to care for veterans who served their country through their military service and now are unable to care for themselves. The VA Office of Inspector General is dedicated to working with our law enforcement partners to ensure that any fiduciary who embezzles VA funds intended to provide necessary support to our nation’s disabled veterans is held responsible,” said David Spilker, Special Agent in Charge, VA Office of Inspector General.

On May 10, 2010, William Dorsey, Jr., signed a fiduciary agreement agreeing to manage the benefit payments provided by the VA to his father, William Dorsey Sr., a 67-year-old disabled Vietnam veteran diagnosed with Alzheimer’s disease and dementia. According to medical records from the secure medical center where he resides,



William Dorsey, Sr., is wheel-chair bound, cannot communicate, and requires total assistance with his daily activities. As part of the fiduciary agreement, Dorsey, Jr., agreed to spend the VA benefit funds only for his father's daily needs, to never commingle funds, to never withdraw cash from the account, and to keep accurate records and receipts. However, by the time he was removed as fiduciary seven years later in May 2017, banking records indicate all of these conditions had been violated, including the direct transfer of money from his father's account to his own personal account. According to a financial analysis conducted by the VA, over \$200,000 remains unaccounted for.

During this same time period, nursing staff reported that Dorsey, Sr., only needed approximately \$50-\$100 to cover expenses each month, and that William Dorsey, Jr., commonly provided items of inferior quality, such as used oversized clothing and half empty bottles of shampoo. According to one social worker supervisor, the attending nurses felt compelled on occasion to buy "basic necessities" for Dorsey, Sr., out of their own pocket. William Dorsey, Jr., 42, of Atlanta, Georgia, was arraigned before U.S. Magistrate Judge Alan J. Baverman. Members of the public are reminded that the indictment only contains charges. The defendants are presumed innocent of the charges and it will be the government's burden to prove the defendants' guilt beyond a reasonable doubt at trial. [Source: DoJ, N. Dist of Georgia | U.S. Attorney's Office | July 22, 2020 ++]

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**Oakland County, Mich.** – A woman was arraigned recently on multiple charges after she allegedly stole more than \$70,000 from an elderly veteran. **Margaret Risdon**, 60, of Bloomfield Hills, was arraigned 16 JUL in 48th District Court before Magistrate Andra Richardson on one count of embezzlement from a vulnerable adult between \$50,000 and \$100,000, a 15-year felony, and two counts of failing to file taxes, both five-year felonies. The case was referred to the Michigan Department of Attorney General by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Office of the Inspector General, which began its investigation after the victim raised concerns that someone was stealing from him.

Between Nov. 6, 2016 and July 20, 2017, Risdon allegedly wrote checks from the victim's bank account to herself and her business, Electronic Creations, totaling nearly \$56,800 and made ATM withdrawals totaling more than \$16,000. Risdon would then deposit the checks into her bank account and withdraw the money in cash. During the time of the alleged theft, the victim was unable to care for himself as he suffered from physical and mental ailments and resided in nursing homes and hospitals. Risdon did not have power of attorney for the victim, nor serve as his guardian or conservator. Risdon also did not file State of Michigan income tax returns to account for the roughly \$72,000 she received from the victim in 2016 and 2017.

Risdon was given a \$5,000 personal recognizance bond and is currently scheduled to appear in court for a probable cause conference at 10 a.m. July 30, followed by a preliminary hearing at 10 a.m. Aug. 6. More than 73,000 older adults in Michigan are victims of elder abuse. The Attorney General's Elder Abuse Task Force was established in March 2019 with dozens of organizations including law enforcement, state agencies, lawmakers and advocacy groups committed to being part of the task force. To learn more about the Elder Abuse Task Force and its initiatives, visit the Attorney General's [website](#). To file a report of elder abuse, call the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services Adult Protective Services at 855-444-3911. [Source: VA OIG | Press Release | July 28, 2020 ++]

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**PROGENITY, INC.** – HHS OIG, DCIS, and VA OIG announced 23 JUL a \$49 million settlement with PROGENITY, INC. ("PROGENITY"), a San Diego-based biotechnology company that provides molecular and diagnostic tests. The settlement resolves claims that PROGENITY fraudulently billed federal healthcare programs for prenatal tests and provided kickbacks to physicians to induce them to order PROGENITY tests for their patients. The Office's lawsuit filed in Manhattan federal court alleges that PROGENITY overbilled Medicaid and the VA by fraudulently using a billing code that misrepresented the tests provided. The lawsuit further alleges that PROGENITY provided illegal kickbacks in the form of excessive "draw fees" to physicians, meals and happy hours for physicians and their staff, and the improper reduction or waiver of patient coinsurance and deductible payments.

Under the settlement approved today PROGENITY will pay \$19,449,316 to the United States to resolve the kickback claims and the Medicaid and VA fraudulent billing claims, and also makes extensive admissions regarding the company’s conduct. PROGENITY will also pay \$13,150,684 to various states to resolve these claims. In addition, PROGENITY will pay \$16.4 million to resolve similar fraudulent billing claims related to TRICARE and the Federal Employees Health Benefits Program through a separate civil settlement with the Southern District of California “USAO SDCA”, and has entered into a Non-Prosecution Agreement with that office. Acting U.S. Attorney Audrey Strauss said: “Progenity received millions of dollars from federal healthcare programs through its fraudulent billing and kickback schemes. The company misrepresented the tests it performed, and tried to get doctors to order Progenity tests by paying them excessive fees and providing meals and happy hours for them and their staff. Our Office will continue to hold healthcare providers accountable when they engage in fraud and other illegal conduct.” [Source: DoJ, So. Dist. of New York | U.S. Attorney’s Office | July 23, 2020 ++]

[Source: [https://www.va.gov/oig/podcasts/transcripts/20200707-49\\_VA\\_OIG\\_May\\_2020\\_Highlights.pdf](https://www.va.gov/oig/podcasts/transcripts/20200707-49_VA_OIG_May_2020_Highlights.pdf) | July 2020 ++]

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## GI Bill Rudisill v. Wilkie

### Update 02: Ruling Won’t Come in Time for Fall Classes

Student veterans hoping for resolution in a court case which could open an extra year of GI Bill education benefits to hundreds of thousands of individuals won’t get any resolution before the start of the fall semester. But they may see some legal progress in time for the spring. The case — Rudisill v. Wilkie, pending before the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit — has gained the attention of numerous education and veterans advocacy groups in recent months due to its potential impact on veterans education benefits.

Last year, a lower appeals court ruled that the Department of Veterans Affairs’ practice of requiring veterans to give up their Montgomery GI Bill eligibility to receive Post-9/11 GI Bill payouts was improper. That means that veterans who use up their 36 months of Post-9/11 GI Bill education benefits should still have access to 12 months of Montgomery GI Bill benefits if they paid into the program while they were serving. Under existing federal statute, any government higher education payouts are capped at 48 months. Department of Veterans Affairs officials appealed that ruling earlier this year, and are scheduled to file additional motions early next week. After that, court officials are expected to schedule oral arguments in late August or September. That pushes any resolution of the case later into the fall, well after classes for the upcoming semester have already begun.

Attorneys for the plaintiff had pushed for a quicker timeline, but with no success. Hunton Andrews Kurth Associate Tim McHugh, an Army veteran and co-counsel on the case, said he is optimistic a final decision by the federal circuit court could come before the end of the year. In recent weeks, a pair of veterans advocates — National Veterans Legal Services Program and Veterans Education Success — filed briefs of support in the case, arguing the more generous interpretation of GI Bill payouts should be upheld based on past congressional intent and court precedents. “The court should turn to the pro-veteran canon and adopt the interpretation that furthers Congress’s purpose of providing more

generous education benefits to veterans,” they wrote. David DePippo, senior counsel for Dominion Energy Services and co-counsel on the case, called their support “a big deal” in furthering the argument. “These are two groups that are big players in this area,” he said. “They really have moved the ball in terms of veterans benefits in the past. So to have them take a look at this and sign on is significant.”

VA’s opposition stems from an argument that the use of both benefits programs amounts to “double-dipping” for veterans, and the potential extra costs of tens of billions of dollars in new education payouts in coming years. Under current rules, the Post-9/11 GI Bill provides 36 months of tuition assistance and living stipends to veterans (or their family members) who served at least three years on active-duty after Sept. 10, 2001. The total value of those payouts can top \$20,000 a year, depending on where individuals attend school. That benefit was finalized in 2010 and largely replaced the Montgomery GI Bill, which requires servicemembers to pay \$1,200 in their first year after enlisting to be eligible for payouts after separation from the service. Individuals who used that education program last semester received payouts of about \$2,000 a month.

The federal circuit court’s decision can be appealed to the Supreme Court, a process that could take several more years to complete. In the meantime, VA officials have declined to recognize the lower court ruling and start awarding the extra GI Bill benefits to eligible veterans. McHugh said his legal team believes that represents a serious violation of federal rules, but enforcement of the issue would likely require a secondary lawsuit to force the issue. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | July 27, 2020 ++]

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## **Atomic Service Medal**

### **Update 01: HASC Approves 2021 NDAA Amendment**



On this 75th anniversary of the first nuclear weapons test, the House Armed Services Committee is working to recognize veterans who witnessed the Trinity detonation and more than 225,000 who participated in later nuclear development and testing. Committee members approved an amendment earlier this month to the fiscal 2021 National Defense Authorization bill that would award retired service members and veterans exposed to radiation during military service -- largely those engaged in nuclear weapons development -- a service medal. Rep. Lori Trahan (D-MA) proposed the measure on behalf of colleagues, calling for former service members to receive the proposed "Atomic Veterans Service Medal."

Veterans who served between 1945 and 1992 and were exposed to radiation became eligible to receive a service certificate under the fiscal 2019 John S. McCain National Defense Authorization Act. But Rep. Jim McGovern (D-MA) and Rep. Tom Emmer (R-MN), who have worked for five years to include the measure in the defense bill, say a piece of paper is not enough. "It is vital to note the unique nature of this group of Atomic Veterans and the urgent need to recognize their service," McGovern and Emmer wrote in a letter to other members of Congress, urging them to support the measure earlier this year. "Tragically, upwards of 80% of American atomic veterans have already passed away, never having received this recognition. Time is running out."

Keith Kiefer is president of the National Association of Atomic Veterans. While he would not be eligible for the service medal since the Departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs do not recognize his exposure -- which occurred in 1978, cleaning up the contaminated Enewetak Atoll in the Marshall Islands -- he said it's important to the 5,000 members of his group and the families of thousands who have died from exposure-related cancers and other diseases. "It's become a very personal thing for the family members, a recognition that their loved ones' premature deaths were not in vain and have been recognized," Kiefer said.

The estimated number of U.S. troops subjected to atomic tests is at least 225,000, according to Emmer and McGovern. They often were placed close to detonation sites in New Mexico, Nevada and the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans with no protective clothing or gear, exposed to ionizing radiation in the wake of a blast. Former service members also were tasked with cleaning up contaminated sites, often without proper protection such as masks, hazmat suits and respirators. "My first job was to drain a crater" left by an atomic blast in Enewetak Atoll," retired Army Sgt. Bob Celestial told Military.com. "I was waist deep in the muck. Afterward, they told me, 'Just jump in the lagoon -- that's your decontamination.' We were young soldiers. We didn't know what we were doing."

Until 1996, when the Repeal of Nuclear Radiation and Secrecy Agreements Law was passed, atomic veterans were not allowed to disclose their participation in the U.S. secret nuclear testing and development programs -- not even to doctors who have treated their cancer, autoimmune disorders and organ failure. They also continue to fight for recognition with the VA. Although the department lists 21 types of cancer as presumed to be related to exposure to ionizing radiation, some veterans don't qualify because, like Kiefer and Celestial, the Defense Department has said the levels of exposure were minimal, or their service records don't show they were present during a blast.

"I was exposed to a 74-kiloton hydrogen bomb in 1957. I was 1.5 miles away with no protective gear. I now have cancer, and the VA has turned me down twice," said Jim Despard, who was released from the hospital Wednesday following treatment for his cancer. "They continue to deny that we were exposed to high levels of radiation, but if the dome is still contaminated, we were the ones that built that dome," Celestial said. He was referring to what is called the Runit Dome on the small island of Runit in the Marshall Islands. It contains 111,000 cubic yards of radioactive debris and was built and filled with dirt and debris from other locations in the atoll by more than 4,000 veterans.

"We deserve more than a medal," Celestial said. Veterans with one of the named conditions presumed to be related to exposure to ionizing radiation are eligible for disability compensation and VA health care. All others can apply on a case-by-case basis, which are decided based on a VA estimate of dosage, an assessment of the likelihood of exposure and medical evidence. They also may be eligible for compensation through the Justice Department's Radiation Exposure Compensation Program. But fewer than 2,000 veterans receive disability compensation for radiation exposure from the VA.

The nuclear age began at 5:29 a.m. on July 16, 1945, when scientists with the Manhattan Project and the U.S. Army detonated an atomic weapon containing 13 pounds of plutonium at the Trinity test site on the Alamogordo Bombing and Gunnery Range, now part of White Sands Missile Range, near Socorro, New Mexico. Three weeks later, the U.S. dropped a uranium-fueled device on the Japanese city of Hiroshima, and three days after that, a weapon similar to the Trinity bomb on Nagasaki. The U.S. conducted more than 1,000 nuclear tests afterward, until Sept. 23, 1992, when the last detonation took place at an underground test at the Nevada National Security Site, roughly 65 miles northwest of Las Vegas.

To mark the occasion of the Trinity blast, President Donald Trump issued a message Thursday calling the event a "remarkable feat of engineering and scientific ingenuity" that launched an "unprecedented era of global stability, scientific innovation and economic prosperity." He said he plans to revitalize and update the country's nuclear capabilities to preserve them and is investing in producing plutonium pits to support the stockpile. "Our nuclear weapons continue to underwrite American national security and are the backstop of our national defense," Trump said. "Having robust and diverse capabilities constrains global nuclear proliferation, deters adversaries, and assures allies and partners that rely upon American nuclear deterrence as a key component of their security."

Kiefer said his organization has been working since 1992 to get the Trinity test anniversary date officially designated as National Atomic Veterans Day. President Ronald Reagan in 1983 issued a proclamation honoring atomic veterans on that day, but the designation was not written in perpetuity. "We'll continue to push for recognition on this day, for designation of highways and memorials honoring our members and for compensation," Kiefer said. Bills currently in Congress that pertain to atomic veterans also include a bill sponsored by Sen. Tina Smith, D-Minnesota, that would designate the Enewetak Atoll cleanup crews officially as "atomic veterans," eligible for VA health care and disability compensation. The creation and distribution of the Atomic Veterans Service Medal has been estimated to cost \$4 million. [Source: Military.com | Patricia Kime | July 16, 2020 ++]

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## **Vet Toxic Exposure | Karshi-Khanabad**

### **Update 02: Sick K2 Vets Left Out of Senate NDAA Bill**

Post-9/11 veterans sickened by toxic chemicals and radiation at an Uzbek airbase (aka. K2) used for staging the war in Afghanistan are again absent from must-pass defense legislation, Senate aides told the Washington Examiner. "There was no comparable amendment offered to the Senate NDAA by any senators," a Senate Armed Services Committee aide told the Washington Examiner of the \$740.5 billion legislation. The House version of the National Defense Authorization Act included an amendment requiring the Department of Defense to study the effects of contaminants that were present at the airbase known as K2, where some 10,000 veterans served between 2001 and 2005. "A study will show what we already know: People are dead, dying, and chronically ill at rates several factors higher than similar populations," said K2 veteran and retired Army Staff Sgt. Mark Jackson, who has chronic thyroid and gastrointestinal problems. "It is a start."

The amendment was sponsored by Reps. Stephen Lynch, a Massachusetts Democrat, and Mark Green, a Tennessee Republican, himself a veteran of the contaminated Khanabad Air Base in Uzbekistan. "The House-passed version would require the Department of Defense to conduct an epidemiological study of health effects and exposures at K2," Lynch told the Washington Examiner. The Department of Veterans Affairs recently agreed to study the illnesses suffered by K2 veterans. The VA told the Washington Examiner that that study will take up to 18 months to yield initial findings. Neither study guarantees sick veterans the prescreenings they require. "In the years since it closed, K2 has been purposefully and successfully forgotten by the government who sent us there," said Jackson.

Earlier this month, Lynch and Green announced that the Department of Defense had finally conceded to a Subcommittee on National Security request and declassified studies of the contaminated air base. "Until a few weeks ago, we had no proof," said Jackson. "Now, we do, in the form of hundreds of pages of declassified contemporary environmental surveys, all of which confirm that K2 was poisonous, irradiated, and toxic." K2 veterans had hoped to achieve the classification of Uzbekistan as an Operation Enduring Freedom location, qualifying the veterans for automatic prescreening tests and presumptive status of ailments afforded to those who served in places such as Afghanistan and Djibouti, Africa.

Now that the NDAA has passed in both the House and the Senate, a conference committee will hash out the differences. "We will encourage the NDAA conferees to accept the current provisions in the House-passed version that would require the Department of Defense to conduct a study on the health effects of toxic exposures on K2 veterans," a House staffer told the Washington Examiner. "Because the study was included in the House-passed bill, that means it might be in the final version sent to the president. Both the House and Senate conferees must agree to it," the staffer added. Said Lynch: "Hopefully, we will find another way to get this done, but the clock is ticking for a lot of these sick veterans and their families." [Source: Washington Examiner | Abraham Mahshie | July 27, 2020 ++]

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## Boxer Rebellion Vets

John Mapes Adams



USMC 1st Marine Regiment Troops



John Mapes Adams



A Chinese Boxer circa 1900

Marine Corps Sgt. John Mapes Adams is one of the few recipients who earned a grateful nation's highest honor outside of a significant war period in U.S. history. Adams was born on Oct. 11, 1871, in Haverhill, Massachusetts, under a different name: George Lawrence Day. He attended high school at Phillips Exeter Academy, a selective boarding school. When he was 23, he joined the Marine Corps under his birth name but eventually switched to the alias John Mapes Adams. Adams was a seasoned Marine with Company F, 1st Marines Regiment, by the time his actions earned him the Medal of Honor at the Battle of Tientsin during China's Boxer Rebellion.

The Boxer Rebellion began in 1898 when a Chinese militia group known as the Boxers became discontent with the foreign powers that had been establishing spheres of influence throughout the country. The Boxers soon began an anti-foreign, anti-Christian uprising in northwest China, which spread to other parts of the country. The foreign influencers the Boxers wanted out included an alliance of the world's largest powers — the U.S., Austria-Hungary, France, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, Japan and Russia — which all had interests in China. In May 1900, the Boxers started burning railroad stations in the city of Peking — current-day Beijing — and threatening the alliance's religious representatives and mission groups, known as legations. These legations called their respective countries for help, and all eight responded by moving in Marines and others to guard the legations.

Tensions grew among all of the factions. By June 18, 1900, it was clear China would declare war. The country offered foreign powers 24 hours of safe passage as far as Tientsin — current-day Tianjin — about 2 hours southeast of Peking. The alliance's foreign ministers declined the offer. So, on 20 JUN, the Boxers and Chinese soldiers seized Peking. The U.S. Marine Corps' 1st Marine Regiment moved into China and tried to seize Tientsin, but they were initially driven back. On 23 JUN, the regiment was finally successful in entering the city, where they held a position until U.S. Army reinforcements were able to join them on 12 JUL. Troops from Great Britain, France, Germany, Russia and Japan joined with the U.S. forces to create an allied force.

The next day, this allied force launched an attack against Tientsin to get rid of the remaining Chinese and Boxer forces that were still inside the city's inner walls. Fighting took place most of the day with little to show for it. Finally, a Japanese night attack broke through the Chinese defenses, allowing the international force to enter the city's inner walls. During this engagement, Adams and three other Marines were cited for "meritorious conduct," which led to Adams earning the Medal of Honor. However, it's unclear exactly what those specific actions were. Online records don't elaborate.

Eventually, the allied forces made it to Peking, and the fighting came to an end. A formal peace treaty known as the Boxer Protocol was signed in September 1901. Thirty-three enlisted Marines earned the Medal of Honor for actions taken during the Boxer Rebellion. Marine Corps officers weren't eligible to earn it until 1913. Adams' received his medal on July 19, 1901, shortly before he turned 30. Adams lived for nearly two more decades. He died at age 49 on



Jan. 6, 1921, and was buried at Cypress Hills National Cemetery in Brooklyn, New York. [Source: DOD News | Katie Lange | July 20, 2020 ++]

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## Civil War Vets

### Richard Enderlin | Union Musician

Musicians played a significant role during the Civil War, cheering up the men in the camps and preparing them to go into battle. But they also took on additional duties, some of which could be dangerous, and they took their roles as soldiers seriously. As we commemorate the recent anniversary of the pivotal Civil War Battle of Gettysburg, we remember the 18-year old Army Musician Private Richard Enderlin, who transformed his role into that of an infantryman when a comrade needed help.



Enderlin was born in Baden, Germany, on Jan. 11, 1843, but he grew up in Chillicothe, Ohio. In November 1861, a few months after the Civil War began, he joined the Union Army as part of the 73rd Ohio Infantry, Company B. About a year and a half later, he found himself in the thick of the fight during the three-day Battle of Gettysburg. Enderlin had voluntarily joined the defense of Cemetery Ridge, thinking his unit was not directly engaged in battle. But it turned out that the ridge, which was roughly the center of the Union line, was a major focus of the Confederates who were trying to break through. Enderlin earned his Medal of Honor in the nighttime hours of July 2, 1863, when he rescued Pvt. George Nixon, the great-grandfather of a future president, Richard M. Nixon.

According to the National Civil War Museum, Nixon was seriously wounded and lay between Cemetery Ridge and the rebels' position. After hearing Nixon's cries of pain, Enderlin put down his instrument and picked up a rifle. According to his Medal of Honor citation, he "voluntarily and at his own imminent peril went into the enemy's lines at night." Despite the heavy volley of fire between the rebels and the Union, Enderlin dragged the injured man back to safety. For his extraordinary courage, Enderlin was promoted the following day to the rank of sergeant. Unfortunately, Nixon did not survive the wounds he suffered. He died several days later and is buried at the cemetery at Gettysburg, which is now a national landmark.

Enderlin continued on with his role as a musician until he was injured in battle in the spring of 1864. He was then transferred to the Veteran Reserve Corps until he was discharged when the war ended. The Medal of Honor was created during the Civil War, and more than 1,500 men who fought then earned the decoration. Enderlin was awarded the honor on Sept. 11, 1897. He went on to live a long life. He died on Feb. 11, 1930, and was buried in Grandview Cemetery in his Ohio hometown. Chillicothe also displays a memorial to Enderlin outside Yoctangee Park. [Source: DOD News | Katie Lange | July 6, 2020 ++]

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## Afghan Vets 15

### Ryan Pitts



Army Staff Sgt. Ryan Pitts was one of several men responsible for setting up a new post in a volatile region of Afghanistan in 2008. The operation turned into a disaster for U.S. forces, but Pitts' actions in guarding the post from insurgents earned him the Medal of Honor. Pitts was born on Oct. 1, 1985, and grew up on a farm in Nashua, New Hampshire. By his own admission, he was an uncoordinated child who wasn't good at sports and wasn't sure what he wanted to do after high school. So, instead of burdening his family with the cost of college, he decided to enlist in the Army's delayed entry program in January 2003 when he was just 17.

Pitts spent several years headquartered in Camp Ederle, Italy. He deployed twice to Afghanistan: for a year in 2005 and again for 15 months beginning in 2007 with the 2nd Battalion, 503rd Infantry, 173rd Airborne Brigade. It was during that second deployment that all hell broke loose in the Waygal Valley region of Kunar Province, where his unit, 2nd Platoon, Chosen Company, was responsible for security. In mid-July 2008, the company was involved in Operation Rock Move, the final mission of their deployment. Pitts' unit, a few Marine Corps mentors and some Afghan soldiers were supposed to reposition forces from Combat Outpost Bella to a new post nicknamed Vehicle Patrol Base Kahler. It was on the outskirts of tiny Wanat village, which initially welcomed the troops. The goal: disrupt militant trafficking in the valley and set the stage for effective regional economic and security improvements.

Early on 13 JUL, then-Sgt. Pitts and eight other paratroopers were at the new post providing perimeter security at Observation Post Topside, an area of higher ground that could watch over the village and serve as the post's eyes and ears. In the predawn darkness, they noticed potential insurgents not too far away. As a fire support specialist, Pitts was about to request indirect fire support from VPB Kahler when, suddenly, more than 200 insurgents started firing rocket-propelled grenades, machine guns and small arms. They had infiltrated the town and set up firing positions and weapons caches all around the main base. The 48 U.S. service members at the post were outnumbered. Some of the insurgents, who were hiding in a brush-filled creek bed just to the north of where Pitts and his crew were, began lobbing grenades at them in an effort to isolate Topside from the main base. All of the men on Topside were killed or injured, including Pitts, who suffered serious shrapnel wounds. Another soldier had to help him staunch the bleeding from a leg wound with a tourniquet.

Pitts had lost a lot of blood and couldn't stand, but he knew they couldn't give up Topside to the insurgents. He took control and fired back as the enemy moved closer. Pulling pins in grenades, he would wait until the last second to throw the explosives so they would detonate immediately and couldn't be tossed back. He also continued to fire a machine gun until two soldiers from the main base down the hill came to his aid. Pitts traded them his machine gun for an M4 with a mounted grenade launcher and continued his counterassault. But soon, he realized he was all alone on Topside — everyone else had died or been forced to move off the hill.

Pitts crawled to Topside's northern radio position and described what was happening to commanders. The insurgents were just on the other side of a sandbag wall from him — so close that the men on the other end of the line could hear their voices. But Pitts kept firing grenades and whispering information to the command post, which they could use to help him with indirect fire support. Four more men tried to come to Pitts' rescue, but all were wounded and one died. Soon after that, U.S. forces sent in air strikes, turning the tide of the battle. The close-air support knocked out the insurgents assaulting Topside long enough for more soldiers to get there and secure it. Eventually, other reinforcements made it to the town and began clearing enemy positions. Pitts and the other wounded men were flown out as the remaining troops continued fighting for several more hours until Topside and VPB Kahler were once again secure.

Pitts' courage and commitment kept the insurgents from overrunning the observation post, which would have given them a vantage point to inflict major damage on the main base and capture any soldiers within it. Unfortunately, his unit paid a heavy price. Nine soldiers died during the battle: Spc. Sergio Abad, Cpl. Jonathan Ayers, Cpl. Jason Bogar, 1st Lt. Jonathan Brostrom, Sgt. Israel Garcia, Cpl. Jason Hovater, Cpl. Matthew Phillips, Cpl. Pruitt Rainey, and Cpl. Gunnar Zwilling. After the fight, it was clear to mission leaders that the villagers in Wanat, who had initially welcomed them, had betrayed their trust. Within a few days, Chosen Company moved out.

Pitts left the Army in 2009 and got his bachelor's degree from the University of New Hampshire at Manchester. He moved back to his hometown, where he works in business development and lives with his wife and son. On July 24, 2014, Pitts received the Medal of Honor from President Barack Obama during a White House ceremony. He is one of 13 living recipients to have fought in Afghanistan. "Against that onslaught, one American held the line," Obama said during the ceremony, noting that Pitts was "just 22-years old, nearly surrounded, bloodied but unbowed." "Valor was everywhere that day," Pitts told reporters after the ceremony. "And the real heroes are the nine men who made the ultimate sacrifice so the rest of us could return home. It is their names, not mine, that I want people to know." Since earning the Medal of Honor, Pitts has rung the closing bell at the New York Stock Exchange, returned to Italy to visit paratroopers in his former unit and he's spoken at length to various groups about his experiences in Afghanistan. [Source: DOD News | Katie Lange | July 13, 2020 ++]

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## WWII Vets 218

**Adolfo Celaya | USS Indianapolis Survivor**



The 1975 American film thriller *Jaws* led to many viewers fearing the ocean. In the film, a giant man-eating great white shark attacks beachgoers at a New England summer resort town. It's up to a local sheriff, a marine biologist and a fisherman to hunt the beast down. One of the more unsettling scenes from the movie was fisherman Quint's revelation that he survived the sinking of the USS Indianapolis. He and his fellow sailors ended up in the water, becoming prey for sharks as they drifted alone at sea for days until rescued. Quint described the frightening experience of a shark looking at you with its black, lifeless eyes, hearing the screams of other men and watching the ocean turn blood-red.

This story represented the real-life tragedy of those serving aboard the Navy cruiser during World War II. On July 30, 1945, two Japanese torpedoes struck the USS Indianapolis just days after delivering components of the atomic bomb later dropped on Hiroshima. Within 12 minutes, the flagship of the U.S. Navy's 5th fleet sunk. Of the 1,196 people on board, around 900 made it into the water alive. After five days at sea, only 317 survived. Adolfo "Harpo" Celaya is one of the few remaining survivors of the USS Indianapolis. The Smithsonian has called this event one of the worst shark attacks in human history.

Celaya enlisted in the Navy in 1944 when he was 17 and fought in both the Battle of Okinawa and the Battle of Iwo Jima. He reached the rank of fireman second class while recovering from the attack, and returned to high school after his discharge at 18. He spent his days drinking at local bars to cope with his trauma. Things took a turn for the better when a Florence High School basketball coach encouraged him to join the basketball team while getting paid through the GI Bill. Despite being considered the best basketball player in town, the principal demanded he not be put in the starting lineup because of his Mexican heritage. But the following year, he led the Florence Gophers to the state playoffs, even as signs in the stands at his games read "No Mexicans" or "No dogs allowed."

Sometimes he would speak Spanish during his games, such as calling out "Tire la pa' ca!" when he wanted his English speaking teammates to pass the ball to him. At one point, the coach of an opposing team accused the Florence team of cheating, claiming that his use of Spanish gave them an unfair advantage. But the Purple Heart recipient recalled struggling with PTSD during his games. He would sometimes envision the opposing team as his attackers out at sea. "Well, I had five guys from Douglas running after me, and it would look like sharks coming after me," he said.

Last laugh

From surviving war to winning a high school basketball state championship, the 92-year-old can smile about it all now. "As a 17-year-old kid, you dream about those things, but I never thought it would happen." Thank you for your service! [Source: Vantage Point | Rachel Heimann | July 16, 2020 ++]

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## Cold War Vets

Tu Lam | Vietnam Refugee



Army Veteran, Tu Lam was born in Saigon, Vietnam, in December 1974, shortly before the city came under the control of communist North Vietnam. Lam's grandfather attempted to flee Vietnam and take his family on a boat to America but had to be rescued by a Russian supply boat. After witnessing many of their relatives' murders, Lam's mother brought the family to America in 1979. They were part of the three million refugees that left Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos to escape communist rule following the Vietnam War.

Growing up in Fayetteville, North Carolina, Lam wanted to become a Green Beret. His uncle and stepfather were Green Berets. The day after Lam graduated high school in June 1993, he went to basic training in Fort Benning, Georgia.



Then, in November 1993, he completed Airborne and Ranger School and joined the F Company Long Range Reconnaissance Company. Lam was a member of their amphibious reconnaissance team, gathering intelligence that would lead to direct-action operations. During this assignment, he conducted operations across Central and South America. Then, in February 1997, he was selected to attend the Special Forces Qualification Course. Lam graduated from the Q-Course in 1998, becoming a Green Beret shortly before his grandfather passed away. Lam's first assignment was with the 1st Special Forces Group in Okinawa, Japan. His first mission was to remove land mines that had been dropped by American forces in Laos and Vietnam during the Vietnam War. The goal of this mission was to make it possible for the children living in Laos to be able to play safely.

In 2016, Lam retired from the United States Army as a master sergeant after 22 years of service. Over the course of his career, Lam deployed to over 20 countries, including war zones and counter-terrorism operations in the Philippines, Iraq and Libya. Following his retirement, Lam provided tactical hand-to-hand and weapons training to major police departments, military units and specialty teams. Lam also inspired the character Ronin for the video game "Call of Duty: Modern Warfare." The creator of the game, Infinity Ward, reached out to him because of his expertise in martial arts, so they could capture his hand-to-hand and weapons combat movements. He used his expertise to contribute his "finishing moves" and commando-style tactics to his character in the game. In addition to his movements, his face and body were scanned to complete the character creation. Thank you for your service! [Source: Vantage Point | John Byrne | July 21, 2020 ++]

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## **Vet Home Covid-19 Impact**

### **Lawmakers Call for Accountability in State Home Deaths**

At least 76 veterans have died and dozens have fallen ill at the Holyoke Soldiers' Home in Massachusetts -- a third of all residents there. Holyoke is the site of one of the deadliest COVID-19 outbreaks for veterans in the country. Now, after what appeared to be weeks with no new cases, the home confirmed a "renewed" case of the virus in a veteran who had previously appeared to recover. The home is limiting visitors again, according to an email sent to family members and residents of the home, reviewed by Connecting Vets. The email was sent by the home's new leadership, interim Superintendent Val Liptak, head of a state team sent to handle the crisis at the home in March, including National Guard troops. The previous superintendent, Bennett Walsh, was removed last month.

During a House Veterans Affairs subpanel hearing 22 JUL, lawmakers wanted to know who was responsible for the failings that led to the deaths and rapid spread of the virus among residents and staff at homes like Holyoke across the country. At a New Jersey home, 82 veterans died. At a Pennsylvania home, 42. Lawmakers called for accountability and change to prevent such tragedies from happening again. But they received few answers or solutions during the hearing. It's difficult to tell how many veterans have died at the state homes. Not all are required to report virus cases or deaths to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention or the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Veterans eligible for VA-funded assisted living care are split up among several types of facilities. Some receive care at 157 state veterans' homes. Others, at VA-managed community living centers (CLCs). Still others receive care at private facilities paid for by VA. VA provides federal grants to the veterans' homes, but they are owned and managed by the states under federal law. VA officials told lawmakers VA "does not have authority over the management or control of a (state veterans' home)."

VA is responsible for ensuring the homes meet department standards through annual surveys, audits, inspections and other checks. In some cases, VA is the only agency inspecting the facilities. But a sharp disparity emerged over the course of the pandemic so far. In a recent interview, VA Secretary Robert Wilkie said just two of the about 7,500 veterans in CLCs nationwide were battling the virus. Rep. Richard Neal (D-MA) said Congress approved \$5 billion in emergency COVID-19 funding for state homes nationwide in the Cares Act passed earlier in the pandemic. Rep. Julia Brownley (D-CA) said CLCs were better staffed, had better access to testing and personal protective equipment

compared to state veterans' homes. "There should not be two standards for care for veterans residing in CLCs and state veterans' homes," Brownley said, adding that she wanted to know the actions VA had taken to help

"It's ultimately the states, not the VA who is responsible for the day-to-day operations of these facilities," said Rep. Neal Dunn (R-FL). "The VA undoubtedly has a special relationship with these facilities ... Now is a good time for us to ... reevaluate that relationship." Brownley said VA could formalize a plan for pandemic response, or in its Fourth Mission, to assist state veterans' homes to prevent future tragedies. Committee Chairman Rep. Mark Takano (D-CA) said he wondered if better VA oversight of the state homes could have mitigated the damage done by the pandemic there, describing systemic issues at some homes such as staffing issues and lack of resources.

The Government Accountability Office provided VA multiple recommendations to VA previously on oversight for the state homes. "I have to wonder how many lives could've been saved ... if there had been stronger, more consistent oversight on the part of VA," he said. VA officials said the department provided support for the state homes during the pandemic, including personal protective equipment such as masks, training, deploying 430 staff to support the homes and admitting more than 500 residents of the home into VA for care.

### **Testing and vaccines**

Rep. Phil Roe (R-TN) and Rep. Conor Lamb (D-PA) quizzed VA on its testing capabilities, including how it could help at the state-run veterans' homes. VA officials provided few, if any, answers, repeating a trend throughout the hearing of telling lawmakers they would provide answers to their offices later. When asked why, after five months of the pandemic, and nearly \$20 billion in COVID-19 emergency funding from Congress, VA still cannot provide testing to all veterans or staff who want or need it, VA officials said the answer was complicated and they would get back to lawmakers about it, offering no public answer. State veterans' home representatives said there is currently not point-of-contact testing at the homes, which can help determine if staff are infected before they come into the facility, preventing further spread.

VA officials told lawmakers VA does not have the resources to test in the veterans' homes and is not providing daily testing for its own employees. "It's a large healthcare system," said Teresa Boyd, Assistant Undersecretary for Health for Clinical Services at the Veterans Health Administration. "We do routine testing of high-risk areas." When Rep. Chrissy Houlahan (D-PA) asked VA officials for "a commitment" to not administer a COVID-19 vaccine to veterans until it is fully approved by the FDA, Boyd said she would take the comment back to VA researchers, but would not publicly commit to holding off until the vaccine gets full FDA approval. [Source: ConnectingVets.com | Abbie Bennett | July 29, 2020 ++]

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## **Military Retirees & Veterans Events Schedule**

**As of 31 JUL 2020**

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\vetans related websites and resources.

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

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



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](mailto:Milton.Bell126@gmail.com) [Source: Retiree\Veterans Events Schedule Manager | Milton Bell | July 31, 2020 ++]

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## **Vet Hiring Fairs**

**Scheduled As of 31 JUL 2020**



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. To participate, sign up for the workshop in addition to registering (if indicated) for the hiring fairs which are shown on the Hiring Our Heroes website <https://www.hiringourheroes.org> for the next month. For details of each you should click on the city next to the date. Listings of upcoming Vet Job Fairs nationwide providing location, times, events, and registration info if required can be found at the following websites. Note that some of the scheduled events for the next 2 to 6 weeks have been postponed and are awaiting reschedule dates due to the current COVID-19 outbreak. 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>

### **First Civilian Job**

Forty-one percent of veterans surveyed indicated they left their first post-military job within one year. Another 31% indicated said they left their first civilian job to make ends meet and never intended to stay. Another 30% left as the result of finding a better job, while 19% left because the job did not align with their expectations. Only 12% left because the position was terminated or they were laid off. The reasons for staying at a job depend greatly on financial and long-term opportunities in the company. Sixty-five percent of veterans say they will stay at a company for better pay, while 55% stay for a clear path of career growth. Other activities, like veteran resource groups and volunteer activities, seem to have less impact on whether veterans remain or leave their jobs.

[Source: Recruit Military, USCC, and American Legion | July 31, 2020 ++]

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## Veteran State Benefits

### Florida 2020

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

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

[Source: <https://www.military.com/benefits/veteran-state-benefits/florida-state-veterans-benefits.html> | July 2020 ++]

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## Vet State Benefits

### Most Popular by State in 2020



U.S. states offer Veterans a wide range of benefits. State representatives provided VA the most popular benefit for Veterans, part of a five-part series. Below is a list of the benefits in alphabetical order by state. For VA benefits, people can download and print the VA Welcome Kit at <https://www.va.gov/welcome-kit>. People can provide general feedback and suggestions on ways VA can improve the Welcome Kit via email at [vawelcomekit@va.gov](mailto:vawelcomekit@va.gov). A YouTube video on the welcome kit is at <https://youtu.be/DZvITWcWutE>.

**Alabama** -- “Alabama’s beautiful State Veterans Homes are our most popular Veteran benefit because we provide more than just skilled care to our heroes, we provide a home filled with love, honor, and compassion. With amazing support from our communities, we are able to provide activities and outings which keep our residents active and engaged and improve their quality of life. We currently have four State Veterans Homes all with waiting lists and are planning the construction of our fifth State Veterans Home.” – Kim Justice, executive director, State Veterans Homes. Veterans can learn more about the program at <https://va.alabama.gov/vets-home-program/>.

**Alaska** -- “The most popular state benefit is the Alaska Property Tax Exemption. This exemption provides a tax break on the first \$150,000 of assessed value of the home for Veterans with a 50% or greater disability rating either by the military or the VA.” – Verdie Bowen Sr., director, Office of Veterans Affairs. Veterans can learn more about this program at (URL) <http://veterans.alaska.gov/RealEstate>

**Arizona** -- “One of Arizona’s most popular state benefits are special license plates that recognize and honor military Veterans. Most popular are the Veteran, Women Veteran, and Freedom Special Plates. Each plate requires a \$25.00 initial application fee and \$25.00 renewal fee. Of the \$25.00 fee, \$17.00 is deposited into the Arizona Department of Veterans’ Services Veteran Donation Fund. Pursuant to Arizona Revised Statutes § 41-608, the Veteran Donation Fund is used to provide grants to nonprofit organizations for the benefit of Veterans in Arizona.” – Wanda Wright, director. Veterans can learn more about Special License Plates at <https://azdot.gov/motor-vehicles/vehicle-services/plates-and-placards/plate-selections-gallery> and the Veteran Donation Fund at <https://dvs.az.gov/donation-fund>.

**Arkansas** -- “One of Arkansas’ newest benefits for Veterans is the state tax exemption on military retirement pay.” – Gina Chandler, assistant director, Veterans Services. More information about that benefit is at <http://www.veterans.arkansas.gov/benefits/state-benefits>.

**California** -- “California’s most popular benefit is our home loan program. Using Qualified Veterans Mortgage Bonds, California provides flexible financing for Veterans purchasing homes in the state of California. The servicing of the loans remains with the department for the life of the loan, and this popular benefit includes exceptional fire, hazard, earthquake, and flood insurance.” – Theresa Gunn, deputy secretary, CalVet Home Loans. California Veterans can learn more about this program at <https://www.calvet.ca.gov/calvet-programs/home-loans>.

**Colorado** -- “The tax exemption on homes is the most popular but limited to 100% permanent and totally disabled Veterans. Given that, the most popular benefit that most Veterans can receive is Disabled Veteran license plates. The DV plates, which waive license tax on one vehicle, pertains to Veterans at 50% or more service connected and permanent and totally disabled Veterans.” – Richard J. Tremaine, director, Division of Veterans Affairs. Veterans can learn more at [www.Colorado.Gov/Vets](http://www.Colorado.Gov/Vets).

**Connecticut** -- “Connecticut’s most popular state benefit is the Veteran designation with American Flag on the State Driver’s License and on non-license ID Cards, which is used by community based organizations, agencies and retailers to verify Veteran status for various local and state programs, services and discounts. To receive Veteran’s flag on an existing Connecticut license or identity card, the Veteran must submit documentation (DD-214 or pre 1950 WG AGO Discharge certificate) of qualifying active federal service, not including initial entry training; or Entitled to retirement pay under 10 USC Chapter 1223, as amended from time to time, or, but for age, would be entitled. The characterization of Honorable Discharge, General under Honorable Conditions, or Other Than Honorable (OTH) if deemed eligible is pursuant to Connecticut’s OTH benefits law.” – Department of Veterans Affairs Commissioner Thomas J. Saadi. Veterans can learn more about this benefit at <https://portal.ct.gov/DVA/Pages/Apply-for-Veterans-Flag-on-CT-Driver-License-or-ID-Card>.

**Delaware** -- “The most popular state benefit are the various Veterans license plates.” – Larence Kirby, executive director, Office of Veterans Services. Special license plates are available through the Department of Motor Vehicles for: Former Prisoners Of War, Formerly Missing-In-Action, Purple Heart Recipients, Medals of Valor Recipients, Disabled Veterans, Delaware National Guard & Reserve Members, Retired Military, Korean War Veterans, Vietnam War Veterans, Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF), Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), and Gold Star Lapel Button.. To learn more about Delaware’s services for Veterans, visit <https://vets.delaware.gov/>.

**Florida** -- “Eligible resident Veterans with a VA certified service-connected disability of 10% or greater shall be entitled to a \$5,000 deduction on the assessment of their home for tax exemption purposes. Real estate owned and used as a homestead by an honorably discharged Veteran with a service-connected, permanent and total disability is exempt from taxation. Any partially disabled Veteran who is age 65 or older, any portion of whose disability was combat-related, and who was honorably discharged, may be eligible for a discount from the amount of ad valorem tax on the homestead commensurate with the percentage of the Veteran’s permanent service-connected disability. A growing economy, mild winters and the lack of a state income tax attract many Veterans and their families to Florida. To keep them here, we offer unique benefits such as in-state tuition rates for Veterans and their families using the Post-9/11 GI Bill, several layers of property tax exemptions, expanded Veterans’ preference, and extensive benefits, licensure and fee waivers for many activities and occupations.” – James S. “Hammer” Hartsell, deputy executive director, Florida Department of Veterans’ Affairs. Veterans can learn more by visiting [www.FloridaVets.org](http://www.FloridaVets.org).

**Georgia** -- “One of the most popular state benefits in Georgia is free license plates for Veterans. License plates are available in a special Veteran themed design, with options available to highlight a Veteran’s branch of service, their era of service, or a special military decoration they received during their service. License plates are also available for disabled Veterans at no charge.” – Mike Roby, Georgia’s commissioner of Veterans Service. Veterans can learn more about the program at <https://veterans.georgia.gov/license-plates>. “Another popular state benefits in Georgia is a free driver’s license for Veterans or an honorary license for their spouse. The license features an American flag and a Veteran designation in the corner. The license is free for Veterans who meet a residency and service requirement but is available for a small fee for Veterans who do not meet the qualifications. License plates are also available for disabled Veterans at no charge.” – Mike Roby, Georgia’s commissioner of Veterans Service. Veterans can learn more about the program at <https://veterans.georgia.gov/driving-licenses-and-personal-id-cards>.

**Hawaii** -- “Hawaii’s Most popular state benefit is the Totally Disabled Veterans Real Property Tax Exemption. Each island has their own tax exemption benefit in place.” – Ronald Han, Director State Office of Veterans’ Services. Veterans can learn more about the exemption at <http://dod.hawaii.gov/ovs/benefits-and-services/>.

**Idaho** -- “The most popular benefit are the reduced hunting & fishing license and tag fees available. Idaho provides resident disabled Veterans with a service-connected disability rating of 40% or greater \$5.75 combination hunting and fishing licenses and reduced tag fees. Nonresident disabled Veterans can obtain hunting licenses for \$31.75 and reduced tag fees. This provides significant cost savings for Veteran hunters and fishers.” – Kevin Wallior, Idaho Division of Veterans Services management assistant. Veterans can learn more about the program at <https://idfg.idaho.gov/licenses/dav-programs>.

**Illinois** -- “Illinois’ newest benefit is the Veteran designation for Illinois state driver’s licenses. This has quickly become our most popular benefit in terms of the number of Veterans who have obtained it. Our most popular monetary benefit is the Illinois Veterans Grant/Illinois National Guard Grant.” – Linda Chapa LaVia, director of the Illinois Department of Veterans’ Affairs. Illinois Veterans and their families can learn more about these programs at <https://www2.illinois.gov/veterans/Pages/default.aspx>.

**Indiana** -- “Indiana has tuition and fee exemption for children of disabled Veterans, children of Purple Heart recipients, and children of POWs. Remission of tuition and fees for children of disabled Veterans (at least 0% service-connected) who served during a period of

war or participated in equally hazardous duty, or the children of Purple Heart recipients, or the children of prisoners of war. This may be used at approved state-sponsored universities for up to 124 credits. – Joseph J. DeVito, outreach director, Indiana Department of Veterans Affairs. Indiana Veterans can learn more about all of the benefits offered at [www.in.gov/dva](http://www.in.gov/dva).

**Iowa --** “Our Homeownership Assistance Program that provides \$5,000 for first time Veteran homebuyers, our Veterans License Plates – which contributes to our License Plate Fund, and our Lifetime Hunting and Fishing License programs are all among our most popular programs.” – Karl J. Lettow, public information. Details on these are at <https://va.iowa.gov/benefits>.

**Kansas --** “Kansas offers a wide variety of hunting and fishing opportunities because of an abundance of wildlife and numerous water resources.” – Kansas Commission on Veterans Affairs Director Gregg Burden. Veterans in Kansas may be eligible for hunting and fishing fee discounts and should visit Kansas Wildlife and Parks at [www.ksoutdoors.com](http://www.ksoutdoors.com) for more information.

**Kentucky --** “Kentucky waives tuition at all state colleges and universities for dependents of certain Veterans, including those who died on active duty, died as a direct result of a service-connected disability, and those who are 100 percent service-connected disabled or receiving a non-service connected pension. This benefit is so popular that people move to Kentucky specifically to take advantage of this benefit.” – Sophi Thompson, Tuition Waiver Program coordinator. Kentucky Veterans can find out more about [this benefit here](#).

**Louisiana --** “Our most popular benefit is our structure in that Louisiana Department of Veterans Affairs has a close working relationship with all 64 of our parishes. We have 74 parish service offices across the state that are accessible to all of our Veterans and their families. Our offices are staffed by highly-trained, federally-accredited Veterans assistance counselors that are employees of the State of Louisiana. As a result of our unique structure, we are able to provide the best opportunity to take advantage of the plethora of available benefits.” – Joey Strickland, Secretary, Louisiana Department of Veterans Affairs. For more information on the parish service offices, visit [www.vetaffairs.la.gov/benefits](http://www.vetaffairs.la.gov/benefits).

**Maine --** “Maine’s most popular benefit that our Veterans take advantage of is the Maine Resident Lifetime Veteran State Park and Museum Pass. Any Veteran who resides in the State of Maine, that received an honorable discharge from military service is eligible to receive a pass. The pass gives the Veteran free admission to State Parks across the state as well as the Maine State Museum.” – David Richmond, director, Maine Bureau of Veterans’ Services. For more information, visit <https://www.maine.gov/veterans/benefits/recreational-licenses/lifetime-park-pass.html>.

**Maryland --** “Maryland provides a number of state benefits to Veterans and their dependents. Based on inquiries received by the Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs, the most popular state benefit is the property tax exemption for Veterans who are rated at 100% disabled. The property tax exemption allows this unique population of Veterans to be fully exempt from property taxes on their primary dwelling.” – George Owings, secretary of the Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs. Veterans can learn more about the exemption and how to apply at <https://veterans.maryland.gov/maryland-tax-benefits/>.

**Massachusetts --** For Massachusetts information, visit <https://www.mass.gov/orgs/massachusetts-department-of-veterans-services>.

**Michigan --** “Our most popular state benefit for emergent needs is the Michigan Veterans Trust Fund (MVTF). The MVTF provides emergency grants to help combat-era Veterans and their families weather unforeseen, temporary financial emergencies. Emergency grants cover expenses such as utility bills, home repairs, transportation and mortgage assistance.” – Lindell Holm, Michigan Veterans Affairs Agency/MVTF executive secretary. For more information and to apply, visit <https://www.michiganveterans.com/mvaaEmergencyAssistanceForm> or call 1-800-MICH-VET.

**Minnesota --** “Our most popular service is the VA Claims representation provided by our staff and our largest program financially is the State Soldiers Assistance Program.” – Larry Herke, commissioner of the Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs. To learn more, visit <https://mn.gov/mdva/resources/healthdisability/claims.jsp>.

**Mississippi --** “Mississippi’s most popular state benefit for totally disabled Veterans is the homestead exemption. If a Veteran has been honorably discharged with total disability, he or she is exempt from all Ad Valorem taxes on the assessed value of homestead property. Another popular benefit is free access to all State Parks and Recreational Facilities. All Veterans are eligible for this perk.” – Stacey Pickering, executive director of Mississippi Veterans Affairs. For more information on Mississippi Veterans Affairs, visit [www.msva.ms.gov](http://www.msva.ms.gov).

**Missouri --** “The Missouri State Veterans Services Program has 44 accredited service officers offering assistance to Veterans, widow/widower of a Veteran, Veterans child or a parent who has lost a son or daughter in military service. Service officers provide counseling and assistance when you have questions about compensation, pensions, education benefits, life insurance, medical benefits, state benefits and burial benefits. They are networked within the supported communities. If federal and state benefits are not enough, our VSO’s know local community agencies who might provide assistance.” – Ryon Richmond, acting executive director, Missouri Veterans Commission. Veterans can learn more about the program at <https://mvc.dps.mo.gov/service/>.

**Montana --** “Montana’s most popular state benefit is the Veteran Designation on the drivers’ licenses. An MOU between Montana Veteran’s Affairs Division and the Department of Motor Vehicles allows us to verify Veteran status in order to have the Veteran designation on their drivers’ licenses for a fee of \$10.” – Kelly Ackerman, administrator, Montana Veterans Affairs Division. For more information, visit [doj.mt.gov/driving/license-plates](http://doj.mt.gov/driving/license-plates).

**Nebraska --** “The Nebraska Veterans Registry is the most popular benefit based on the fact that out of the 125,000 Veterans in Nebraska 85,000 plus are registered with the State of Nebraska. This allows for easy application for benefits provided such as military license plates and special discounts sometimes offered at establishments throughout the state. This also eases outreach to Veterans by the Nebraska Department of Veterans

Affairs.” – John Hilgert, Nebraska Department of Veterans Affairs director. Veterans can apply to the registry at [https://www.nebraska.gov/va\\_registry/index.cgi](https://www.nebraska.gov/va_registry/index.cgi).

**Nevada** -- “Nevada’s most popular state benefit is a state income tax exemption for all! Because Nevada does not have a state income tax, all residents including Veterans are exempt.” – Julie Dudley, communications director. Veterans can learn more about the State of Nevada at <http://nv.gov/> and the Nevada Department of Veterans Services at <https://veterans.nv.gov/>.

**New Hampshire** -- “In my opinion, New Hampshire’s most popular state Veteran benefit is most likely it’s property tax credits. Depending on what city or town you live in, New Hampshire offers qualified Veterans a tax credit for up to \$750 annually and if you are a 100% permanently and totally disabled Veteran (as determined by the Veterans Benefit Administration), you will be eligible for up to \$4,000 in property tax relief.” – William Gaudreau, director, NH Division of Veteran Services. Veterans can learn more about benefits at [www.nh.gov/nhveterans](http://www.nh.gov/nhveterans).

**New Jersey** -- “Veterans are eligible for a \$6,000 exemption on your income tax return if you are a military Veteran who was honorably discharged or released under honorable circumstances from active duty in the Armed Forces of the United States on or any time before the last day of the tax year. Your spouse (or civil union partner) is also eligible for an exemption if he/she is a Veteran who was honorably discharged or released under honorable circumstances and you are filing a joint return. This exemption is in addition to any other exemptions you are entitled to claim and is available on both the resident and nonresident returns.” – Patricia A. Richter, acting director, Division of Veterans Services. More information is at <http://www.state.nj.us/treasury/taxation/military/vetexemption.shtml>

**New Mexico** -- The most popular state benefit available to New Mexico’s 154,000 Veterans, according to the New Mexico Department of Veterans Services, is the Veterans State Property Tax Exemption. This is an exemption of up to a \$4,000 reduction in the taxable value of a Veteran’s primary residence for county property taxation purposes. This benefit is also available to non-remarried surviving spouses of Veterans who would have otherwise qualified for this benefit. Any Veteran who has been rated 100% service-connected disabled (permanent & total) by VA and is a legal resident of New Mexico qualifies for a complete property tax waiver for their primary residence.. According to DVS, in 2019 the agency processed 6,480 exemption and waiver applications. Veterans can learn more about the program at <http://www.nmdvs.org/state-benefits/>.

**New York** -- “New York’s most popular state benefit is the FreshConnect Checks program. This program in collaboration with Agriculture and Markets, allows Veterans and their families to access \$20 in fresh food vouchers to be used at farmers markets across New York.” – Joel Evans, executive deputy director, New York State Division of Veterans’ Services. New York Veterans can learn more about the program at <https://agriculture.ny.gov/consumer-benefits-farmers-markets#freshconnect-benefits-for-veterans-and-servicemembers>.

**North Carolina** -- “The most popular North Carolina state benefit is Veteran license plates and the tax exclusion for 100% disabled Veterans.” – Martin Falls, chief deputy secretary for the North Carolina Department of Military and Veteran Affairs. Veterans can learn more about the North Carolina Veteran programs at [www.milvets.nc.gov](http://www.milvets.nc.gov).

**North Dakota** -- “Our most popular state benefit is the grant program at North Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs.” – Lonnie Wangen, commissioner. The state offers a Hardship Assistance Grant and a grant for North Dakota Veterans with PTSD. Veterans can learn more at <http://www.nd.gov/veterans/benefits/hardship-assistance-grant>.

**Ohio** -- “Every county in Ohio has a Veterans Service Commission, who employ Veterans service officers to assist Ohio Veterans with benefits, transportation, and even financial assistance- all at no charge to Veterans.” – Sean McCarthy, assistant director, Department of Veterans Services. A comprehensive Ohio Veterans Resource Guide is available online at <https://dvs.ohio.gov/wps/wcm/connect/gov/7c2ff73e-7a10-42a9-b2c1-4688be28837c/BenefitsGuide.pdf?MOD=AJPERES&CVID=n8kF7Cb>.

**Oklahoma** -- For Oklahoma information, visit <https://odva.ok.gov/>.

**Oregon** -- “Veteran Recognition License Plates are very popular in Oregon for Veterans, disabled Veterans, and their families. This program includes multiple recognition plate options that allow Veterans to display pride in their military service, all while helping to support work for fellow Veterans and their families through organizations such as the Oregon Veterans’ Homes and Gold Star Families, both of which receive a portion of the registration fees charged for some plates.” – Ana Potter, Oregon Department of Veterans’ Affairs Aging Veterans Services director. Oregon Veterans and their families can learn more about the program at <https://www.oregon.gov/odot/dmv/pages/vehicle/plates.aspx#Veteran>.

**Pennsylvania** -- “Pennsylvania’s most popular state benefit is by far the Real Estate Tax Exemption. This program, administered by the Pennsylvania Department of Military and Veterans Affairs, provides real estate tax exemption for any honorably discharged Veteran who is 100 percent disabled, a resident of the commonwealth and has a financial need. More than 14,000 Pennsylvania Veterans are enrolled in the program, which grows by about 1,000 Veterans each year.” – Joel H. Mutschler, director of the Bureau of Veterans Programs, Initiatives, Reintegration, and Outreach. Pennsylvania Veterans can learn more about the Real Estate Tax Exemption program at [dmva.pa.gov](http://dmva.pa.gov).

**Rhode Island** -- “The most popular state benefit is Rhode Island National Guard members receive free tuition.” – Kasim Yarn, director, Rhode Island Office of Veterans Services. Veterans can learn more at <http://www.vets.ri.gov/>.

**South Carolina** -- “All persons who have been declared permanently and totally disabled by the Social Security Administration, VA, or other state or federal agencies, are eligible for a homestead exemption in an amount set by the General Assembly. This also applies to persons over age 65.” – Brandon C. Wilson, public information director. For more information, contact your county and municipal tax offices or visit <http://va.sc.gov/benefits.html>.



**South Dakota --** South Dakota's most popular state benefit is the [bonus program](#). The state of South Dakota awards a bonus to active duty military members and Veterans who meet service qualifications. "Regardless of service era, we take an all-inclusive approach to ensure all Veterans have access to their benefits," said Greg Whitlock, Secretary of the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs. Whitlock encourages Veterans to contact their local county or tribal Veterans service officers or the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs office (605-773-3269) to learn more about their benefits. Veterans can also visit <https://vetaffairs.sd.gov/> or <https://www.facebook.com/SDDVA/>.

**Tennessee --** "Tennessee's most popular Veteran benefit is [the property tax relief for certain 100% disabled Veterans](#) and their surviving spouses for up to \$175,000 of the property's assessed value. Determination of eligibility for a homeowner who is a disabled Veteran or widow(er) of a disabled Veteran will be made based on information provided by the VA through use of consent forms." – Ron Dvorsky, Tennessee Department of Veterans Services resource coordinator training officer. Veterans can learn more about the program at <https://comptroller.tn.gov/office-functions/pa/property-taxes/property-tax-programs/tax-relief.html>.

**Texas --** "From September 2019 through April 30, 2020, the Texas Veterans Commission (TVC) Claims Department has assisted over 7,000 Veterans in receiving over \$250 million in retroactive payments plus annual increases. I'd say that shows the TVC claims program is very popular." – Thomas P. Palladino, executive director of the Texas Veterans Commission. Veterans can learn more at <https://www.tvc.texas.gov/claims/>.

**Utah --** "Utah's Veterans Property Tax Abatement is widely used designed to reduce certain property taxes Veterans owe on normally taxed property, to include homes, automobiles and recreational vehicles. The tax reduction is based on the level of a disability rating as determined by VA." – Gary Harter, executive director of Utah's Department of Veterans and Military Affairs. Additional information is at <https://veterans.utah.gov/utah-tax-abatement-exemption/>.

**Vermont --** "Vermont's most popular benefit is a property tax reduction program for Veterans with a VA rating of 50% or greater." – Robert E. Burke, director, Office of Veterans Affairs. For more information visit [veterans.vermont.gov](https://veterans.vermont.gov).

**Virginia --** "Virginia's VA claims assistance program. This [program](#) has over 100 full time staff dedicated to assisting transitioning service members and Veterans prepare, and when necessary, appeal their VA disability compensation and pension claims." – Thomas Herthel, deputy commissioner for the Virginia Department of Veterans Services. In 2019, VDVS staff helped over 200,000 Veterans submit over 70,000 claims and appeals. Additionally, VDVS has a dedicated team of appeals attorneys and specialists who assist Veterans before the Board of Veterans Appeals and the Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims and advocate on their behalf. In all, Virginia's Veterans received over \$3.5 billion in federal disability claims benefits in Federal Fiscal Year 2019. Veterans can learn more at <https://www.dvs.virginia.gov/benefits>.

**Washington --** "Washington offers free license plates for disabled Veterans, Purple Heart and Gold Star, as well as free camping for Veterans with 30% or greater disability." – Liza Narciso, assistant to the director, Washington Department of Veterans Affairs. For more information, visit <https://www.dva.wa.gov/>.

**West Virginia --** "West Virginia provides funds each year to pay for education and training opportunities that do not qualify under VA guidelines. This gives our Veterans a second opportunity for success." – Cabinet Secretary Dennis Davis. Veterans can learn more at <https://veterans.wv.gov/Pages/default.aspx>.

**Wisconsin --** "WDVA's online tool, MyWisVets.com, makes it easy for Wisconsinites to check their eligibility benefits, upload supporting documents, apply for grants, pre-register at our Veterans homes or for an internment, and more. MyWisVets.com is supported by WDVA's Veterans Benefits Resource staff, who are also available by phone, email, or via our Live Chat feature on the WDVA website to support Veterans with state and federal benefits questions." – Donald Placidi Jr., Division of Veterans Benefits administrator, Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs. Veterans can visit the online portal at [www.MyWisVets.com](http://www.MyWisVets.com).

**Wyoming --** "The most popular state benefit is the property tax exemption. This benefit is used in all 23 counties." According to Tim Sheppard, executive director, Wyoming Veterans Commission. Veterans can learn more at <https://www.wyomilitary.wyo.gov/veterans/commission/>.

[Source: Vantage Point | Adam Stump | July 22, 2020 ++]

**\* Vet Legislation \***





**Note:** To check status on any veteran related legislation go to <https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress> for any House or Senate bill introduced in the 116th 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. To read the text of bills that are to be considered on the House floor in the upcoming week refer to <https://docs.house.gov/floor>.

## Transition Assistance Program

### Update 09: H.R.7542 | TAP Counseling Bill

U.S. Rep. Mike Levin (D-CA) introduced legislation to adjust how service members are placed in counseling pathways provided by the Transition Assistance Program. This bill would build on the John S. McCain National Defense Authorization Act of 2019, which established at least three pathways for servicemembers receiving TAP counseling. These pathways are “designed based on service members’ risk level,” said Eric Mee, the communications director for Levin. Currently, the pathways are determined by a number of factors, including rank, term of service, disability, health, educational and employment history, and more. Levin’s bill, introduced 9 JUL, aims to help counselors better determine risk of not having a successful transition through a set of additional factors. These new factors include:

- Child care requirements of the member (including whether a dependent of the member is enrolled in the Exceptional Family Member Program).
- The employment status of other adults in the household.
- The location of the duty station of the member (including whether the member was separated from family while on duty).
- The effects of operating tempo and personnel tempo on the member and their household.
- Whether the member is an Indian or urban Indian, as those terms are defined in section 4 of the Indian Health Care Improvement Act (Public Law 94–437; 25 U.S.C. 1603).

Levin said these changes are vital to guarantee that TAP adequately serves every service member. “One of my top priorities is ensuring that service members have all of the support they need to start a new career when they leave the service, and the Transition Assistance Program is fundamental to that effort,” said Levin in a press release. “These resources are also critical as we work to address veteran suicide, which can often be driven by economic distress. I look forward to working with my colleagues to make sure these much-needed fixes are made as soon as possible.”

Sign up for the Education & Transition News. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Zach England | July 14, 2020 ++]

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## VA Home Loan

### Update 72: H.R.3504/S.2022 | Specially Adaptive Housing Improvement Act

Legislation that expands grants available to certain disabled veterans to modify their homes to meet their physical needs passed through Congress on 20 JUL and will now land on President Donald Trump’s desk for his signing into law. The House voted to approve a Senate version of the Ryan Kules and Paul Benne **Specially Adaptive Housing Improvement Act of 2019** nearly one year after lawmakers passed the first draft of the bill.

Introduced in the House initially by Reps. Mike Levin (D-CA) and Gus Bilirakis (R-FL), the bill updates the Department of Veterans Affairs’ Specially Adapted Housing grant, which provides money for veterans with certain permanent, service-connected disabilities, with the most common being bilateral amputees and paralyzed veterans. The bill increases the funding available to these veterans from about \$85,000 to about \$98,000. It also extends the benefit to blind veterans and allows beneficiaries to access the funding up to six times instead of three. The Senate passed a slightly different version of the same bill on 26 MAR, which required it return to the House for a final vote.

Introduced in the Senate by Sens. Jerry Moran (R-KS) and Kyrsten Sinema (D-AZ) the version headed to President Donald Trump allows all eligible veterans access to the updates to the program and it allows the funding eligibility to renew every 10 years. “Many veterans carry wounds from military service that make everyday life more challenging.

Our bipartisan bill breaks down barriers to help veterans access the specially adaptive housing benefits they've earned—and its passage shows what we can accomplish when we put aside politics and focus on getting results for America's veterans," said Sinema, a member of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee.

Former Army Capt. Ryan Kules, a double amputee for whom the bill is named, testified before Congress about his experience with the program and how the bill's updates will impact veterans. He thanked the lawmakers for their "tireless effort to get this to the president's desk." In his own home, Kules used the grant primarily to widen hallways and doorways and lower countertops to better accommodate his wheelchair. Others have used funds for ramps, voice-activated technology and installing safer appliances throughout the home. "I know the difference that these benefits can make on a warrior's home-life and I experienced their shortcomings as well," Kules said.

Paralyzed Veterans of America supported the bill alongside the Wounded Warrior Project and applauded its passage. "Like all of us, housing needs change over time, based on a variety of circumstances. Veterans should not have to limit themselves from moving into a different residence due to not being able to afford to make the necessary modifications or having to shoulder the burden of paying for the modifications themselves," said Carl Blake, executive director of Paralyzed Veterans of America. "It's hard to imagine President Trump not signing the legislation that would assist catastrophically injured veterans who fought in Vietnam, Iraq, Afghanistan and other conflicts in having accessible homes." The White House would not comment Tuesday on whether Trump will sign the bill but it had not as of A.M. 31 JUL . [Source: Stars & Stripes | Rose L. Thayer | July 21, 2020 ++]

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## **Vet Treatment Courts**

### **Update 02: H.R.886 | Veteran Treatment Court Coordination Act of 2019**

A bill that would help give a second chance to veterans who've committed nonviolent crimes has moved to the president's office to be signed into law. The **Veteran Treatment Court Coordination Act of 2019** directs the Department of Justice to create a program that would provide funding and technical assistance to state, local, and tribal governments with veterans treatment courts or the intent to begin one. Such courts specifically address the problems that veterans face, similar to the way a drug or mental health court provides treatment rather than punishment. "We're not out to punish. This is a treatment and rehab court. We're here to identify illnesses and conditions. We're here to get veterans well," VTC advocate, mentor, and retired Army Col. DJ Reyes told Military Times.

One in five veterans has symptoms of a mental health disorder or cognitive impairment, Justice for Vets reported, citing a RAND report. Combat-related mental illnesses and substance abuse have also been found to be closely linked. As a result, the primary purpose of a VTC is not to punish, but rather to identify, treat and rehabilitate those disorders or conditions incurred while in military service that could have contributed to subsequent criminal behavior, said Reyes. Examples include substance/opioid/alcohol abuse, PTSD, traumatic brain injuries, or military sexual trauma. "The desired outcome is a VTC graduate who is seamlessly transitioned back with his or her loved ones, and the local community, as a positively impactful citizen," he said. "We as a society owe nothing less to this commitment in support of our veterans."

Luis Quinonez, a Vietnam vet and head of the National Veterans Court Alliance who worked with policymakers to gain support for the bill, agreed. Get the military's most comprehensive news and information every morning "Veterans who have served overseas and in combat have a unique set of problems," Quinonez said Veterans participating in such programs also meet regularly with judges and veteran mentors who provide advice, information, and accountability. "If we're going to send our men and women, our sons and daughters, to war and they come back broken, it's our obligation to help them to find their way back," said Reyes, who helped to found a VTC in Tampa, Fla. and now volunteers as a mentor.

Introduced by Rep. Charlie Crist, a Democrat from Florida, on Jan. 30, 2019, the bill to provide federal assistance to VTCs received bipartisan support and was unanimously consented to in the House on 20 JUL. Before becoming a law, the bill must be signed by President Donald Trump. “Our veterans sacrificed to keep us safe. They have earned our support and understanding for the unique challenges they often face,” Crist said. The VA reported the existence of at least 551 veterans courts in June 2018. Programs like the one in Tampa have seen great success, but they’re funded by local governments and don’t currently have federal assistance in structuring their programs. As a result, the eligibility criteria and methods for treatment vary from court to court. This bill would change that, asking the Justice Department to work with the secretary of defense and attorney general to make available grants, technical assistance, and information on best practices for running a VTC.

The two biggest challenges that stand in the way of this bill, Quinonez told Military Times, are funding and a lack of understanding. “We have some members of Congress who felt that we were creating a new court system, they didn’t understand that, when we thought of veterans courts, we don’t really mean courts. We mean dockets. What they are is they set aside an afternoon or a whole day to address veterans’ issues. It is done in the same courtroom by the same judges,” Quinonez said. They had initially hoped for \$5 billion in funding for the program, Quinonez said. This may seem like a lot, he added, but the VA reported that there are more than 700,000 veterans in some phase of the criminal justice system. Quinonez estimated that each of those veterans costs the government between \$30,000 and \$40,000.

Because of the lack of understanding and national debt concerns, the bill was only allocated about \$20 million, Quinonez said, which will go towards starting programs in nearly 8,000 different courts. Funds will also go to the Department of Justice to set up a point of contact and federal guidance for VTCs. “That’s the driving force behind this bill: to nationalize and federalize the program so that we can provide federal funding to enable all 50 U.S. states to establish their own VTC programs,” Reyes said. Quinonez hopes that the Justice Department’s guidance will recognize the uniqueness of veterans’ issues and work with law enforcement to reach veterans before they have a criminal record. “As long as we’re able to include the mental and emotional assistance programs, then we’ll be able to make a difference,” he said.

The many supporters of the bill show that officials involved in the criminal justice system feel similarly. Quinonez said he’s worked with multiple members of congress, senators, state Supreme Court justices, and the National District Attorneys Association, among others, to let the stories and input of those whose daily lives involve veterans treatment in the judicial system affect the legislation. “At the end of the day, we want to keep them out of jail, get them in treatment, and then get them back into the community as impactful citizens, taking the burden off the community, criminal justice system, and law enforcement,” Reyes said. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Harm Venhuizen | July 21, 2020 ++]

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## **Reserve Component Burial**

### **Update 01: HR.7752 | State Veterans Cemetery Internment**

Legislation that would expand eligibility for state veterans cemeteries to allow for the interring of National Guard members and Reservists has been introduced by U.S. Sen. Jeanne Shaheen and U.S. Rep. Chris Pappas of New Hampshire, both Democrats. Under current law, in order to receive Department of Veterans Affairs grant money for improvements, state veteran cemeteries are barred from interring Guard members and Reservists due to rules requiring active service. The legislation would allow state cemeteries to decide whether to inter an honorably discharged Guard member, Reservist, or their spouse without jeopardizing the grants. “This bill is about equity for members of the National Guard and reserves in allowing them to have a final resting place that befits their service and sacrifice,” Pappas said. “We should allow our state veterans cemeteries to bury these heroes without the risk of losing federal funding.” U.S. Sen. Maggie Hassan, also a Democrat, is a bill co-sponsor. Col. Warren Perry, the deputy adjutant

general for New Hampshire, and Shawn Buck, director of the New Hampshire State Veterans Cemetery, support the legislation. [Source: VFW Action Corps Weekly | July 10, 2020++]

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## **Vet Bills Sent to President**

**July 15 thru 31, 2020 | Three**

The House and Senate passed the following bills which support veterans and forwarded them to the White House for signature. .

- [H.R. 3535](#), the *G.I. Bill Work Study Improvement Act of 2019*,
- [H.R. 3504](#), the *Ryan Kules and Paul Benne Specially Adaptive Housing Improvement Act of 2019*, and
- [S. 3637](#), to amend the *Servicemembers Civil Relief Act* and provide additional legal protections for service members impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

These three pieces of legislation now head to the White House. The President has the option to sign them into law or veto them and send them back to Congress. If vetoed Congress can override the veto with a two-thirds vote of each chamber, at which point the bill becomes law and is printed. If Congress is in session and the President takes no action within 10 days, the bill becomes law. If Congress adjourns before 10 days are up and the President takes no action, then the bill dies and Congress may not vote to override. This is called a pocket veto, and if Congress still wants to pass the legislation, they must begin the entire process anew. The VFW asks the president to swiftly sign these bills into law. Veterans, service members, and their families will greatly benefit from this bipartisan, bicameral work done by Congress. [Source: VFW Action Corps Weekly & [www.whitehouse.gov](http://www.whitehouse.gov) | July 24, 2020 ++]

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## **House Vet Bill Progress**

**16 thru 31 JUL 2020**

Lawmakers on a key committee advanced 12 bills to the House floor on 30 JUL, including measures to force the Department of Veterans Affairs to update its motto and legislation aimed at offering protections for victims of VA medical malpractice. Lawmakers and advocates have called the VA motto, or mission statement, "exclusionary" and "outdated." But [VA leaders refused](#) to change it, arguing that it was tantamount to rewriting history. VA's mission statement quotes Abraham Lincoln's second inaugural address in 1865: "To care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan."

While the lawmakers said they agreed the "original spirit" of Lincoln's words were inclusive, they argued that it was time to alter the motto slightly to reflect a more diverse veteran population.

More than 10 percent of America's veterans and more than 17 percent of its armed forces are women, reflecting a changing military and VA that necessitates a change to VA's motto to help all veterans feel welcome, lawmakers and advocates said. They suggested an alternative, more inclusive motto that echoes Lincoln's words: "To care for those who shall have borne the battle, and for their families, caregivers and survivors."

Increasingly, changing the motto garnered bipartisan support in Congress. On Thursday, the [Honoring All Veterans Act](#), introduced by Rep. Jackie Speier (D-CA) passed with unanimous support from Republicans and Democrats on the committee. "VA's current gender-exclusive motto doesn't properly acknowledge (women's) service, and that is simply wrong," said Rep. Kathleen Rice (D-NY), who has pushed for the change for years. "We're just as grateful for their service and sacrifice as we are for anyone brave enough to put on our country's uniform. That is why we must pass (the bill), to ensure that these veterans receive the respect they deserve."

Ranking member Phil Roe, R-Tenn., led his fellow Republican members in support of the change. "This is easy for me," he said. "All you have to do is change one word. "I support this bill in recognition of the millions of women who have raised their right hands in service throughout the history of this great country, in gratitude for their bravery ... as a sign of my commitment to continuing to work to honor all those who have borne the battle."

### **VA medical malpractice**

Lawmakers also advanced legislation Thursday that would provide more protections for veterans who became victims of [medical malpractice at VA](#). The Brian Tally VA Employment Transparency Act aims to close a more than seven-decade loophole and protect millions of veterans. The bill, introduced by Rep. Mike Levin (D-CA) would allow any veteran or family member who has filed a claim against VA for damage, injury or death to be entitled to receive, within 30 days, a notice from VA about legal council, the employment status of anyone involved in the claim (including whether they work for VA or are a contractor) and the statute of limitations for the claim.

The bill is named for Marine veteran Brian Tally, who has worked for years since he was irreparably injured by near-fatal Department of Veterans Affairs medical malpractice to ensure what happened to him does not happen to any other veterans. "Tears are flowing, my heart is racing, I'm shaking and I'm recounting the last 4.5 years," Tally said after the vote Thursday. "Still at a loss of words. We did it." Another bill in Congress is [also named for Tally](#), but the Employment Transparency Act is the first to pass to the floor for a vote. Follow Tally's efforts on Facebook at [Rally Around Tally](#).

### **Native veterans**

The committee passed two measures Thursday aimed at helping Native veterans. The [Native American PACT Act](#), introduced by Rep. Ruben Gallego, D-Ariz., would prohibit VA from collecting healthcare copayments from veterans who are members of an Indian tribe. The [Department of Veterans Affairs Tribal Advisory Committee Act](#), introduced by Rep. Debra Haaland (D-NM) establishes an advisory committee on tribal and Indian affairs to advise VA on issues for Native tribes, tribal organizations and Native veterans. Lawmakers have increasingly considered legislation to aid Native American and Native Alaskan veterans, who disproportionately do not receive the federal benefits they earned during service. Native Americans and Native Alaskans are more likely to serve in the U.S. Armed Forces than any other group, yet they remain among the poorest and least insured veterans with the least access to VA services. Native leaders told Connecting Vets that those struggles to get services they earned has increased during the pandemic. Native veterans are more likely to live far from VA facilities, have lower personal incomes, higher unemployment and are more likely to lack health insurance than other veterans.

### **Other bills approved by the committee Thursday:**

- H.R. 5639, the Chuck Osier Burial Benefits Act, which would allow VA to furnish urns for the remains of eligible veterans whose cremated remains are not interred at national veterans' cemeteries;
- H.R. 6589, the CFO Authority and Collaboration Act, which would require VA to develop a plan to address weaknesses of the department;
- H.R. 7111, the Veterans Economic Recovery Act, which directs VA to carry out a retaining assistance program for unemployed veterans;
- H.R. 3228, the VA Mission Telehealth Clarification Act, which authorizes health professional trainees to provide treatment by telemedicine;
- H.R. 7445, expanding eligibility for VA home loans to eligible Reservists and National Guard members;
- H.R. 7795, the Veterans Benefits Fairness and Transparency Act, which would help veterans access and submit disability benefits questionnaire forms from VA;
- H.R. 5245, the Stopping Harm and Implementing Enhanced Lead-time for Debts (SHIELD) for Veterans Act, which would bar VA from recovery certain payments or overpayments made because of processing delays;
- H.R. 5487, the Veterans Cemetery Grants Improvement Act, which increased from \$5 million to \$10 million the amount VA may grant to states and tribal organizations to operate and maintain veterans' cemeteries.

The bills now move to the House floor for votes. If they are approved by the chamber, they move to the Senate for consideration. The House only has a few days remaining for votes before Congress heads on its annual break, and the November elections are approaching. [Source: ConnectingVets.com | Abbie Bennett | July 30, 2020 ++]

**\* Military \***



## **PFAS Toxic Exposure**

### **Update 19: House NDAA Amendment Targets Military Bases**

House lawmakers presented an extensive amendment to the annual defense spending bill targeting harmful chemicals that have contaminated hundreds of military bases. The bipartisan measure, headed by Debbie Dingell (D-MI) is designed to scale back the risks of exposure to toxic fluorinated chemicals known as PFAS, so-called “forever chemicals” because they are not expelled from the human body once ingested. PFAS have been linked to some types of cancer and have contaminated at least 328 U.S. military installations, according to the Environmental Working Group, a nonprofit watchdog organization.

“PFAS [chemicals] are poisoning our servicemembers and families and communities around military bases,” Dingell said in a call with reporters 14 JUL. “These harmful chemicals are found everywhere and much of the source contamination leads back to military facilities who aren’t taking the steps to clean up PFAS contamination.” The amendment to the 2021 National Defense Authorization Act is identical to Dingell’s PFAS Action Act H.R.535, which passed the House in January with the support of 24 Republicans. It requires the Environmental Protection Agency to list PFAS chemicals, including those found in firefighting foam that military bases use, as hazardous to get its Superfund grants for cleanup, and directs the EPA to set enforceable federal drinking water standards.

Dingell said the NDAA is a vehicle to move the chemical legislation into law, after the bill went dark in the Senate. After the PFAS Action Act passed through the Democratic-controlled House, the White House rebuked it and threatened to veto it if Senate Republicans approved it. “This is one of the areas we’ve really battled with the administration. ... It’s where we have strong bipartisan support. ... This is a very dangerous substance that the EPA has not done enough...The EPA is continuing to allow new PFAS onto the market,” Fitzpatrick said Tuesday. He added that the focus is not exclusively on military bases due to the chemical’s far-reaching impacts.

The White House put out a statement saying the bill would "require the Administration to bypass well-established processes, procedures, and legal requirements of the Nation's most fundamental environmental laws," including the Clean Air Act and the Safe Drinking Water Act. "By truncating the rulemaking process," the White House's statement said, "this legislation risks undermining public confidence in the EPA's decisions, and also risks the imposition of unnecessary costs on States, public water systems, and others responsible for complying with its prescriptive mandates."

Toxic PFAS chemicals have been found in firefighting foam, which the military has used for decades. The foam has been found to contaminate groundwater and well water around bases. Recent data from the EWG found 28 bases with PFAS levels in drinking water at levels above state standards. PFAS are also found in a wide range of consumer products used since the 1940s and have been found in cookware, pizza boxes, dental floss and stain repellents.



According to the EPA, PFAS chemicals can cause harm to the immune system, impact infant birth weights, cause cancer or disrupt thyroid hormone production.

More than 100 Army installations were discovered to have drinking water contaminated with PFAS, according to a recent report from the Army conducted by EWG. The highest levels were found in Fort Leavenworth, Kan.; National Guard's Joint Training Base in Los Alamitos, Calif.; and Belmont Armory, Mich. The EPA designates per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances, or PFAS, as "a category of manmade chemicals that are found in everyday items." The chemicals build up in the human body over time and are not able to be broken down by the environment. [Source: | Stars & Stripes | Steve Beynon | July 14, 2020 ++]

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## **USS Bonhomme Richard**

**She is Salvageable.**



The blaze that engulfed the San Diego-based amphibious assault ship Bonhomme Richard for more than four days was extinguished 16 JUL, Navy officials said. The Navy's top officer, Adm. Mike Gilday, toured the fire damage to the ship on 17 JUL, describing it as very extensive in terms of the damage and the intensity. "We've not seen a fire of this magnitude in a Navy ship in recent memory, at least in my career," Gilday, the chief of naval operations, said during a news conference following the tour of the ship. It is yet to be determined is its cause, and whether and when the ship will be repaired. The investigation is expected to take weeks. There will be three different but synchronized investigations into the events of the fire, and Gilday intends to make them available to the public once they are completed. One will be a safety investigation to determine the fire's cause. Another will be led by Naval Criminal Investigative Service to make certain "there's no malfeasance at the root of the fire," Gilday said. The last will be a command investigation to see whether the right procedures were in place and what could have been done differently.

Rear Adm. Philip Sobeck, commander of Expeditionary Strike Group 3, said the ship is salvageable. "The survivability of the ship is there — it's survivable," he said. "It's in stable condition all the way through. The ship can be repaired. Whether or not it will be .... is to be determined." Crews still must inspect the ship thoroughly to put down all hot spots, Sobeck said. "The flames are out, but the heat is still there," he said. "We're going space by space as I speak to every compartment checking for hot spots." Once this is done, Sobeck said, the fire will be officially out.

In a separate statement that day, Sobeck said the cause of the fire remains unknown until an investigation is finished. He has said a spark from an unknown source could have ignited heavy-duty cardboard boxes, rags and other maintenance supplies stored in the lower vehicle storage area. The fire then traveled upward to the well deck — a wide hangar-like area — and took off from there. "We did not know the origin of the fire. We do not know the extent of the damage. Our fire teams are investigating every space to verify the absence of fire. Until every space is checked

and there are no active fires we will not be able to commence any official investigations. What we do know is that brave Sailors from commands all across San Diego worked tirelessly alongside Federal Firefighters to get this fire extinguished and I want to thank them for their efforts.”

According to Sobeck, 40 sailors and 23 civilians were treated for minor injuries such as smoke inhalation and heat exhaustion during the roughly 100-hour long firefight. Temperatures topped 1,200 degrees F at the height of the inferno, Sobeck said — a temperature that had water from fire hoses turning to steam as soon as fire teams tried to engage. The fire on the 844-foot ship began around 8:30 a.m. 12 JUL and sent acrid plumes of smoke into the San Diego skies for two days. By the morning of 14 JUL, the plume was noticeably smaller, although the smell of the fire stayed in neighborhoods nearest the base through 16 JUL. Firefighting crews from a dozen San Diego-based ships — more than 400 sailors — assisted federal firefighters from bases throughout Southern California fighting the fire. Navy helicopters from Helicopter Sea Combat Squadron 3 dumped more than 1,500 buckets of water on the ship around the clock. Tug boats also shot water onto the ship, cooling the ship’s hull.

Several photos of the damage to the ship’s “island” superstructure and interior were posted online over the last two days, showing entire spaces blackened by fire and smoke, as well as at least two large holes in the island’s roof. The forward mast — located on the island — collapsed early 13 JUL. Sobeck explained that the damage to the island is due, in part, to the material with which it was constructed. “It’s aluminum; it’s a softer metal,” Sobeck said. “You saw (in the photos) the remnants of what high heat does to aluminum. The deck underneath is secure. Now that things are starting to cool off, we can go in and assess what the real issues are.” The crew’s living quarters was among the parts of the ship that burned, Navy officials said, so 84 sailors who lived on the Bonhomme Richard full-time have been moved to other quarters on Naval Base San Diego. On the night of 15 JUL the Bonhomme Richard shifted and listed toward the pier, prompting the Navy to pull off about 30 firefighting sailors who had been searching the bowels of the warship for remaining hot spots. They resumed their work an hour later. The withdrawal of sailors was out of an abundance of caution; there was no fear that the 840-foot ship would capsize, Lt. Cmdr. Patricia Kreuzberger told the Associated Press.

Sobeck singled out two Bonhomme Richard sailors for praise — Damage Controlman 2nd Class Jeffrey Garvin and Lt. j.g. Bernardo Tinoco — who he said exemplify the resiliency of the Navy’s sailors. Garvin was the fire marshal on duty Sunday when the call of “black smoke” came across the loudspeaker system of the Bonhomme Richard, Sobeck said. Garvin was sent to the hospital Sunday to undergo concussion screening after the first of two explosions rocked the ship. Upon returning, Garvin again went into the ship to fight the fire when a second explosion occurred, again sending him to the hospital for screening. “We did not allow him to go back in a third time,” Sobeck said. Tinoco led multiple fire teams onboard the ship since Sunday and once recovered a sailor in need of medical attention, Sobeck said. Sobeck thanked the San Diego community for its support. “As I was walking in and out of the pier every single day almost every single hour over the last four days, I’ve witnessed your sons and daughters rushing to the flames, putting the flames out and securing their ship,” he said.

The Bonhomme Richard cost \$761 million, according to estimates by the Federation of American Scientists, and was at the end of a two-year, \$250 million upgrade to accommodate the F-35B fighter. It is one of a handful of similarly equipped amphibious assault ships. Defense officials have been eyeing the mini-aircraft carriers as a way to keep the newest-generation of fighters continually available in the Pacific, as the U.S. counters strategic threats from China. If the ship is saved, it likely will be out of action for an extended period, which could limit what the Navy can do in deploying its forces, military observers say.

Sobeck said that the loss of the Bonhomme Richard — whether temporary or permanent — would affect deployments of the Navy’s expeditionary forces, but the service is equipped to fill any gaps. He added the new amphibious assault ship USS Tripoli — just commissioned 15 JUL in Mississippi — is bound for San Diego in the near future. It can take up to three years for newly commissioned ships to deploy armaments; usually crew certification and training happen first.



[Source: San Diego Union Tribune | Andrew Dyer | July 16, 2020 ++]

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## USS Bonhomme Richard

### Update 01: Toxic Chemicals Found in Fire Air Sampling

Toxic chemicals were present in the smoke from the amphibious assault ship Bonhomme Richard fire in San Diego, according to a new report. The San Diego County Air Pollution Control District determined the smoke contained substances including benzene, chloromethane and acetonitrile after conducting an air sampling, according to the San Diego Union-Tribune. However, the fire primarily emitted pollutants caused from normal activities like driving a car.

Navy Rear Adm. Philip Sobeck, commander of Expeditionary Strike Group 3, initially said that there was “nothing toxic in there” from the fire. He later explained that the fire was first reported in the lower cargo area of the ship, which means that the area contained many maintenance supplies. “There’s plastics that go around cabling, those kind of things, there’s different rags, there’s all the things that are used to kind of maintain the ship, clean the ship ... and so right now we’re testing and we’re checking everything that we know, and we’re within [U.S. Environmental Protection Agency] standards,” Sobeck told reporters during a press conference on 13 JUL

Although the San Diego air district slapped the Navy with a notice of violation for “creating a public nuisance by producing smoke and odors,” the Navy didn’t have many options at its disposal in controlling the fire, district officials said. “Because of the magnitude of this incident, it would have been difficult to avoid these violations,” said Mahiany Luther, chief of compliance for the air district, according to the San Diego Union Tribune. “I’m not aware of any measure that they could have implemented to prevent the impact on the communities.”

While the San Diego Air Pollution Control District advised locals to avoid exercising outside and to remain indoors because of fine particulate matter, California’s Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment concluded that the risk the toxic smoke posed to residents is low. “At those levels, over that short period of time, there were no known great health risks,” said Donna Durckel, spokeswoman for the county’s air district, the San Diego Union-Tribune reports. Still, the newspaper noted that members of the community have assembled a Navy Ship Fire Community Advocates group to examine potential legal action that could be taken. The group is also urging the military to craft an emergency notification plan for future incidents. [Source: NavyTimes | Diana Stancy Correll | July 29, 2020 ++]

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## **Military Sexual Harassment/Assault**

### **Lawmakers, Advocates Urge Change after Killing**

Lawmakers and advocates — all women — called for change 21 JUL to the military's handling of sexual harassment and assaults and described the recent killing of a female soldier as a “watershed moment” and a “reckoning” against a scourge of sexual violence in the armed forces. A dozen or so women gathered in front of the Capitol on Tuesday morning, many holding signs showing Spc. Vanessa Guillen against the backdrop of a Mexican flag. The signs read, “Ni una mas” and “Justicia for Vanessa.” The hashtag #NiUnaMas, meaning “not one more woman dead,” became a rallying cry in Mexico against the murder of women.

Guillen, a 20-year-old small arms repairer stationed at Fort Hood, was killed by another soldier 22 APR. She was reported missing in late April, and her remains were found more than two months later about 20 miles from the base. Guillen's family has said that she faced sexual harassment on base but was too afraid to report it. “She felt so unsafe going to her command to make any kind of report... she knew she may receive harassment or retaliation,” said Rep. Sylvia Garcia, D-Texas. “It's time we put a stop to this. This can never happen again.” Spc. Aaron Robinson, a fellow soldier, is believed to have killed Guillen with a hammer in an arms room, and then moved her body to a site along the Leon River. When confronted 30 JUN by local law enforcement in Killeen, Texas, Robinson shot himself in the head and died. A civilian suspect, Cecily Aguilar, 22, was being held without bail on three federal charges related to helping Robinson, her boyfriend, mutilate and hide Guillen's body.

Guillen's family criticized the Army Criminal Investigation Command for not responding fast enough to find Guillen. They've demanded a congressional investigation into what happened. The gathering near the Capitol on 21 JUL was the launch to what advocates called a “Justicia for Vanessa Day of Action.” They encouraged female service members and veterans to use the hashtag #IamVanessaGuillen to continue sharing their own stories of sexual harassment and assault while serving in the military. A rally was planned for Tuesday afternoon in downtown Washington. “Some have likened this movement surrounding Spc. Guillen's death as a ‘Me Too’ moment for the military, but I believe it's far bigger than this,” said Rep. Julia Brownley, D-Calif., leader of the Women Veterans Task Force. “Now is when we say, ‘Not one more’ regarding the systemic sexual violence in our military. The culture of misogyny is killing service women and men alike.”

Specifically, lawmakers and advocates want to change the chain of commands' involvement in investigating and prosecuting sex crimes in the military. An amendment to the fiscal 2021 National Defense Authorization Act, which is being debated in Congress, would require the commandants of U.S. service academies to follow the recommendations of independent prosecutors in cases of sexual harassment and assault — removing those decisions from the chain of command. The measure is established as a four-year pilot program to test the idea of using independent prosecutors in these cases. According to Pentagon data released in January, reports of sexual assaults at military academies were up 27% last year, reinforcing a disturbing trend at the elite institutions for the past few years.

Rep. Elaine Luria (D-VA), a graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy, opposed the pilot program when it appeared in last year's NDAA. This time, she'll vote for it, she said. “I was part of the problem,” Luria said Tuesday. “I feel like I need to be part of the solution. I believe in the chain of command, but we must do more. We must create an avenue to help women feel safe.” Advocates present on 21 JULy, including Melissa Bryant with the American Legion and Lindsay Church with Minority Veterans of America, called for more comprehensive legislation to remove commanders' influence and bias from sexual assault investigations. “We stand here to demand change,” Church said. “This all-too-familiar nightmare must stop. How many service members must die before we realize commands can't investigate themselves?”

The Guillen family and their attorney, Natalie Khawam, plan to create legislation that would establish an independent agency where service members could report sexual assault and harassment, rather than going through their chain of command. They plan to release details of the bill July 30, the day after the family is expected to meet with President Donald Trump at the White House.

[Source: Stars & Stripes | Nikki Wentling |: July 21, 2020 ++]

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## **Korean War Anniversary**

### **Update 05: Trump Signs Proclamation Commemorating End**

Sixty-seven years ago, the guns fell silent along the Korean demilitarized zone after more than three years of brutal fighting to defeat the expansion of communism on the Korean Peninsula, President Donald J. Trump said in a proclamation 24 JUL. National Korean War Veterans Armistice Day marks the signing of the Korean Armistice Agreement on 27 July 1953 in Panmunjom, a border village inside the Demilitarized Zone that divides North and South Korea. "We pause to remember the uncommon courage and sacrifice of ordinary Americans who fought to defend freedom and protect the values we hold dear," Trump said about the historic day.

This year marks the 70th anniversary of the start of the Korean War. When the conflict began, Americans were still rebuilding their lives in the aftermath of World War II, enjoying the blessings of peace and looking toward a future filled with hope and prosperity, Trump noted. "When freedom and democracy were under threat on the Korean Peninsula, however, 2 million Americans left their homes, put on our nation's uniform, and answered their country's call to duty," he said. Their resolve was tried and tested in once obscure and unfamiliar places, such as Pork Chop Hill, Heartbreak Ridge, Chipyeong-ni, Pusan and the Chosin Reservoir, and in unnamed locations known only by grid coordinates or hilltop elevations, he said.

"Alongside tens of thousands of coalition troops from our allies around the world, these individuals fought, bled, died, went missing, and suffered brutal captivity to defeat a determined foe amid the harshest of conditions, including sweltering heat, bone-numbing cold, and deep snow that buried valleys and rugged ridgelines," the president said. "Their unquestioned valor, determination, and patriotism halted communist aggression and restored liberty and dignity for the South Korean people," he said. "In our nation's capital, the black granite wall of the Korean War Veterans Memorial stands as a testament to their sacrifice, etched with the words 'Freedom is Not Free.'" In total, more than 36,000 Americans gave their lives in the Korean War, more than 103,000 were wounded, and nearly 8,000 went missing in action, he said.

Today, South Korea, once decimated in the aftermath of the war, is one of the world's most vibrant, dynamic and economically prosperous democracies — and one of our strongest allies, he said. "Our armed forces continue to proudly serve side-by-side with our Korean military counterparts," Trump said. "This ironclad alliance, forged in war and reinforced by a shared love of liberty and deep ties of friendship, is vital to peace and stability in both Asia and the world."

"As we commemorate the 67th anniversary of the Korean War Armistice, we renew our commitment to the principles of liberty for which our Korean War veterans so valiantly fought," he said. "We are eternally grateful for the families that endured the unimaginable sacrifices and heartache of war, and we are thankful for all the men and women who helped change the fate of a nation. The 38 months of bloody warfare represent the honorable legacy of a selfless and courageous generation of American patriots."

[Source: DOD New | David Vergun | July 25, 2020 ++]

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## Confederate Flag Controversy

### Update 03: New Military Policy Announced

Defense Secretary Mark Esper on 17 JUL unveiled a new military-wide policy that limits what flags can be displayed by American troops on U.S. military installations, buildings and vehicles, which effectively bars Confederate flags without actually mentioning the controversial banners. The new policy comes after weeks of rigorous debate within the Pentagon's highest levels about the Confederate battle flag's place on America's military posts as calls for its prohibition grew amid a renewed national conversation on racism after the killing of a handcuffed Black man by Minneapolis police on Memorial Day. The Marine Corps first moved to ban the flag in April and issued official guidance doing so in June. Other U.S. military entities, including top commands in South Korea and Japan, followed suit in recent weeks.

Esper's policy labels nearly all flags outside those representing the United States, its states and territories, official U.S. military flags, the Prisoner of War/Missing in Action flag, and those representing allied nations and military organizations as unauthorized for public display by U.S. troops on Defense Department property. He wrote the flags displayed by service members should focus on U.S. military tenets such as good order and discipline, treating all our people with dignity and respect, and rejecting divisive symbols. "What has always united us remains clear — our common mission, our oath to support and defend the Constitution, and our American flag," Esper wrote in the memorandum dated 16 JUL. "With this change in policy, we will further improve the morale, cohesion, and readiness of the force in defense of our great nation."

The military services had all been considering branch-wide bans on displays of the Confederate flag in recent months, but paused in issuing such guidance when Esper's office took the lead on the issue early this month. Pentagon officials said it was intended, in part, for the Defense Department to issue a singular policy across its entire force. But the policy was also meant to avoid President Donald Trump's wrath, one official said 17 JUL. Trump has defended the Confederate battle flag in recent weeks, especially after NASCAR moved to ban its display at its races. Trump has also vowed the names of 10 southern Army posts named for Confederate generals from the Civil War would not be changed during his administration. "My stance is very simple: It's freedom of speech," Trump said in a 7 JUL interview with Nexstar broadcasting.

In an April letter to the Marine Corps, Gen. David Berger, the corps commandant, wrote the Confederate battle flag could raise a sense of pride for some southerners, but others view it as a symbol for racism and hate. "This symbol has shown it has the power to inflame feelings of division," he wrote. "I cannot have that division inside our corps."

Esper's policy released 17 JUL does not ban "unauthorized flags" from display in museums, at grave sites, on historical or educational displays, works of art or monuments.

Senior Army officials said recently the Army was continuing to look at the names of those 10 installations but would not announce a change in the near future. Congressional lawmakers, meanwhile, are split on the issue, but drafts of the 2021 National Defense Authorization Act, the annual Pentagon policy and spending bill, approved by the Senate and House Armed Services Committees contain provisions aimed at stripping installations of Confederate-linked names. Trump has vowed a veto of any legislation that reaches his desk and forces such name changes. Army Secretary Ryan McCarthy, speaking to reporters 16 JUL, said he was committed to banning any "divisive symbols" from his service, but he avoided explicitly labeling the Confederate flag such a symbol. "We would have any divisive symbols on a 'no-fly list,' if you will," he said. [Source: Stars & Stripes | Corey Dickstein | July 17, 2020 ++]

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## **Self-Healing Synthetic**

### **Newly Developed by Army Researchers**



Army-funded researchers have developed a synthetic protein, inspired by the suction cups on squid, that can repair damage caused by scratches, holes and cuts within seconds, the service said. The self-healing synthetic skin could one day feature in Army robots, prosthetic legs, personal protective equipment like hazmat suits, ventilators, and other items where damage from wear and tear could mean life or death, an Army statement said. “With a self-healing bio-based synthetic material, any sites of damage that emerge can be repaired, extending the lifetime of the system or device,” said Stephanie McElhinny, biochemistry program manager at the Army Research Office, which helped fund the research.

Researchers at Penn State University and the Max Planck Institute for Intelligent Systems in Stuttgart, Germany, developed the self-healing synthetic protein after analyzing the genetic material of serrated grabbers on squid suction cups, which heal themselves if damaged, they said in a study published in the journal *Nature Materials* on 27 JUL. When they tested the protein’s self-healing properties by slicing a piece of it in half, putting the two halves together and heating them, the two pieces merged, the researchers wrote in the study. The protein also filled in and healed damaged areas that the researchers scratched with a laser or poked to make tiny holes.

The synthetic material could have numerous military applications, including fixing scratches on the protective coating of gear like hazmat suits, or repairing small holes in pressurized containers to prevent fluid or air leaks, the researchers said. Scientists used the material to make an artificial muscle they say can lift weights 3,000 times heavier than its own mass, and a machine to pick up cherry tomatoes to demonstrate it can handle delicate items. “This research demonstrates the potential of engineering synthetic proteins to deliver novel materials for future Army applications, such as personal protective equipment or flexible robots that could maneuver in confined spaces,” McElhinny said.

Similar materials developed previously have had healing times of up to 24 hours, said Abdon Pena-Francesch, a Humboldt postdoctoral fellow in the physical intelligence department at the Max Planck Institute. The new, squid-inspired synthetic protein allowed scientists to reduce that to one second, he said. “Our protein-based soft robots can now repair themselves immediately,” said Pena-Francesch, the paper’s lead author. “In nature, self-healing takes a long time,” he said. “In this sense, our technology outsmarts nature.” [Source: Stars & Stripes | J.P. Lawrence | July 29, 2020 ++]

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## **Stolen Valor**

### **Update 120: Military Cases on the Rise**

Investigators at the National Archives have taken steps to make their research resources more available to federal and local law enforcement to deal with what they suspect is an uptick in "stolen valor" cases to obtain benefits or loans during the COVID-19 pandemic. "We believe they're doing it," said Jason Metrick, assistant Inspector General for

Investigations at the National Archives. "It's a matter of exposing or finding it." "We see lots of ID theft" by individuals seeking to claim a veteran's identity to get a credit card or a loan, Metrick said.

In an interview 27 JUL, Metrick and Waleska McLellan, special agent in charge at the Office of Inspector General in the National Archives and Records Administration, said their initiative is focused on putting out the word their resources are there to help in stolen valor cases. "We have a responsibility to protect these records" from misuse, McLellan said. "We want to let folks know we're here," Metrick added. Some law enforcement agencies "may not know we exist." McLellan and Metrick said the initiative is not intended to go after that 30-something blowhard at the end of the bar who just has to tell anybody who will listen about how tough he had it on Iwo Jima. "Money or some type of tangible benefit is the key element in bringing federal charges against an individual falsely claiming valor awards," the fact sheet states.

Congress passed a bill in 2005 to criminalize false claims about military service and awards. But in the landmark 2012 case of *U.S. v Alvarez*, the Supreme Court ruled that the bill was an unconstitutional violation of free speech rights. In essence, the court ruled that lying in itself is not a crime. Lawmakers went back to the drawing board and passed the Stolen Valor Act of 2013, making it a crime punishable by up to one year in jail to make false claims about military service and awards with the intent of seeking monetary gain, employment or other benefits available to veterans.

Metrick pointed to the recent case of Christopher Crawford, 31, who was sentenced in May on fraud and related charges to six to 12 years in jail for stealing at least \$17,000 from American Legion Post 568 in Scranton, Pennsylvania. Crawford allegedly used false claims to get the job as the post's executive director and misused the post's debit cards for unauthorized purchases, including trips to casinos. He had claimed to be an Army combat veteran wounded in Iraq, but the charges showed that he had been discharged at Fort Benning, Georgia, under "less than honorable conditions" for going absent without leave during basic training.

In a statement when charges were filed in January, Lackawanna County District Attorney Mark Powell said, "The conduct alleged in this case -- masquerading as a combat veteran in order to infiltrate and steal funds from an American Legion post -- is breathtakingly brazen and unprecedented in my almost 30 years of practicing criminal law in Lackawanna County. It's an affront to every veteran." The IG's office at NARA has put out a Facebook page with a stolen valor fact sheet -- <https://www.facebook.com/NARAOIGOfficeofInvestigations> -- on the office's mission to expose false claims. NARA has also established a hotline -- 301-837-3500 -- for the public to report suspected cases of stolen valor. [Source: Military.com | Richard Sisk| July 27, 2020 ++]

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## **Navy Terminology, Jargon & Slang**

### **‘Make Fast’ thru ‘Midrats’**

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

**Make Fast** – To tie off (a line) securely.

**Make Way** – (1) From the Rules of the Nautical Road, when a ship is making way she is proceeding under her own power, whether by engine or sail (or oars, for that matter). Often confused with UNDER WAY (q.v.); a ship which is

adrift (not under power or sail) is under way, but not making way, even though she may be moving with respect to the seabed due to wind and current effects. (2) A command to get out of the way.

**MARDET** - MARine DETachment.

**Marine Napkin** – The flap on the front of the traditional 13-button US Naval enlisted uniform trousers.

**Marine Shower** – Changing clothes without bathing, usually just applying deodorant. Similar to POMMIE BATH.

**Masker** - A noise-reduction system in which air is pumped into the water from belts in the vicinity of the engineering spaces.

**Matelot** - (RN) A sailor. Actually, the word is French and means, literally, sailor. The reason sailors are referred to as 'mateys.' Pronounced to rhyme with 'glow.'

**Material Condition Xray** - A material condition where fittings or closures (hatches, watertight doors, valves, flappers, etc.) marked with an 'X' ('X-ray, in the phonetic alphabet) must be closed. Generally seen only in port. Surface ships only.

**Material Condition Yoke** - Closures marked 'X' and 'Y' must be kept closed. This is the normal daylight underway material condition, and represents a minimal condition of watertight integrity.

**Material Condition Zebra** - All fittings and closures marked 'X', 'Y', and 'Z' must be closed. Maximum watertight integrity. "Set Condition Zebra" is the command to close all water-tight doors, hatches, and fittings throughout the ship. Usually follows the call to GQ.

**Material Condition Circle William** - A material condition involving ventilation fittings and machinery marked with a 'W' inside a circle. Used to control the spread of smoke in a fire belowdecks, or in preparation for an NBC attack.

**Max Conserve** - Signal to aircraft to use power levels appropriate for maximum endurance. 'Loiter' is similar, although loitering usually involves staying in one place. 'Max Conserve' more properly applies to an aircraft flying a long-range profile.

**Mayday** – Distress call via radio, anglicized from the French *M'aidez* (help me).

**MCAS** - Marine Corps Air Station.

**MCPOC** – (pronounced 'mickpock') Master Chief Petty Officer Of the Command. Senior MCPO assigned to the unit. Similar to the COB of a submarine.

**Meatball** - (obsolete) A system in which a red light was reflected off a large parabolic mirror and projected aft to provide glideslope data to the pilot on approach. In common usage today, synonymous with the luminous yellow display of the FRESNEL LENS system which replaced it.

**Meet Her** – An order to the helm to use the rudder as needed to stop the ship's turn. Usually followed by an order giving a course to steer.

**Menopause Manor** - (RN) Chief's Quarters. See GOAT LOCKER.

**MER** – Multiple Ejector Rack, a device used to increase the amount of ordnance carried by an aircraft. Allows up to six weapons to be hung on a single set of shackles, depending on weight and other limitations.

**Messcrank** - aka CRANK. Food service personnel, especially nonrated personnel provided by the ship's other departments (non-Supply depts.) to perform scutwork such as busing tables, washing dishes, etc.

**Messdecks** – Crew's eating area.

**Mess Mother** - (RN) Senior hand of the mess, responsible to the COX'N for the cleanliness and good order of the mess decks.

**Mickey Mouse Book** - See PIPING TAB.

**Midrats** - Food served at midnight for ongoing watchstanders, although the oncoming watch section commonly does not get up early enough to partake. Offgoing section gets the remnants, if any. Usually a combination of leftovers, plus something new to round out the service. A contraction of "midnight rations."

[Source: <http://hazegray.org/faq/slang1.htm> | July 31, 2020 ++]

### \* Military History \*



## Operation IUG

### Soviet's Moldova Purges

On the night between June 5-6, 1949 Stalin ordered deportations from Soviet-occupied Bessarabia (i.e. Moldova). The Soviets named the operation "IUG" [South] and brought in about 45,000 soldiers, policemen and secret services agents to carry it out. The mass deportations formed part of the last stage of the Sovietization of the various territories seized by the Soviet Union during and after the Second World War. The first train wagons, overcrowded with people inside them remained stationary until 8 JUL when they departed for Siberia. About 35,000 people, 11,000 of whom were children, were put in train wagons and sent in appalling conditions deep into the Soviet Union in Siberia and Kazakhstan to labor camps to be "politically re-educated" having been deemed "enemy elements" of the Soviet regime in the new territories.

These territories were annexed by the Soviet Union after the signing the Stalin-Hitler Pact in August 1939 and included the Baltic states, eastern Poland and part of Bukovina and Bessarabia – which had both been part of the Kingdom of Romania. The Soviets targeted the opinion-forming intelligentsia – intellectuals, teachers, professors and priests – as well as politicians, administrative officials and entrepreneurs. The purge concentrated on the most prominent figures in society. Over 100,000 people were sent to labor camps in the Soviet Union from Bessarabia – today's Moldova – in three waves, in June 1941, July 1949 and April 1951. Many of them died on the way to Siberia for lack of food and water and because of the inhumane conditions on a train journey lasting weeks.



A few survivors of the deportation Soviet Labor Camps in Siberia.

Pavel Filip, the Prime Minister of Moldova, said at an official event commemorating the victims in The National Assembly Market Square, "The drama of the deportations, the terrible tortures that these people went through, are still

open wounds, but they are our wounds, and they are part of what we are today. “That’s why it’s important not to forget. Let us remember these people and the place they have in our history every year.” He stressed that Stalinist deportations struck at the Romanian cultural foundations of the country, at everything related to its culture and values. “We often ask why we do not succeed, or why we remain behind other countries. The answer is simple – because the best ones ... were deported, so that the remaining ones could be manipulated more easily and silenced,” said Filip.

“Labor camps in the Soviet Union were actually death camps; no one returned alive from them, so the men and children deported had a tragic destiny and were practically exterminated in these camps,” the historian Ion Varta, the director of the National Archives in Moldova, said. Bessarabia was part of Tsarist Russia before becoming part of the Romanian kingdom between the two World Wars. Stalin then annexed it and it formed part of the Soviet Union until 1991 when it declared independence. [Source: <https://balkaninsight.com> | Chisinau Birn |July 6, 2018 ++]

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## Auschwitz Liberation

### Soviet’s Free 7,000 Inmates on January 18, 1945

On January 27, 1945 the Soviet Army pried open the gates of Auschwitz concentration camp in German-occupied Poland and liberated some 7,000 emaciated prisoners. About 58,000 others had been hurriedly marched westward before the Soviet Army approached. Auschwitz, the German word for the Polish town of Oswiecim, was the site of the largest Nazi concentration camp during WWII. It consisted of a concentration camp, a labor camp, and large gas chambers and crematoria. More than 1.3 million people were sent to Auschwitz between 1940-1945. Some 1.1 million of them were killed. Nine in 10 were Jews.



During WWII, the Nazi regime imprisoned an estimated 15-20 million people who they perceived as a political threat or inferior, especially Jews. They were held in camps and ghettos across Europe and subjected to abominable conditions, brutality, and murder in what has become known as the Holocaust. Auschwitz was the largest of these death camps and was divided into three main camps: Auschwitz I, Auschwitz-Birkenau, and Auschwitz III. Auschwitz I housed prisoners in abandoned Polish army barracks. Some were subjected to inhumane medical experiments carried out by SS doctors. Auschwitz II, also known as Auschwitz-Birkenau, held the greatest number of prisoners and also housed large gas chambers and crematoria. Auschwitz III was a work camp that housed prisoners working at a synthetic rubber factory. Other smaller sub-camps also existed.

The Nazis experimented with Zyklon B gas to kill prisoners at Auschwitz I. These tests were deemed successful and the program greatly expanded at Auschwitz-Birkenau. When new deportees arrived at Auschwitz-Birkenau, they immediately underwent selection. Some were saved to be used as forced labor, while others went directly to the gas chambers. This process tore families apart, and separated family members would typically never see one another again. One such family was the Guttman family. Irene Guttman and her twin brother Rene were living in Prague with their parents when German soldiers arrested Irene's father. He was sent to Auschwitz where he was killed in December 1941. The twins and their mother were deported to Theresienstadt ghetto and later to Auschwitz where their mother died. The 5-year-old twins were separated and subjected to horrific medical experiments under Dr. Josef Mengele. Their story is just one of many that occurred during the Holocaust.

On January 18, 1945, as the Soviet Army approached, the Nazis abandoned Auschwitz. The SS tried to hide evidence of the crimes committed at the camp by burning documents and blowing up several crematoria. The 'healthy' prisoners, numbering about 58,000, set off westward on a death march. Very few of them survived. The remaining prisoners, some 7,000, were too sick and starving to march and left to die in the camp.

Rene Guttman was herded onto a truck to be sent to his death, but Dr. Mengele countermanded the order, saying that only he could kill his twins. With this order, both Rene and Irene remained in the camp. On that bitterly cold morning of January 27th, prisoners huddled in their barracks. "We heard a grenade exploding near the entrance area," recalled a former prisoner. "We looked out and saw some Soviet reconnaissance soldiers approaching, guns in their hands. The soldiers came up and said: 'You are free at last.'" The Guttman twins recalled liberation day. "I remember walking out of Auschwitz. I do remember trying to look back and around me to see if I could find Irene because I was leaving this place. I did see her, but we had to march on. There was shooting all around us, then we were surrounded by Russians dressed in white uniforms, that was the liberation," said Rene. Irene, who was too weak to walk, was carried by a Polish peasant woman to her home.

One year later, a charity organization arranged for Irene to come to the United States along with other war orphans, where she was adopted. She wondered if she would ever see her brother Rene again. With the help of her adoptive family, they managed to locate Rene, who was living in Prague. The family adopted him as well, reuniting the twins in 1950. When evidence of the atrocities committed at Auschwitz and other concentration camps came to light, the world was shocked. Decades later, the 2005 United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution naming January 27th, the day that Auschwitz was liberated, as International Holocaust Remembrance Day. [Source: Battlefield Chronicles | Jenny Ashcraf | July 24, 2020 ++]

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## **The Ghost Matt Urban**

### **The Most Decorated Infantry Officer You've Never Heard Of**



Guinness World Records stopped tracking the world's most decorated soldiers because the importance and distinction of certain medals outweighs the objective number of medals a service member can be awarded—a distinction veterans certainly understand. What brought this to their attention was the medal count between Audie Murphy—long regarded as the most decorated U.S. soldier ever—and a little-known WWII veteran and Medal of Honor recipient named Matt Urban, whose medal count matched Murphy's. But no one knew that Urban had matched the well-known Murphy until



36 years after the end of WWII because Urban's recommendation and supporting paperwork were lost in the bureaucratic shuffle.

He was also awarded the French Croix de Guerre and the Legion of Merit but never knew until his military records were reviewed to award his Medal of Honor. And there were a lot of actions to review. President Carter called then retired Lt. Col. Matt Urban "The Greatest Soldier in American History" as he presented the Medal of Honor to Urban in 1980. The soldier's Medal of Honor citation alone lists "a series of actions" – at least 10 – that go above and beyond the call of duty. The Nazis called Urban "The Ghost" because he just seemed to keep coming back to life when they killed him. The soldier's seven Purple Hearts can attest to that.

Urban joined the Army ROTC at Cornell in 1941. It was just after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor and unfortunately for the Nazis, Urban graduated in time to land in North Africa in 1942. He was ordered to stay aboard a landing craft off the Tunisian coast, but when he heard his unit encountered stiff resistance on the beaches, he hopped in a raft and rowed to the fight. There he replaced a wounded platoon leader. Later, at the Battle of the Kasserine Pass, Urban destroyed a German observation post, then led his company in a frontal assault on a fortified enemy position. During one German counterattack, Urban killed an enemy soldier with his trench knife, then took the man's machine pistol and wiped out the rest of the oncoming Germans. He was wounded in his hands and arm. In North Africa, his actions earned him two Silver Stars, a Bronze Star, and two Purple Hearts.

It was in France where Urban would distinguish himself and earn his nickname. His division landed at Normandy on D-Day, and later at the French town of Renouf he spearheaded another gallant series of events. On June 14, 1944, two tanks and small arms began raking Urban's men in the hedgerows, causing heavy casualties. He picked up a bazooka and led an ammo carrier closer to the tanks. Urban then exposed himself to the heavy enemy fire as he took out both tanks. His leadership inspired his men who easily bested the rest of the German infantry. Later that same day, Urban took a direct shot in the leg from a 37mm tank gun. He continued to direct his men to defense positions. The next day, still wounded, Urban led his troops on another attack. He was wounded again and flown back to England.

In July 1944, he learned how much the fighting in the French hedgerows devastated his unit. Urban, still in the hospital in England, ditched his bed and hitchhiked back to France. He met up with his men near St. Lo on the eve of Operation Cobra, a breakout effort to hit the German flanks and advance into Brittany. He found his unit held down by a German strong point with two of his tanks destroyed and a third missing its commander and gunner. Urban hatched a plan to remount the tank and break through but his lieutenant and sergeant were killed in their attempts – so he mounted the tank himself. "The Ghost" manned the machine gun as bullets whizzed by and devastated the enemy. He was wounded twice more in August, refusing to be evacuated even after taking artillery shell fragments to the chest. He was promoted to battalion commander.

In September 1944, Urban's path of destruction across Europe was almost at an end. His men were pinned down by enemy artillery while trying to cross the Meuse River in Belgium. Urban left the command post and went to the front, where he reorganized the men and personally led an assault on a Nazi strongpoint. Urban was shot in the neck by a machine gun during the charge across open ground. He stayed on site until the Nazis were completely routed and the Allies could cross the Meuse. And that's just his Medal of Honor citation.

In a 1974 interview with his hometown newspaper, the Buffalo News, he credits his survival to accepting the idea of dying in combat. "If I had to get it," Urban said, "it was going to be while I was doing something. I didn't want to die in my sleep." The reason he never received a recommendation for the Medal of Honor was because the recommendation was just lost in the paperwork shuffle. His commander, Maj. Max Wolf filed the recommendation, but it was lost when Wolf was killed in action. "When I came home, I never thought about war," he said in a 1988 press report. "That's why the medal was 35 years late. ... I just never pursued it." It was the enlisted men who fought with Urban who started asking about "The Ghost's" Medal of Honor. Matt Urban died in 1995 at age 75 and is interred at Arlington National Cemetery. [Source: We Are The Mighty | Blake Stilwell | July 21, 2020 ++]

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## WWII Photos

### Villafranca, Italy Battle Casualty



**Men of the U.S. Fifth Army, 1st Bn, 85th Mountain Infantry, 10th Mountain Division, give blood plasma to a wounded German soldier at an aid station in Villafranca, Italy, April 26, 1945**

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## WWII Operation Union II

### Marines Kill so Many Germans, Nazis Think them a Battalion

On Aug. 1, 1944, less than two months after D-Day, Marine Maj. Peter J. Ortiz, five other Marines, and an Army Air Corps officer parachuted into France to assist a few hundred French resistance fighters known as the Maquis in their fight against the Germans. Ortiz had already worked and trained with the Maquis in occupied France from Jan. to May 1944. The mission, Operation Union II, faced a rough start. Due to the danger of the Marines being spotted or drifting away from the drop zone, the jump was conducted at low altitudes. "Because of the limitations, we had to make this jump at 400 feet," said Sgt. Maj. John Bodnar in a Marines.com interview. "As soon as we were out of the aircraft our chutes opened and the next thing I remember is I was on the ground."

The Marines, some of the only ones to serve in the European theater in World War II, would make good use of the personnel they had. First, they recovered 864 supply crates of weapons and ammunition that were dropped after the men parachuted in. Then, they linked up with the Maquis and began training the resistance fighters. For a week, the Marines schooled the resistance fighters on how to use the new equipment, how to conduct ambushes, and how to harass German forces. They also conducted reconnaissance and mapped prime areas to conduct ambushes. When the fighters began conducting the ambushes, they were very successful. The exact casualty counts are unknown, but the Maquis and their Marine handlers inflicted so much damage so quickly that German intelligence believed an allied battalion had jumped in to assist the resistance instead of only six Marines and a soldier.

The Germans did not take the threat lightly. They remembered Ortiz from the Jan.-May 1944 mission and were still angry about his theft of 10 Gestapo trucks and a pass that let him drive the vehicles right through checkpoints. They began executing captured resistance members in public areas in an attempt to deter others. On 14 AUG, an entire town was murdered after the Germans found injured resistance members hiding in the church. The Marines were on a nearby

ridge and watched as the Germans destroyed the town. "They burned the place down," Bodnar later said in a Marines.com interview. "We just left there ... they killed them all."

The next day, the Marines were trying to move positions when a German patrol got the jump on them. They split up and tried to escape, but Ortiz, Risler, Bodnar, and a resistance member were pinned down. Fighting in a small town, Ortiz became worried that the Germans would destroy it if the Marines escaped. After his initial calls for a parley were ignored, he simply walked out while under fire to speak to the German commander. The German finally ordered his men to stop firing and Ortiz, fluent in German, French and a few other languages, offered to surrender himself and his men if the Germans would promise to leave the town alone. The German commander, believing he was fighting a company, agreed.

Risler and Bodnar stepped out and the Germans captured the resistance member, Joseph Arcelin. Luckily for the Arcelin, he was wearing the uniform of Sgt. Perry and so the Germans didn't execute him. Maj. Steven White, a Marine Corps intelligence officer and liaison to the 60th Anniversary Commemoration of Operation Union, said the Germans thought the Americans were lying about their numbers. "Initially, the German officer was in disbelief," White told Marines.com. "He did not believe that only 4 Marines had held off his forces for this long. He insisted that Maj. Ortiz turn over the rest of his team members." Ortiz was able to convince the German officer that the four men formed the entire team. He and his men spent the rest of the war in a German POW camp near Bremen, Germany. [Source: We Are The Mighty | Logan Nye | July 01, 2020 ++]

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## **Military History Anniversaries**

**01 thru 15 AUG**

Significant events in U. S. Military History over the next 15 days are listed in the attachment to this Bulletin titled, "**Military History Anniversaries 01 thru 15 AUG**". [Source: This Day in History [www.history.com/this-day-in-history](http://www.history.com/this-day-in-history) | July 2020 ++]

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## **WWII Bomber Nose Art**

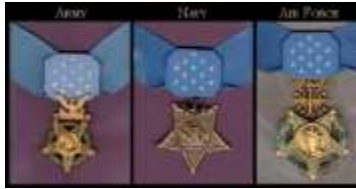
**[56] Pacific Princess**



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## Medal of Honor Citations

Clair Goodblood | Korea



*The President of the United States takes pride in presenting the*

**MEDAL OF HONOR** *posthumously*

*To*

**CLAIR GOODBLOOD**

**Rank and organization:** Corporal U.S. Army Co D, 7th Infantry Regiment

**Place and date:** Near Popsu-dong, Korea, 24 and 25 April 1951

**Entered service:** Burnham, Maine 1947

**Born:** 18 September 1929, Fort Kent, Main

### Citation

Cpl. Goodblood, a member of Company D, distinguished himself by conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty in action against an armed enemy of the United Nations. Cpl. Goodblood, a machine gunner, was attached to Company B in defensive positions on thickly wooded key terrain under attack by a ruthless foe. In bitter fighting which ensued, the numerically superior enemy infiltrated the perimeter, rendering the friendly positions untenable. Upon order to move back, Cpl. Goodblood voluntarily remained to cover the withdrawal and, constantly vulnerable to heavy fire, inflicted withering destruction on the assaulting force. Seeing a grenade lobbed at his position, he shoved his assistant to the ground and flinging himself upon the soldier attempted to shield him. Despite his valorous act both men were wounded. Rejecting aid for himself, he ordered the ammunition bearer to evacuate the injured man for medical treatment. He fearlessly maintained his 1-man defense, sweeping the onrushing assailants with fire until an enemy banzai charge carried the hill and silenced his gun. When friendly elements regained the commanding ground, Cpl. Goodblood's body was found lying beside his gun and approximately 100 hostile dead lay in the wake of his field of fire. Through his unflinching courage and willing self-sacrifice the onslaught was retarded, enabling his unit to withdraw, regroup, and resecure the strongpoint. Cpl. Goodblood's inspirational conduct and devotion to duty reflect lasting glory on himself and are in keeping with the noble traditions of the military service.



Corporal Clair is remembered at the Korean War Veterans Memorial in Washington. This is a National Parks Service and American Battle Monuments Commission location. He is buried in Burnham, Maine. His citations included:

- ★ Purple Heart
- ★ Combat Infantryman Badge
- ★ Marksmanship Badge
- ★ Korean Service Medal
- ★ National Defense Service Medal
- ★ Republic of Korea Presidential Citation
- ★ Republic of Korea War Service Medal
- ★ United Nations Service Medal
- ★ Army Presidential Unit Citation
- ★ Army Good Conduct Medal

[Source: <http://www.cmozs.org/recipient-detail/3118> | July 2020 ++]

#### \* Health Care \*



## Blood Donations

### Update 01: 600K TRICARE Users Identified as COVID-19 Survivors



More than 600,000 Tricare users in the military health system's East Region received emails Friday asking them to consider donating blood for research as "survivors of COVID-19." But given that just 31,000 persons affiliated with the U.S. military have been diagnosed with the coronavirus, the email came as a surprise to beneficiaries. "Just wondering [if] anybody [got] an email from Tricare saying since you are a COVID survivor, please donate your plasma.?? I have NOT been tested," wrote a beneficiary on Facebook. "Just remember all those people inputting data are human and make mistakes."

Humana Military, the company that manages Tricare for part or all of 31 states and the District of Columbia, issued a call to blood donors located near military installations that are collecting plasma from recovered coronavirus patients, also known as convalescent plasma, as a potential treatment for the illness. But the message went to every beneficiary located near a collection point.

*"As a survivor of COVID-19, it's safe to donate whole blood or blood plasma, and your donation could help other COVID-19 patients. Your plasma likely has antibodies (or proteins) present that might help fight the coronavirus infection. Currently, there is no cure for COVID-19. However, there is information that suggests plasma from COVID-19 survivors, like you, might help some patients recover more quickly from COVID-19," the email stated.*

Six hours later, Humana issued a mea culpa. "In an attempt to educate beneficiaries who live close to convalescent plasma donation centers about collection opportunities, you received an email incorrectly suggesting you were a COVID-19 survivor. You have not been identified as a COVID-19 survivor and we apologize for the error and any confusion it may have caused," the company wrote.

Marvin Hill, Humana's corporate communications lead, said the company apologizes "for the confusion caused by the original message," which was sent to recipients based on their proximity to a plasma collection facility and not "on any medical information or diagnosis." "As a part of an effort to educate military beneficiaries about convalescent plasma donation opportunities, Humana was asked to assist our partner, the Defense Health Agency. Language used in email messages to approximately 600k beneficiaries gave the impression that we were attempting to reach only people who had tested positive for COVID-19. We quickly followed the initial email with a clear and accurate second message acknowledging this. We apologize," Hill said in a statement sent to Military.com.

The Defense Department announced in late May that it planned to collect 8,000 units of plasma by 30 SEP from patients who recovered from COVID-19, part of a nationwide effort to study the effectiveness of convalescent plasma as a treatment for the illness. But on 17 JUL, DoD officials said they have increased the goal to 10,000. The department has already collected 4,601 units. "Our goal is to encourage all personnel who have fully recovered from COVID-19 to donate their convalescent plasma as a way to help their friends, family, or colleagues who may be suffering from the disease now or who may contract the disease in the future. The need is now," said Army Col. Audra Taylor, chief of the Armed Services Blood Program.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration approved convalescent plasma as an investigational therapy in March for those hospitalized with the illness, and more than 35,000 patients in the U.S. have received it. While there is no data that proves "definitively" that convalescent plasma works, there have been "encouraging reports and a lot of mechanistic reasoning that in fact convalescent plasma may be helpful," said Dr. Janet Woodcock, director of the Center for Drug Evaluation and Research at the FDA. "These studies are being done as we speak ... we need donors. Blood drives are ongoing, and the U.S. government will be trying to accelerate these drives for convalescent plasma," Woodcock said in a call with reporters last week. Antibodies found in convalescent plasma also serve as a source for another potential treatment for COVID-19: monoclonal antibodies. These are clones of isolated neutralizing antibodies -- either taken from humans or artificially created -- that are currently in development and safety testing as an "antibody cocktail" to treat the coronavirus for patients both in and out of hospitals, according to Woodcock.

In addition to collecting convalescent plasma at 15 military blood donation centers, DoD plans to deploy a mobile blood collection unit to areas with a high concentration of COVID-19 cases, Taylor said. To be eligible, donors must be at least 17 years old, weigh at least 110 lbs., be in good health and be symptom-free for 14 days. Additionally, potential donors must have a prior diagnosis of COVID-19. As of 20 JUL, 31,418 patients affiliated with the Defense Department have tested positive for COVID-19, including 21,909 service members. Nationwide, nearly 3.9 million Americans have contracted the virus and 141,426 have died. Worldwide, since the coronavirus was first detected in China in December, 14.7 million people have had confirmed cases and 611,599 have died, according to Johns Hopkins University. [Source: Military.com | Patricia Kime | July 22, 2020 ++]

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## **Chronic Traumatic Encephalopathy**

### **Military and Veterans Exposure Underreported**

Our military fighting for our country overseas come home to face a different kind of battle. We've heard the letters "CTE" in sports, but our troops are facing it, as well. Chronic traumatic encephalopathy, or CTE, is the term used to describe brain degeneration likely caused by repeated head traumas. The Augusta, Ga. (WRDW/WAGT) I-TEAM is finding out the Department of Defense numbers are underreported. It's "Call of Duty" meets hide and seek.

In an interview retired Sgt. Daniel Smith, a Purple Heart recipient, said, "We were trained to go out there and look for IEDs. So that's what we've done. The "looking" is not so bad. The "finding" is what's the problem. It wasn't 50-60 yards from us, but my head was sticking up. I was the gunner on the vehicle. And it rattled us pretty good. It knocked me completely in the turret backwards. I had blood coming out of both my ears," Smith said. Smith was back in combat three days later, and not officially diagnosed with a traumatic brain injury until he was back in the States six months later. "Have you been exposed to more than one blast?" I-TEAM reporter Laura Warren asked. "Yeah, I was exposed to a couple because we were out there looking for them," Smith said. Now, the Purple Heart recipient is fighting a different battle here at home, his brain injury, but he's not alone.

According to the Department of Defense, close to 400,000 in the military have been diagnosed with some sort of brain injury since 2000, but through our investigation, we found those numbers are underreported. "I have a number of veterans, and when I say a number, I mean a dozen, when I ask -- have you ever been blown up, and they'd say, 'Sure'. Sometimes a couple of times a week. I'd say total, in your first deployment," said Dr. Patrick Lillard, a retired neurosurgeon and psychiatrist. "How many times?" Warren asked. "Eight or maybe so," Lillard replied. Lillard is treating soldiers with brain injuries for more than 50 years. He's seen the effects of CTE, long before we had the research to name it.

"What is the difference in the impact of, say, a helmet to helmet tackle, versus a mortar blast?" Warren asked. "A patient that I've seen here, he was involved in an IED that blew his Humvee up in the air and upside down, the blast effect of that was 1,000 times more severe than two football players hitting each other," Lillard said. 1,000 times more severe. It's alarming considering the data we uncovered from the Department of Defense. Of those near 400,000 traumatic brain injuries recorded in the armed forces from 2000 to 2018, the I-TEAM found 82 percent of those are marked as 'mild.' And only 9,000 injuries of 2.5 percent are marked as 'severe'. The Army reported the most TBIs, or traumatic brain injuries, over those 18 years, a little more than 225,000. The Navy, Air Force, and Marines -- about 52,000 to 54,000. Again, the majority marked as "mild," and counted only once.

Lillard agrees this I-TEAM analysis reflects a misleading hole in data reporting since repeated head trauma is the hallmark of CTE. Current data reflects our government's practice of only tracking diagnosed TBIs. Even if a service member has more than one TBI, it's only counted once, meaning the true number of traumatic brain injuries may actually be in the millions. "I feel because of the numerous IED exposures since 9/11, there will be a profound epidemic of degenerative CTE cases in the coming years," Lillard said. "And the question is, are we prepared to evaluate them and treat them? And is there something we can do earlier by not ignoring the problem but taking care of them immediately."

Most of what we know about CTE is thanks to Dr. Ann McKee's research. She is the chief neuropathologist for the Department of Veterans Affairs in Boston who helped start a brain bank, since right now, the only way to diagnose CTE is by autopsying the brain after death. "How widespread of a problem might this be?" Warren asked. "It's not just these major injuries, it's the smaller ones, too -- and we're finding there can be long-lasting effects," McKee said. Smaller injuries like the ones the Department of Defense records as mild, and while most of the more than 80 brains in McKee's brain bank belong to athletes, they are actively studying military veterans. "So how many veterans' brains have you studied so far? How many have you collected in the brain bank?" Warren asked. "It's about 100, I don't have

the exact number for you,” McKee said. “How many of those had CTE?” “It’s about a third, maybe a little more than that,” McKee said.

And back to Smith ... “Tell me how many of these CTE symptoms do you identify with,” Warren asked. “Memory loss, confusion, impaired judgment, impulse control problems, aggression, depression, anxiety, suicidal thoughts, and towards the end stages, tremors, shaking similar to Parkinson’s. Everything except the tremors,” he said. Does Smith have CTE? Right now, we don’t know. Researchers are hoping they are on the verge of being able to diagnose CTE while victims are alive. And the hope is to keep it from progressing. Experts like Lillard say there needs to be realistic data on head injuries and serious changes when it comes to military protocol. “Are you worried about the future?” Warren asked. “I worry all the time and there have been times I’ve had my dark moments,” Smith said. And Sgt. Daniel Smith is hoping he lives to see those changes. [Source: WRDW News | Laura Warren (Opinion) | July 20, 2020 ++]

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## **Carbon Monoxide Poisoning**

### **What it is & How to Prevent It**

Carbon monoxide (CO) is an odorless, colorless gas formed by the incomplete combustion of fuels. When people are exposed to CO gas, the CO molecules will displace the oxygen in their bodies and lead to poisoning. Since CO has no odor, color or taste, it cannot be detected by our senses. This means that dangerous concentrations of the gas can build up indoors and humans have no way to detect the problem until they become ill. Furthermore, when people become sick the symptoms are similar to the flu, which can cause victims to ignore the early signs of CO poisoning.

The CDC estimates that approximately 400 people die from unintentional CO exposure in the United States every year. The good news is that carbon monoxide poisoning can be prevented with simple actions such as installing a CO alarm and maintaining fuel burning appliances. In simple terms, CO is produced whenever a material burns. Homes with fuel-burning appliances or attached garages are more likely to have CO problems. Common sources of CO in our homes include fuel-burning appliances and devices such as:

- Clothes dryers, Water heaters, Furnaces or boilers
- Fireplaces, both gas and wood burning
- Gas or wood stoves and ovens
- Motor vehicles
- Grills, generators, power tools, lawn equipment
- Tobacco smoke

There are a number of ways people can be exposed to high levels of carbon monoxide while participating in activities such as camping, fishing, hunting and boating.

- Items such as camp stoves, charcoal grills, fuel-burning lanterns and generators should never be used inside a tent, RV or cabin
- Do not place portable generators near open doors and windows
- Ice fishing houses that use heating equipment should have a working CO alarm installed and users should crack a window for additional ventilation
- Heating equipment in cabins and ice houses should be regularly inspected and be in good condition
- Boaters should be aware of exhaust area at the back of the boat and should tow passengers at least 20 feet from this area
- Be aware of exhaust from neighboring boats when parked near them
- Consider installing a CO alarm in the cabin of boats

To Protect your family from CO poisoning

- Properly vent and maintain fuel-burning appliances. It is important to know what appliances in your home are fuel-burning and make sure that they are maintained properly. All of these appliances should be vented to the outside. You should have your fuel-burning appliances (ex. furnace) checked by a qualified heating contractor every year to look for potential problems. It is also a good idea to know the signs of a potential CO problem:
  - Streaks of soot around fuel-burning appliances, or fallen soot in a fireplace
  - Absence of an upward draft in your chimney
  - Excess moisture and condensation on windows, walls and cold surfaces
  - Rusting on flue pipes or appliance jacks
  - Orange or yellow flame in combustion appliances (the flame should be blue)
  - Damaged or discolored bricks at the top of the chimney
- Never use appliances intended for outdoor use inside. Examples include barbecue grills, camp stoves, portable generators or gas-powered lawn equipment. Do not use an oven to heat your home. Not only is it a fire risk, it is also a carbon monoxide hazard. Do not run or idle your vehicle in an attached garage. Instead, back your vehicle out right away. Check that your vehicle's exhaust pipe is not blocked, for example, by snow during the winter.

Identifying CO poisoning can be difficult because the symptoms are similar to the flu. CO is often called the “silent killer” because people will ignore early signs and eventually lose consciousness and be unable to escape to safety. For most people, the first signs of exposure include mild headache and breathlessness with moderate exercise. Continued exposure can lead to more severe headaches, dizziness, fatigue and nausea. Eventually symptoms may progress to confusion, irritability, impaired judgment and coordination, and loss of consciousness. You can tell the difference between CO poisoning and the flu with these clues:

- You feel better when you are away from home
- Everyone in the home is sick at the same time (the flu virus usually spreads from person to person)
- The family members most affected spend the most time in the house
- Indoor pets appear ill
- You don't have a fever or body aches, and you don't have swollen lymph nodes that are common with the flu and some other infections
- Symptoms appear or seem to get worse when using fuel-burning equipment

Don't ignore a CO alarm if it is sounding. If people in the home are exhibiting symptoms of CO poisoning, immediately leave the building and call your local fire department. In cases where residents are feeling fine, call your local gas utility company or a qualified technician to help identify the cause of the problem. [Source: Minnesota Department of Health | July 2020 ++]

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## **Coronavirus Vaccine**

### **Update 05: Likely Not to Be as Effective for Older People**

People around the world are holding their collective breath, dreaming of the day a vaccine finally brings the coronavirus to its knees. Unfortunately, the reality is likely to be messier. Experts are divided about how quickly a vaccine might be ready and how effective it will be once it's released. In addition, history suggests the vaccine might not work as well in older folks — the people most in need of protection from COVID-19, the disease caused by the coronavirus. Earlier this year, Scientific American noted that the human immune system goes through two significant changes over a lifetime — once shortly after birth, and again when a person reaches old age. Thus, vaccines that work well for younger people might not be as impactful for those in a later stage of life, whose immune systems are not as efficient.

Recently, AARP sounded a similar alarm. It noted that the 2017--2018 flu vaccine was 38% effective in the general population, but less than 20% effective in people over 65. If the coronavirus vaccine follows a similar pattern, it will still be helpful. A vaccine that prevents younger folks from getting sick should also prevent the spread of COVID-19 to those over age 50. But a vaccine that doesn't work as well in older adults will leave a lot of people vulnerable to the coronavirus. AARP notes that a vaccine's effectiveness depends on the "seroconversion of infection." This term refers to the body's production of detectable levels of an antibody. Paul Duprex, director of the Center for Vaccine Research at the University of Pittsburgh, told AARP that a coronavirus vaccine might get to seroconversion in 50% or less of people: "If you get just over 50 percent in younger, healthy people, that's like fighting a battle with one leg. If the vaccine doesn't work as well in older folks — say, 25 percent — it's like fighting the battle with one and a half of your legs missing."

Scientists now have the ability to add extra ingredients to vaccines to make them more effective, AARP notes. In addition, it is possible that multiple vaccines — including versions that work better in seniors — will be developed. But all of this suggests that people should not put too much faith in a vaccine to keep them safe. Instead, practicing social distancing and other safety protocols — such as wearing a mask — makes sense. Duprex urges people to take steps — including exercising regularly, eating better and getting plenty of rest — that will fortify their immune systems. That is especially important for anyone over age 60, he says. Eating better and exercising more are both among the tips we suggest in "7 Ways Your Life Should Change Before the Next Pandemic."

Duprex also reminds people that any progress related to vaccines should get us closer to the day when the pandemic finally ends. Duprex says: "Let's make sure a useful vaccine helps older people, but let's also quash this thing in younger people so we reduce the overall circulation of the virus. That's what happened with measles. And measles is the most infectious human virus on the planet." [Source: MoneyTalksNews | Chris Kissell | July 10, 2020 ++]

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## **Coronavirus Vaccine**

### **Update 06: White House 'Very Confident' By Year's End**

The effort to produce a COVID-19 vaccine and better treatments by year's end is on track, a White House senior official said 13 JUL. Within weeks, Phase III clinical trials will begin for at least one of the several vaccine candidates developed by Operation Warp Speed (<https://www.hhs.gov/about/news/2020/06/16/fact-sheet-explaining-operation-warp-speed.html>), a collaboration between the Defense Department, National Institutes of Health, and other agencies, the official told reporters. "The current outbreaks may help us get a vaccine faster than if we had no outbreaks," he said on condition of remaining unnamed. The reason: clinical trials need 30,000 participants and must take place in locations where outbreaks are occurring. The unexpected surge in cases over the summer mean those two conditions are now easier to meet.

The official said that Warp Speed managers are "very confident" and "encouraged by the early data" that came in last week on vaccine candidates. He also said a number of manufacturing sites will be ready to begin production of vaccines within four to six weeks. "We feel very confident that by the end of the year we will have tens of millions of vaccines to put into American arms," he said. OWS is also working on antibody-based therapeutics: medicines that could lessen the effects of the virus, including some that could be applied prophylactically (before a patient gets sick. These would work like mini vaccines, shielding vulnerable populations such as medical workers unlike a vaccine becomes available. The official said he hopes to have these in the fall.

More than 50 of these therapeutics efforts are based on monoclonal antibodies "because the tech has advanced so much," enabling "rapid" increases in production, Janet Woodcock, the director of the Center for Drug Evaluation and Research at the U.S. Food and Drug Administration told reporters. Highly potent monoclonal antibodies are playing a big role in that push for therapeutics. There are currently more than 50 monoclonal antibody programs ongoing "because the tech has advanced so much," enabling "rapid" increases in production, Janet Woodcock, the director of

the Center for Drug Evaluation and Research at the U.S. Food and Drug Administration told reporters. Later this month, OWS will begin clinical evaluation of various therapeutics with two master protocols, one for outpatient subjects and inpatient subjects, enabling researchers to “evaluate multiple antibodies in the same trial,” she said.

But some scientists, including at Duke University, have said it’s unlikely that a vaccine will be widely available by year’s end, let alone to meet a demand that could reach 25 million doses. The U.S. simply lacks the capacity to produce vaccines that quickly. A small Canada-based company called Medicago, which has received DARPA funding for its innovative approach to vaccine production, is trying to change that. The company essentially inserts a DNA sequence into soil bacteria and then grows plants (a cousin of the tobacco plant) that can be turned into vaccine doses. They project that they’ll eventually be able to produce ten million doses a month by the end of 2021.

On 14 JUL, company officials announced that they had begun Phase I clinical trials of their vaccine candidate. Medicago CEO Dr. Bruce Clark said that the firm has been in contact with Operation Warp Speed and has “had great discussions and interactions with their leadership.” But they remain a relatively small player in the vaccine biotechnology industry. “The concern from a company like ours, it’s difficult for us to get the attention of the funding agencies,” said Clark, noting that they have to compete for attention with other, much larger companies that aren’t necessarily the most innovative players in the field. “New technology doesn’t always come from the big players...Let’s not perpetuate a model shown to be predictable,” he said of the current approach to vaccine development. “It produces something; but it’s not a step change, not changing the game. Companies like ours can change the game.” [Source: Defense One | Patrick Tucker | July 14, 2020 ++]

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## Covid-19 Fake Cures

### MMS & Thrive

**Miracle Mineral Solution (MMS)** -- **Mark Grenon**, 62, and his sons, Jonathan Grenon, 34, Jordan Grenon, 26, and Joseph Grenon, 32, who allegedly marketed "Miracle Mineral Solution" (MMS), a toxic bleach, as a cure for COVID-19, have been charged with conspiracy to defraud the United States, conspiracy to violate the Federal Food, Drug and Cosmetic Act, and criminal contempt. According to the criminal complaint affidavit, the Grenons allegedly:

- Directed their customers to ingest MMS, a solution that contains sodium chlorite and water, which causes the solution to become chlorine dioxide, a powerful bleach
- Claimed that MMS can treat, prevent, and cure COVID-19
- Marketed MMS as a miracle cure-all for dozens of other serious diseases and disorders, including cancer, Alzheimer's, autism, multiple sclerosis, and HIV/AIDS, even though the FDA had not approved MMS for any use
- Sold tens of thousands of bottles of MMS nationwide under the guise of Genesis II Church of Health and Healing, an entity they allegedly created to avoid government regulation of MMS
- Willfully violated civil court orders to halt distribution of MMS
- Sent letters to the judge presiding over the civil case saying that they would not comply with the Court's orders and that the judge should be "taken out."

The judge ordered that all websites selling MMS be immediately removed from the Internet and that all supplies involved in the product creation be confiscated and destroyed. Multiple agencies were called to the "church" location in Bradenton, Fla. in connection with search warrants and the federal order. Hazmat crews were reportedly called to assist with the warrants. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has strongly urged consumers not to purchase or use MMS, explaining that drinking MMS is the same as drinking bleach and can cause dangerous side effects, including severe vomiting, diarrhea, and life-threatening low blood pressure. The FDA has received reports of people requiring hospitalizations, developing life-threatening conditions, and dying after drinking MMS. [Source: US Attorney's Office Southern District of Florida news release | July 8, 2020 ++]

**Thrive Anti-Viral Wellness Booster** -- Under an administrative settlement with the Federal Trade Commission (FTC), **Marc Ching**, the California-based marketer of a supplement called Thrive, which consists mainly of Vitamin C and herbal extracts, is barred from: (a) continuing to make baseless claims that Thrive can treat, prevent, or reduce the risk of COVID-19, and (b) making unsupported cancer treatment or prevention claims for products containing cannabidiol (CBD). In April, the FTC announced that Ching agreed to a preliminary federal court order that imposed similar terms. The order also requires Ching to send written notices to customers and retailers of Thrive, that: (a) clearly explain that it will not treat, prevent, or reduce the risk of COVID-19, (b) CBD-EX, CBD-RX, and CBD-Max will not treat cancer, and (c) informs customers and retailers of Ching's settlement with FTC. According to the FTC's federal district court complaint and administrative complaint seeking temporary relief, Ching:

- Since at least December 2018 advertised and sold Thrive online, through his Whole Leaf Organics website
- Began in March 2020 marketing Thrive as an "anti-viral wellness booster" that treats, prevents, or reduces the risk of COVID-19
- Advertised and sold Thrive online, with a 50-capsule bottle selling for \$36.99
- Falsely stated that these benefits of Thrive were clinically proven
- Used his Whole Leaf Organics Web site to advertise and sell three CBD-containing products, CBD-EX, CBD-RX, and CBD-Max, falsely claiming they were effective cancer treatments

Ching's administrative case is scheduled to begin on January 7, 2021. [Source: FTC press release | July 10, 2020  
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## Covid-19 Misinformation

### COVID INFO FROM JOHNS HOPKINS HOSPITAL Email

Misinformation about COVID-19 purporting to come from Johns Hopkins is circulating widely online, including one particular message described as an "excellent summary" that has been shared extensively worldwide in the past few weeks. The message, which has no identifiable connection to Johns Hopkins, includes approximately 20 bullet points, the first of which begins "**The virus is not a living organism** ...". It is sometimes attributed to a Johns Hopkins doctor, or immunologist, or to "Irene Ken, whose daughter is an Asst. Prof in infectious diseases at Johns Hopkins University."

The information, which is being widely shared via email and on social media, has been reviewed by the popular online fact-checking resource Snopes (<https://www.snopes.com/fact-check/johns-hopkins-covid-summary>) and labeled "misattributed." A Johns Hopkins statement says the message "lack[s] credibility." "We have seen rumors and misinformation circulating on social around the coronavirus and have received questions from many of you about these posts," Johns Hopkins Medicine said in a statement. "Rumors and misinformation like this can easily circulate in communities during a crisis. The rumors that we have seen in greater volumes are those citing a Johns Hopkins immunologist and infectious disease expert. We do not know the origin of these rumors and they lack credibility." You can find reliable information about COVID-19 from Johns Hopkins experts at <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu> and <https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/coronavirus>.

Experts suggest that when evaluating information you find online, confirm that it comes from a trusted source—such as the Centers for Disease Control and Infection, the World Health Organization, or a reputable news organization—before sharing it. If a post makes a scientific or medical claim and attributes it to a specific source, such as Johns Hopkins, try verifying the information through the organization's publicly available resources.

"If you see something on social media and you want to take action based on it, it is important to first check whether a trusted source, such as a local newspaper, has reported that information," says Mark Dredze, an associate professor of computer science at Johns Hopkins who studies how information circulates via social media. "Be skeptical and consult a trusted authority. Go to the websites of the CDC or local public health authorities, and check if it's something they recommend. If it's something medically related, consult with your doctor."



Tara Kirk Sell, a senior scholar at the Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security, studies misinformation and rumors in response to public health events. She shared her expertise in a recent episode of the Johns Hopkins podcast Public Health On Call. "There are a number of things that can be harmful about [misinformation]," she said. "People can waste their money, people can think they're protected when they're not protected and take risky actions they shouldn't be taking, and sometimes these [fake] cures can harm people themselves." [Source: The HUB | <https://hub.jhu.edu/2020/04/03/coronavirus-misinformation-rumors-social-media> | July 2020 ++]

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## **COVID-19 Vulnerability**

### **Update 04: Giving up Smoking May Lower Your Risk**

The coronavirus poses an ever-greater danger to younger men and women — particularly those who smoke, according to a new study from researchers at the University of California, San Francisco. Although COVID-19, the disease caused by the coronavirus, remains more dangerous for older adults, about one-third of younger adults now face serious health risks if they contract the coronavirus, the researchers found. The researchers looked at data from a nationally representative sample of approximately 8,400 men and women ages 18 to 25 and assigned what they characterize as “medical vulnerability” scores to groups of study participants. These scores account for factors such as smoking within the previous 30 days. They also account for obesity, heart conditions, diabetes, current asthma, liver conditions, and immune conditions such as lupus, gout and rheumatoid arthritis.

Medical vulnerability overall was 33.3% for young men and 29.7% for young women. But vulnerability was much worse for smokers. In fact, medical vulnerability was just 16.1% for the nonsmokers included in the study compared with 31.5% for all young adults in the study, both smokers and nonsmokers. In a press release, lead researcher Sally Adams of the UCSF Division of Adolescent and Young Adult Medicine said: “Recent evidence indicates that smoking is associated with a higher likelihood of COVID-19 progression, including increased illness severity, ICU admission or death. Smoking may have significant effects in young adults, who typically have low rates for most chronic diseases.” To make matters worse, Adams pointed to research that shows today’s young adults are starting to smoke at higher rates than adolescents, which is a reversal from prior trends. Significantly fewer young women smoke than young men, the researchers noted. However, women are more likely to have three conditions — asthma, obesity and immune conditions — that make them vulnerable to severe COVID-19 outcomes.

In recent weeks, infection rates appear to be much higher among young adults than they were this spring. The researchers cited statistics from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention for the week ending 27 JUN showing there were 34.7 hospitalizations per 100,000 people for those ages 18 to 29, and 306.7 hospitalizations per 100,000 people for patients over 65. By contrast, for the week ending 18 APR, there were 8.7 hospitalizations per 100,000 people for the 18-to-29 age bracket, compared with 128.3 per 100,000 people for those over 65. That means the June numbers represent a 299% increase in hospitalizations for young adults versus a 139% increase in hospitalizations for older adults. [Source: MoneyTalksNews | Chris Kissell | July 14, 2020 ++]

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## **Covid-19 Vulnerability**

### **Update 05: The Older You Are, the Greater the Risk**

The coronavirus pandemic is a danger to everyone. Regardless of age or health, you can become very sick — and possibly even die. However, the overwhelming percentage of fatalities attributed to COVID-19 involve older people. While adults ages 65 and older account for 16% of the U.S. population, they make up 80% of deaths tied to COVID-19, the disease caused by the new coronavirus, according to the Kaiser Family Foundation (KFF). The percentage of victims who are 65 or older differs from state to state, however. The foundation recently dug into the numbers.

Using provisional statistics from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention as of July 22 — which are for the week ending July 11 — the Kaiser Family Foundation concluded that seniors account for the largest share of COVID-19 deaths in the following states:

- Idaho: People age 65 and older account for 94% of COVID-19 deaths
- New Hampshire: 92%
- Massachusetts: 90%
- West Virginia: 90%
- Rhode Island: 90%
- Minnesota: 89%
- Connecticut: 89%
- Pennsylvania: 87%
- Indiana: 86%
- Ohio: 86%

On the other hand, those who are 65 or older account for the smallest percentage of the COVID-19 fatalities in the following areas: The District of Columbia: 70%, Texas: 70%, New Mexico: 71%, Arkansas: 71%, Mississippi: 74%, Nebraska: 74%, and Arizona: 74%. Several states were excluded from the KFF analysis due to data discrepancies. Those states are Alaska, Hawaii, Maine, Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, Utah, Vermont and Wyoming. You can see how the other 41 states and D.C. fare in Figure 1 of the [Kaiser Family Foundation analysis](#).

One factor seems to tie together the states that have been especially dangerous for older residents. According to the foundation: “States that have reported a larger share of adults 65 and older who have died of COVID-19 tend to be those states that have had a disproportionate number of deaths in long-term care facilities.” As was reported in June, more than 40% of all coronavirus deaths in the U.S. have been linked to nursing homes. States in the South and the Sun Belt largely have seen better outcomes for residents age 65 and older. However, the Kaiser Family Foundation notes that the pandemic is peaking later in these states than in others, and the numbers might eventually change.

Not surprisingly, **the older you are, the greater the risk**, wherever you live. The KFF says 33% of the people who have died from COVID-19 in the U.S. have been age 85 or older. Regardless of your age or the state where you live, going to certain places and engaging in specific activities puts you at higher risk for infection with the coronavirus. [Source: MoneyTalksNews | Chris Kissell | July 24, 2020 ++]

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## Covid-19 Testing

### Update 01: How to Understand Your Test Results

Americans are being swabbed by the thousands to learn if they have covid-19, the disease caused by the novel coronavirus. It's how many are determining their risk of contracting or spreading the virus to someone else. Experts say testing is a vital component to controlling the outbreak, but one test result still isn't a green light to visit vulnerable friends or family members. The nature of covid-19, the time it takes for someone to develop symptoms and the varied ways the virus affects people make each test a snapshot in time more than a definitive answer. "I personally wouldn't consider a single test a license to go see my parents, who are older and would be at higher risk," said Carl Bergstrom, a University of Washington biology professor who studies infectious diseases.

The viral swab tests, seen at drive-through clinics across the country, tell people whether they're infected with the novel coronavirus on that particular day, said Lucy Wilson, an infectious-disease specialist and a professor at the University of Maryland Baltimore County. It takes time for the coronavirus to replicate to a critical mass for a swabbing test to detect it. The time this process takes varies from person to person and ranges from two to 14 days, experts say. "The problem is this virus is a strange virus," Bergstrom said. "The timing varies a lot in people." Imagine that you become infected today and are tested tomorrow; Bergstrom said "we have every reason to believe you're going to test

negative, even though you're infected." On average, people tend to show symptoms or test positive for the virus about five days after exposure, Wilson said. "It's just like a pregnancy test," Wilson said. A pregnancy test can detect only certain hormones after a certain number of days or weeks, but it doesn't mean you're not pregnant.

If you do start developing symptoms, such as a fever, sore throat or loss of smell, experts say you should absolutely get tested for the coronavirus. Wilson said people need to determine whether the symptoms they're experiencing are a result of the coronavirus or are another illness - such as strep or the flu. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention advises anyone with symptoms to stay home and self-isolate as much as possible. If you've been in contact with someone who has covid-19 but you don't have any symptoms, Wilson said, you should consider a 14-day self-quarantine and discuss whether to get tested with your health-care provider. As the Atlantic reported last month, it's still not clear how accurate viral tests are for people who haven't developed symptoms. There's a degree of uncertainty, even with a negative test result, and not a lot of data to determine exactly how early a swab test can start to detect the infection for a person showing no symptoms.

On top of all this, the rising demand for more testing has led to week-long delays for results. An average of 685,000 people were tested per day last week, according to data collected by the Covid Tracking Project and reported by the New York Times. The White House aims to reach 1 million tests a day by the fall. Experts say the backlog in some parts of the country makes the results useless for efforts to control the spread of the virus. Generally, people who have the virus are symptomatic for around six days, Bergstrom said. If the results take five days to come back, there's only so much a person can do to protect those around them. Bergstrom added the results become "absolutely useless" for efforts to quarantine or to trace contacts. This is why, regardless of testing, public health experts continue to stress wearing masks in public and physical distancing. In the absence of test results, or symptoms, keeping your distance from others helps in mitigating the spread of the disease.

There are still not enough tests for everyone to be regularly screened for the virus, said Erica Sohs, an infectious-disease expert and professor at the University of Nebraska Medical Center. Researchers at Harvard's Global Health Institute say the United States needs to triple, if not quadruple, the testing capacity to contain the virus. The actual number recommended by the institute varies day-to-day because the methodology is dependent on a number of variables. One potential solution as grade schools and universities weigh reopening in the fall is pool testing, where swabs from a group of people are tested all at once to save time and conserve supplies. "If you wanted to do surveillance testing just to make sure there's not a silent outbreak going on in a school, having pool testing would be helpful," Sohs said. "I wish we were talking more about that."

People who think they already had covid-19 in the spring but did not go to a hospital are getting antibody tests, also known as serology tests. Bergstrom said some just want to know whether that bad cold they had a few months ago was actually the novel coronavirus. Antibody tests can tell whether someone has already been infected with covid-19 by using a blood sample to identify the proteins a body produces one to three weeks after an infection, according to the CDC. "Right now, we don't really know what a positive antibody test means in terms of the degree to which you're protected." In general, antibodies help immune systems fight off any future infection from the same virus, but it's not clear how much protection covid-19 antibodies can provide or how long the protection might last. That's because immunity varies depending on the pathogen. Antibodies from a measles infection will provide a person lifelong immunity. Meanwhile, antibodies for a strain of influenza won't protect the body for nearly as long.

Antibody tests can also provide a false positive reading, meaning the test indicates you have antibodies from covid-19 when that's not the case. The false positive may just mean your body has antibodies for another coronavirus, like one that causes the common cold. "We're just not there yet with the accuracy of the antibody test," Wilson said. At the moment, experts can't say if antibodies from a past covid-19 infection provide someone immunity or even temporary protection from the virus. The virus is still so new. Because of this, Bergstrom said positive antibody tests shouldn't be used as "a license" to return to the office or other group activities. What antibody tests can provide is a broader understanding of the progression of an outbreak. In the District of Columbia, fewer than 6 percent of residents have tested positive for antibodies from the coronavirus out of 13,706 blood samples. The results show public health experts

who has and hasn't been exposed to the virus. According to the FDA, people with antibodies from the virus may be able to donate their plasma to be used as "a possible treatment" for those with the disease.

For anyone still waiting for their test results, experts say it's important to be aware of the caveats. The tests can determine only so much. Beyond what we know, Bergstrom said, everyone must weigh the risks and mitigate their own possibility for exposure. "We can't all stop living our lives entirely," Bergstrom said. "We have to make decisions about the risk we want to take on." [Source: The Washington Post | Teddy Amenabar (Opinion) | July 20, 2020 ++]

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## COVID-19 Headgear

### Update 06: Mask Washing

We should all wear cloth face coverings in public to help tamp down the spread of the coronavirus, according to organizations such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. And now a growing number of governments and even retailers are requiring them. However, the type of masks recommended by the CDC won't do much good if we don't keep them clean. The CDC says you should wash them after every use. To do it right, remove the mask carefully and toss it into the wash. Use the warmest water allowed for the fabric used to make the mask. If you don't plan on doing laundry right after wearing the mask, you can wash it by hand. The CDC recommends creating a bleach solution consisting of:

- 5 tablespoons (1/3 cup) household bleach per gallon of room-temperature water, or
- 4 teaspoons household bleach per quart of room-temperature water

Soak the mask in the bleach solution, letting it sit for five minutes. Then, rinse it with cool or room-temperature water. You should not use the mask until it is completely dry. If you use a bleach solution, make sure to choose a bleach intended for disinfection, as not all are. Check the label to be sure, and do not use any bleach past its expiration date. And of course, never mix household bleach with any cleanser, especially ammonia. Remember to wash your hands thoroughly after removing your mask, the exterior of which might have become contaminated with the virus. If you're committing one of the following mistakes, your hands may not be as clean as you think. Here are hand-washing mistakes you may be making and how to correct them:

- 1. Using hand sanitizer when soap and water are available --** Hand sanitizer is a very convenient way to keep your hands clean. However, it should be just a backup if soap and water are available. While hand sanitizer can reduce how many germs you have on your hands, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) says it doesn't get rid of all types of germs.
  - If your hands are visibly greasy or dirty, hand sanitizer may not be very effective. Also, if you have harmful chemicals on your hands such as heavy metals and pesticides, hand sanitizer may not remove them.
  - When using a hand sanitizer, check the product label to ensure it contains at least 60% alcohol.
- 2. Just rinsing --** Make sure you are washing your hands with soap and water frequently throughout the day. Always wash them with soap and water after using the restroom and before eating.
  - Don't get lazy and skip the soap. According to the CDC, soap is more effective at removing germs, dirt and harmful chemicals from your skin.
  - Plain water is better than nothing. Without access to soap and water — unless your hands are visibly dirty — you can use a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol. Air drying is fine, and if you use a towel, make sure it's clean.
- 3. Using antibacterial soap --** The CDC and U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) recommend washing with regular soap and water to kill germs and prevent the spread of disease. There's no need to use antibacterial soap to wash your hands. There are no proven benefits of using antibacterial hand soap. The FDA says there is not enough evidence

that antibacterial soaps you find at the store are better at preventing the spread of illness than regular soap. In addition, one ingredient, triclosan, is being examined for its possible effect on human health.

**4. Washing your hands infrequently --** While there's no need to be a germaphobe, washing your hands infrequently can leave you and those around you at risk. You want to wash your hands often with soap and water both to protect yourself and to prevent the spread of germs. Warm water or cold, bar soap or liquid — all are fine, the CDC says. The CDC recommends washing your hands particularly:

- During and after prepping food and before eating.
- Before and after caring for a sick person with vomiting and diarrhea, and before and after treating a wound or a cut.
- After using the toilet, helping a child use the toilet or changing a diaper.
- After coughing, sneezing or blowing your nose.
- After touching animals (they can spread disease), their food or their waste and after handling pet food and treats.
- After touching trash.

**5. Washing your hands too quickly --** Don't be in a hurry when washing your hands. Many people put soap on their hands, rub them together a few times, rinse and call them clean. This may remove some germs, but not enough to prevent the spread of disease.

- The CDC recommends washing your hands for 15 to 30 seconds to remove germs. Worldwide, many countries and global organizations have adopted guidelines for washing hands for about 20 seconds.
- Not sure how long is 20 seconds of hand-washing? Hum the "Happy Birthday" song twice while scrubbing with soap and water.

**6. Ignoring fingernails --** Your fingernails are great hiding places for germs and bacteria. People often ignore them during hand-washing and focus on the palms of their hands. Make sure you clean well under your fingernails, especially if they are long.

**7. Not drying your hands after washing --** Wet hands make it easier to transfer germs, so it's important to dry them after washing. There is no consensus on the best way to dry your hands. Studies suggest that a clean towel or an air dryer works well to keep germs at bay.

[Source: MoneyTalksNews | Chris Kissell & Veneta Lusk | July 22, 2020 ++]

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## **Covid-19 Virus Survivability**

### **Update 01: CDC Changes Isolation Recommendations**

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's self-isolation rules have been a facet of pandemic life in the nation since March. Those who test positive for the coronavirus but who do not have symptoms have counted down the minutes until they could be free to venture out, while the sick have worried about how long they could be a danger to their loved ones. Now, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, acknowledging expanded understanding about the infectiousness of the novel coronavirus, has changed some of its recommendations. It now advises most people with active cases of covid-19, the illness caused by the coronavirus, to isolate for 10 days after symptoms begin and 24 hours after their fever has broken. For those who have a positive test but are asymptomatic, the public health agency as of 17 JUL recommended isolating 10 days from the testing date. The CDC had previously recommended people isolate until two negative swabs for the coronavirus -- but that turned out to be impractical given the shortage of tests.

In the six months since the virus has been in the United States, multiple studies have suggested most people are infectious for only a short period, usually four to nine days. In one large contact-tracing study of high-risk interactions in hospitals and homes, exposures of people to the virus took place within five days of a patient's illness. CDC noted

that a "limited number of persons with severe illness" may continue to produce the virus longer and may warrant extending the isolation period to as much as 20 days. As with other guidelines about the coronavirus, much remains in flux, and differing opinions exist in different parts of the world about how long people should isolate or quarantine.

Isolation rules are for people who test positive, while the term quarantine is generally used for people who have been in contact with an infected person but do not have confirmed infections. The CDC continues to recommend a 14-day quarantine period. Switzerland requires people to isolate for 10 days, but some have argued that is still too long. In Taiwan, travelers from low-risk countries such as New Zealand, South Korea and Vietnam must quarantine in a hotel for just seven days. Visitors from higher-risk countries are still subject to a 14-day rule. The World Health Organization updated its guidance in June to recommend 10 days of isolation for those who do not have symptoms and at least 13 days for people with symptoms.

Julian Tang, a virologist with the University of Leicester in the United Kingdom and the National University of Singapore, said he has been advising clinical teams for several months that patients can be released from isolation at 10 days. He said papers examining when people are capable of spreading the virus have been remarkably consistent about the time frame for potential transmission. In a paper in *Nature*, researchers found that the virus starts to be neutralized by antibodies that appear on the fifth day of an infection and that by the eighth or ninth day, no live virus was detected. A study on nasal swabs and viral load published as a letter in the *New England Journal of Medicine* found that the amount of virus seems to drop off almost from the first day of symptoms.

"You're not going to reach absolute zero risk," Tang said, "but the studies have shown viral shedding mostly stops after 10 days." The CDC expressed similar sentiments in its recommendations, which contain the caveat that they are based on the best available information and "reflect the realities of an evolving pandemic." "Even for pathogens for which many years of data are available," the CDC stated, "it may not be possible to establish recommendations that ensure 100 percent of persons who are shedding replication-competent virus remain isolated." [Source: The Washington Post | Ariana Eunjung Cha | July 22, 2020 ++]

## \* Finances \*



## SSA Fund Depletion

### Update 16: Woes Accelerating — Blame the Pandemic & Birth Rate

You've probably heard that Social Security, a major source of many Americans' retirement income, soon will be on hard times. True enough. Social Security experts previously have said they expect the program's trust fund for Social Security Survivors Insurance (OASI) retirement benefits to be exhausted by 2034 unless the government acts to shore it up. Now, the story has grown worse: Two nonprofit institutions recently issued new reports showing that the coronavirus pandemic has dug Social Security's hole deeper. They expect the program's OASI retirement reserves could be depleted as early as 2031 or 2032. The gap grows. The Disability Insurance (DI) reserves for disability benefits are good until 2065. Refer to <https://www.ssa.gov/news/press/releases/2020/#4-2020-5> for the Social Security Board's APR 2020 projections.

That doesn't mean Social Security will entirely collapse in 2034. Rather, it means that payroll taxes will be the retirement program's only income in 2034. Without reserves to fund any OASI gap, those taxes would cover only 76%



of the program's obligations to Social Security retirement beneficiaries. Now, though, reports from two research institutions say that the pandemic is causing the Social Security reserves to shrink even faster than expected:

- [The Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget](#), discussing the pandemic's effect on government debt and deficits, gives Social Security's trust fund for retirement benefits just 11 more years — until 2031 — to run dry.
- [The Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania](#) projects that Social Security's retirement trust fund could be empty as soon as 2032.

Long before the pandemic, Social Security analysts knew to expect a shortfall in funds. Stephen C. Goss, chief actuary of the Social Security Administration, wrote in 2010 that the shortfall in funds is due to the aging of our population. It's not that we're living longer, however. It's that the birth rate has fallen in the U.S. Instead of our earlier average of three children per woman, the U.S. birth rate has dropped to two children per woman. The effect: Relatively fewer people are working and paying payroll taxes to support Social Security. Government can fix the problem, Goss adds: "Adjustments to taxes or benefits that offset the effects of the lower birth rate may restore solvency for the Social Security program on a sustainable basis for the foreseeable future."

Now, unemployment from the pandemic is adding to the problem. The Wharton School researchers call out three effects of the pandemic that are making things worse for Social Security:

- Unemployment. It is especially bad among low-wage workers, the report says. Their removal from the workforce has reduced payroll tax revenue. The longer the recession runs, the worse the problem grows.
- Low interest rates. We are in a climate of very low interest rates, as the Federal Reserve lowered its benchmark rate to near zero in March. That means Social Security trust funds generate less interest.
- Low inflation. Our current prolonged low inflation has kept earnings low for workers, further reducing the payroll tax revenue Social Security depends on.

If you are expecting to claim Social Security benefits in the future — and even if you are drawing benefits now — the exhaustion of Social Security's reserves could well affect your retirement. Exactly how is unknown. Without government action, current benefits could be reduced. The good news is this: The problem can be fixed. But will it be? CNBC writes: "Fixing that would require cutting benefits, raising taxes or a combination of both." Raising taxes would require action from Congress. Some adjustments can be made by changing the rules for paying out benefits.

So far, any reform seems far away. Plenty of ideas for Social Security's salvation have been floated but none appears to have gained traction. AARP, for example, has [proposed](#) 12 ways for putting the program on its feet, along with pros and cons. Here are just a few of them:

- Raise the full retirement age. Today's retirees are eligible for full benefits at around age 66 (depending on your birth date). Full retirement age is set to gradually move to 67 for retirees born in 1960 and sooner. Requiring retirees to wait longer to become eligible for their non-reduced benefit amount could help close the money gap.
- Increase or eliminate the payroll tax cap. Right now, workers pay Social Security taxes on earnings up to \$137,700. Earnings over that ceiling aren't taxed currently, so taxing more of workers' take-home pay would bring more taxes to the program.
- Increase the Social Security payroll tax rate. Taxing workers and employers at a higher rate could shore up the program's finances.

If you have a favored plan for fixing Social Security, you can work for action by joining an advocacy organization or contacting your elected [representatives](#) in Congress. [Source: MoneyTalksNews | Marilyn Lewis | July 24, 2020 ++]

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## Sales Tax

### Update 04: August State Holidays

States across the nation kick off sales tax holidays in late July and early August. Stroll into your favorite store during these windows, and you may be able to purchase items without being charged state sales tax. Think of it as a way to boost your savings — and a rare opportunity to get an upper hand on the taxman. In many of these summer sales tax holidays, back-to-school items are exempt items, including everything from clothes to school supplies. Other states extend the savings to things like office supplies and personal computers. None extend them to vehicle purchases

Holiday dates and the spending caps for exempt items also differ from state to state. So, check your state's rules before heading to the store. For most of the states in the following list, you can click on the state name to learn more.

1. [Arkansas](#): Aug. 1-2. (5/5% plus local rates up to 5.5%)
2. [Connecticut](#): The state has yet to formally announce dates for 2020, but last year the holiday was the week of Aug. 18-24. (7.25% plus local rates up to 1%)
3. [Florida](#): Aug. 7-9 (6% plus local rates up to 2.5%)
4. [Iowa](#): Aug. 7-8 (6% plus local rates up to 2%)
5. [Maryland](#): Aug. 9-15 (6%)
6. [Massachusetts](#): Aug. 29-30 (6.25%)
7. [Mississippi](#): July 31-Aug. 1. (7% plus local rates up to 1%)
8. [Missouri](#): Aug. 7-9. (4.225% plus local rates up to 7.513%)
9. [New Mexico](#): Aug. 7-9. (5.125% plus local rates up to 7.75%)
10. [Ohio](#): Aug. 7-9. (5.75% plus local rates up to 2.25%)
11. [Oklahoma](#): The state has yet to formally announce dates for 2020, but last year the holiday was Aug. 2-4, starting on the first Friday in August. (4.5% plus local rates up to 7%)
12. [South Carolina](#): Aug. 7-9. (6% plus local rates up to 3%)
13. [Tennessee](#): July 31-Aug. 2. (7% plus local rates up to 2.25%)
14. [Texas](#): Aug. 7-9. (6.25% plus local rates up to 2%)
15. [Virginia](#): Aug. 7-9. (4.3% plus local rates up to 2.7%)

Refer to the Sales Tax Institute's website <https://www.salestaxinstitute.com/resources/rates> to find the tax rates charged in all states and <https://www.salestaxinstitute.com/resources/sales-tax-faqs> for sales tax FAQ's. [Source: MoneyTalksNews | Chris Kissell | July 16, 2020 ++]

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## Coronavirus Financial Planning

### Update 21: Who Could Receive another Stimulus Check



If you're wondering when your next stimulus check will arrive, we don't have great news for you. The truth is that no one knows when — or whether — American households will see another round of payments from Uncle Sam. The

adoption of another federal coronavirus relief bill of any kind would require a divided Congress to work together a few months before a presidential election. That's not impossible — extraordinary times can bring the two sides together, as we saw earlier this year. But passing such legislation will be no small feat.

In mid-May, the House of Representatives passed a bill that includes a second round of stimulus payments — the Health and Economic Recovery Omnibus Emergency Solutions Act, or Heroes Act. But the Senate has yet to vote on the \$3.4 trillion bill, or to reveal its own version. In the meantime, we've dissected the Heroes Act to show you what a second round of stimulus checks would look like if the Heroes Act becomes law — or if Congress agrees on another version that contains the same stimulus payment provisions in the Heroes Act.

Under the Heroes Act, stimulus checks would be larger, on average, than they were under the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act, or CARES Act. The CARES Act authorized what it called “recovery rebates” of \$1,200 per eligible taxpayer and \$500 per eligible dependent, while the Heroes Act would authorize \$1,200 per taxpayer and \$1,200 per dependent for up to three dependents. The average Heroes Act rebate would be \$2,170 compared with an average CARES Act rebate of \$1,729, according to an analysis by the American Enterprise Institute. More people would be eligible for a rebate under the Heroes Act. They include the following groups.

### **1. People who earn less than a certain amount**

The Heroes Act uses the same income thresholds that the CARES Act used to determine a taxpayer's eligibility for a payment:

- \$150,000 for joint tax returns and surviving spouses
- \$112,500 for heads of households
- \$75,000 for people with other tax filing statuses, such as single

If you make more than the applicable amount listed above, you would not receive the full amount or would not receive a payment at all.

### **2. Retirees**

As was the case with the CARES Act payments, the Heroes Act payments would be available to Social Security recipients and people who do not earn enough money to be required to file a federal tax return, assuming they are otherwise eligible, according to the American Enterprise Institute analysis. This means retirees could receive a second stimulus payment.

### **3. More resident aliens**

Only people who have a Social Security number were eligible for a CARES Act payment. But people who have an individual taxpayer identification number, or ITIN, from the IRS would be eligible for a Heroes Act payment, the American Enterprise Institute reports. This means a greater number of resident aliens would be eligible for a Heroes Act payment than were eligible for a CARES Act payment. For example, resident aliens who don't qualify for a Social Security number but have an ITIN could not receive CARES Act payments but could receive a Heroes Act payment, assuming they are otherwise eligible.

### **4. More dependents**

Not only would dependents qualify for larger amounts under the Heroes Act, but more dependents would qualify for a payment under the bill than qualified under the CARES Act. As the American Enterprise Institute summarizes it: “Under the CARES Act, a household could receive an additional \$500 for each qualifying child, defined as a child under the age of 17. ... This excluded children that have turned 17, college students that may still be dependents, and other dependents, such as elderly parents. In contrast, the [HEROES] Act would provide [an] additional \$1,200 to all dependents (up to three per household). This definition includes those left out of the CARES Act.”

[Source: MoneyTalksNews | Karla Bowsher (Opinion) | July 16, 2020 ++]

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## Household Pulse

### Census Survey Estimates of Pandemic Impact | JUL 9-14

The Census Bureau on 15 JUL released new data from the experimental Household Pulse Survey. This Survey is the result of an effort by the Census Bureau and other federal statistical agencies to document temporal trends in how individuals are experiencing business curtailment and closures, stay-at-home orders, school closures, changes in the availability of consumer goods and consumer patterns, and other abrupt and significant changes to American life.

The Census Bureau expects to produce and disseminate data on a weekly basis. The sample is designed to produce estimates for all 50 states and the District of Columbia, as well as for the 15 largest metropolitan statistical areas. [Results](#) are scheduled to be released every Wednesday through July 29, 2020. Based on responses collected July 9 through July 14, the Household Pulse Survey estimates that during the COVID-19 pandemic:

- 50.1% of American adults live in households which have experienced a loss in employment income
- 35.1% of American adults expect to experience a loss in employment income
- 10.8% of Americans lived in households where there was either sometimes or often not enough to eat in the previous 7 days
- 40.6% of adults had delayed getting medical care in the previous 4 weeks
- 25.3% of respondents reported having little interest or pleasure in doing things more than half the days/nearly every day last week
- 23.3% of respondents reported feeling down more than half the days/nearly every day last week
- 33.8% of respondents reported feeling anxious or nervous more than half the days/nearly every day last week
- On average, households spent \$212.79 a week to buy food at supermarkets, grocery stores, online, and other places to be prepared and eaten at home.
- 26.4% of adults either missed last month's rent or mortgage payment, or had slight or no confidence that their household could make the next payment on time

[Source: U.S. Census Bureau Press Release | Release Number CB20-TPS.4 | July 15, 2020 ++]

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## Rentals

### Update 03: Cities Where Renting Is Cheaper than Owning

Americans' homeownership rate is 65.3%, according to the latest U.S. Census data. Owning a home is a big part of the American dream. With it comes with a sense of accomplishment, security and pride. It also comes with responsibility for maintaining the home, paying property taxes, carrying insurance, paying utilities and keeping up with community commitments such as paying association fees. These costs add up quickly, so it's important to weigh the advantages and disadvantages before you buy. LendingTree, the online loan marketplace, recently compared rents with mortgage payments in the 50 largest U.S. metros and concluded "renting is cheaper than owning in each of the nation's 50 largest metros" if you're still paying off your mortgage. Following are the metros where renting is cheaper by more than \$700 a month, beginning with cities with a smaller advantage for renters.

#### 13. Milwaukee

- Median monthly gross rent: \$885
- Median monthly housing costs (for homes with a mortgage): \$1,599
- Renting saves: \$714

Housing sales in metro Milwaukee were [down 25.2%](#) in May 2020 versus a year before, with a lack of homes for sale cited as a drag on the market. The average sale price of a home in the metro area rose 8.3% in April versus a year before, to \$266,922, the Milwaukee Business Journal says. Milwaukee's \$714 gap between the costs of renting and buying landed it the No. 13 spot on LendingTree's list.

## 12. Seattle

- Median monthly gross rent: \$1,403
- Median monthly housing costs (for homes with a mortgage): \$2,154
- Renting saves: \$751

Prior to the COVID-19 outbreak in the U.S., home prices in the Seattle area were growing faster than in any other major American city except Phoenix, according to [The Seattle Times](#). Prices rose 6.9% year over year there in March, compared with an average of 4.4% for the rest of the country. So despite having a higher typical rent than in many of the other cities on this list, renting offers big savings over owning a home in the Emerald City.

## 11. Philadelphia

- Median monthly gross rent: \$1,114
- Median monthly housing costs (for homes with a mortgage): \$1,869
- Renting saves: \$755

Both median rent and median home values rose in Philly for 2019, according to [Curbed Philadelphia](#). However, the number of available homes declined, which may be part of the reason renting is so attractive here.

## 10. Sacramento, California

- Median monthly gross rent: \$1,219
- Median monthly housing costs (for homes with a mortgage): \$1,988
- Renting saves: \$769

Renting is a clear winner in Sacramento. And yet, there's room to grow if you're interested in homeownership. The city is among Indeed.com's [2019 list](#) of the best cities for job seekers, ranking in the top 20.

## 9. Chicago

- Median monthly gross rent: \$1,092
- Median monthly housing costs (for homes with a mortgage): \$1,861
- Renting saves: \$769

Prior to the coronavirus pandemic hitting the U.S., experts expected Chicago's [2020 housing market](#) to be relatively flat, with minor decreases in both home prices and sales. That would be a good result for renters, who are seeing strong savings over homeownership in the Windy City.

## 8. Hartford, Connecticut

- Median monthly gross rent: \$1,090
- Median monthly housing costs (for homes with a mortgage): \$1,947
- Renting saves: \$857

If you're looking to relocate and save on housing costs, consider Hartford. It recently made Glassdoor's list of the [top 10](#) cities for a new job, based on hiring opportunity, cost of living and job satisfaction. The city boasts a median salary of \$60,320.

## 7. San Diego

- Median monthly gross rent: \$1,569
- Median monthly housing costs (for homes with a mortgage): \$2,478
- Renting saves: \$909

In spite of pandemic-related job losses, San Diego home prices are on the rise, The San Diego Union-Tribune [found](#) in the latest data. In fact, they're rising faster here than anywhere in California, making renting in San Diego look like a bargain.

## 6. Providence, Rhode Island

- Median monthly gross rent: \$945
- Median monthly housing costs (for homes with a mortgage): \$1,863
- Renting saves: \$918

You can spend the money you save by renting in Providence on the city's legendary restaurant scene. Two of the city's chefs were among 2020's James Beard Award semifinalists.

## 5. Boston

- Median monthly gross rent: \$1,404
- Median monthly housing costs (for homes with a mortgage): \$2,365
- Renting saves: \$961

Like Sacramento, Boston ranks high on Indeed.com's Best Cities for Job Seekers report, coming in at No. 3. More good news: The Boston housing market is one of the fastest recovering from the recent slump caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, trailing only Denver, according to [Forbes](#).

## 4. Los Angeles

- Median monthly gross rent: \$1,463
- Median monthly housing costs (for homes with a mortgage): \$2,490
- Renting saves: \$1,027

Living among the stars doesn't necessarily require you to match their income, especially if you're renting. Average asking rent in Los Angeles is down compared with this time in 2019, according to a report in [Los Angeles Magazine](#), which blamed the economic crises related to the COVID-19 outbreak.

## 3. San Jose

- Median monthly gross rent: \$2,108
- Median monthly housing costs (for homes with a mortgage): \$3,198
- Renting saves: \$1,090

Renting in San Jose might not be cheap — the city has the highest median rent on this list — but it sure looks that way compared with the alternative of having a mortgage there. On the bright side, the city tops Indeed.com's 2019 list of the best cities for job seekers.

## 2. San Francisco

- Median monthly gross rent: \$1,790
- Median monthly housing costs (for homes with a mortgage): \$2,953
- Renting saves: \$1,163

You may not be able to afford to buy a home in San Francisco, but the high rents here might be worth it if you get a great job. Indeed.com's latest Best Cities for Job Seekers report named the city one of the best metropolitan areas for job seekers, just behind its southern neighbor San Jose. Additionally, it's one of the fastest-recovering housing markets in the COVID-19 era, according to [Forbes](#).

## 1. New York City

- Median monthly gross rent: \$1,391
- Median monthly housing costs (for homes with a mortgage): \$2,731
- Renting saves: \$1,340

The biggest savings to be found from renting versus buying a home are in none other than the Big Apple, where the cost of renting is about half the cost of homeownership. What a difference a year makes: Last year, typical rent in NYC was only about \$250 below the typical mortgage payment.

[Source: MoneyTalksNews | Elizabeth Lotts | June 17, 2020 ++]



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## Work at Home Scams

### Update 02: Videos to View Before your Taken

As the Coronavirus continues to spread, you may be looking for ways to make money without ever stepping foot outside your door. Maybe you saw an ad online for a business coaching program you can do from your living room. Or maybe you got a call about getting paid to stuff envelopes from your dining room table. While these might look like easy ways to earn quick money and stay safe at home – most of these jobs are scams. Watch the video at [https://www.consumer.ftc.gov/sites/www.consumer.ftc.gov/files/video-0184\\_workathomescam\\_640x360.jpg](https://www.consumer.ftc.gov/sites/www.consumer.ftc.gov/files/video-0184_workathomescam_640x360.jpg) to learn how you can be on the lookout for work-at-home scams. It is the first-person story about a retired nurse's work-at-home scam experience, and what she did about it. Learn more about work-at-home businesses here: You might also view the FTC Business Opportunity fraud video at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OoB2PKYbu4Q>. In it real consumers, who fell for the pitch, tell their stories and a former scammer gives an insider account of how these operations use high-pressure tactics and how consumers can protect themselves.

Check out the FTC's Working From Home site at <https://www.consumer.ftc.gov/topics/working-home> to learn more about protecting yourself from work-at-home scams. In the market for a job? Visit the FTC's Jobs and Making Money for tips on avoiding job scams at <https://www.consumer.ftc.gov/jobs>. [Source: BBB Institute for Marketplace Trust | July 2020 ++]

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## Inheritance & Estate Taxes

### 17 States with One or the Other — or Both

Getting to retirement with a fat nest egg is a big accomplishment. All those years of toil and saving have paid off. If you are exceedingly fortunate and plan to pass on a big inheritance to your children or a charity, you still have one big retirement-planning mission remaining: protecting a chunk of your wealth from disappearing into the coffers of state and federal governments. Depending on where you live, achieving that goal can be difficult, or relatively easy. In fact, 33 states charge no estate or inheritance taxes. But 12 states and the District of Columbia charge [estate taxes](#), and six charge [inheritance taxes](#). And pity the poor residents of the alleged "Free State" — Maryland levies both types of taxes. The full list of such states, and the District of Columbia, in each category is as follows:

- *States that charge estate taxes* – Connecticut, District of Columbia, Hawaii, Illinois, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New York, Oregon, Rhode Island, Vermont, and Washington.
- *States that charge inheritance taxes* – Iowa, Kentucky, Maryland, Nebraska, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania

#### Estate taxes vs. inheritance taxes

Your estate is taxed based on the total value of everything you own at the time of your death. According to [Nolo](#): "This includes all the obvious assets, like real estate and bank accounts, plus some that aren't so obvious — for example, the proceeds of a life insurance policy that the deceased person owned." By contrast, inheritance taxes depend on *who* inherits your assets. For example, taxes may not be due if your spouse inherits your assets, but taxes might be due if the assets go to your children or someone more distantly related to you.

If you live in one of the states on the two lists above, don't panic. Estate taxes typically are assessed only if your assets exceed a certain level, such as \$1 million. And some states have much higher thresholds. As for inheritance taxes, rates typically are modest if you leave your assets to close relatives. For example, Nolo says that in Nebraska, close relatives who inherit \$40,000 or less face no taxes, and just 1% is charged on assets over that amount left to those

family members. However, taxes of 13% will be due in Nebraska on amounts above \$15,000 left to more distant relatives, and 18% will be due on amounts above \$10,000 that you leave to others, such as nonrelatives or organizations.

### **Avoiding these taxes**

The higher exemption levels associated with most state estate and inheritance tax systems are not much solace to people with very large estates who hope to pass down their cash. So, what can you do if you are in that fortunate circumstance?

- You could move to a new state or accept your fate, while taking solace in the knowledge that the 2017 federal tax legislation [significantly raised the exemption levels](#) for federal estate taxes. [For the 2020 tax year](#), federal estate taxes will not apply to your estate unless your assets exceed \$11.58 million — then, the tax applies only to the amount above \$11.58 million.
- Creating a trust is another option for those concerned about a tax bite. Trusts are often used to bypass estate taxes, as Money Talks News founder Stacy Johnson details in “[Ask Stacy: I’m Afraid to Leave an Inheritance for My Kids — What Should I Do?](#)”
- For more tips on protecting your assets from taxes, check out “[8 Documents That Are Essential to Planning Your Estate](#).”

[Source: MoneyTalksNews | July 20, 2020 ++]

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## **Driveway Scams**

### **Summer is the Time for Them**

If your driveway needs paving or repairs, don’t trust just anyone to do the job. BBB Scam Tracker has received numerous reports of unscrupulous contractors who trick homeowners with supposedly good deals. Victims end up with shoddy pavement -- or nothing at all -- to show for what they paid.

### **How the Scam Works:**

- A contractor shows up at your door or calls you on the phone. They claim they’ve been doing work in your area and noticed you need someone to lay asphalt. Because they are already working nearby, they can give you a discount. If you agree to the price, they will ask for a percentage of the fee up front. If you ask questions, the contractor will be hesitant to reveal details about their business or office location.
- Once you’ve paid, the scam contractor may disappear completely. If you attempt to contact them, you quickly realize their contact information was a sham. In other cases, the contractor may do shoddy work and demand you pay in full. If you protest, the contractor may use intimidation tactics, such as threatening a lawsuit, to convince you to pay up.

### **Tips to Protect Yourself for Contractor Scams**

- Be wary of unsolicited offers. Most scams involving contractors begin when a random contractor goes out of their way to offer you an estimate you never asked for.
- Research companies and contractors before you hire. Start with BBB.org. If the contractor has multiple negative reviews and complaints, don’t hire them. Often, a simple internet search can reveal that companies or individuals have been involved in fraudulent activities or provided unsatisfactory work to previous clients.
- Get everything in writing. Ask for an estimate in writing. Don’t let a contractor start working on a project until you have a written, signed contract that outlines start and complete dates, a detailed description of the work to be provided, material costs, payment arrangements, and warranty information.
- Stagger your payments. Most contractors will require you to pay a percentage of the total price up front, but you should never pay the full price before the work has begun. Instead, make an agreement to stagger payments so you can inspect work at various stages of the project.

- Use safe payment methods. Paying with a credit card is the best practice, since your credit card company will likely offer you some recourse if the company is fraudulent. Checks are also a safe way to pay, but make sure you write them out to a company, not an individual. Paying cash or using an electronic wallet app is risky since there is no way to stop the payment or get your cash back if anything goes awry.

### **For More Information**

Search BBB.org for [paving companies](#) in your area. Also common are “[free roof inspection](#)” scams. Learn more about those cons here. You can also read BBB’s [tips on hiring a contractor](#). If you’ve been the victim of a contractor scam, be sure to report it at BBB.org/ScamTracker. Your report can help expose scammers and protect other consumers.

[Source: BBB Scam Alerts | July 17, 2020 ++]

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## **Locksmith Scams**

### **Update 01: Know the Signs**

Most people only call a locksmith when they are desperate for help. That means it’s easy to overlook red flags and fall prey to a scammer. By getting to know the signs of a locksmith scam ahead of time, you can avoid cons if an emergency does arise.

### **How the Scam Works:**

- You’ve locked yourself out of your home or car! You take out your phone and do a quick search for locksmiths in your area. This is where the scam begins. Many locksmith scams use the name and logo of a reputable locksmith to advertise their business. When you call these imitators, they may answer with a generic “Hello, locksmith services,” rather than a specific business name.
- In one common version of this scam, the person on the phone offers you an extremely cheap quote – as low as \$15. However, once the locksmith arrives on-site, they find a number of “reasons” to raise the price. Scammers prey on consumers’ feelings of desperation, and victims often end up paying hundreds more than what they were initially quoted.
- In other cases, scammers may also claim that opening your door is impossible. They insist you need to drill the old lock and replace it with a new, expensive lock. This, too, is most likely a deception; a skilled locksmith can open just about any lock. In addition, scammers like to sell “extra-secure” locks that, in reality, are cheap and anything but secure. What’s even more disturbing is that a scam locksmith now knows where you live or work and how to gain reentry later on.

### **Tips to Protect Yourself from Locksmith Scams**

- Critique their advertising. Look closely at the business's advertisements. Is the specific name of the business clearly identified? Does the ad look similar to other ads but have a different name? Does it appear that the dealer actually operates under several names?
- Ask plenty of questions. Most consumer complaints concern fees that were not disclosed when they called the locksmith. Ask about the cost of a service call, mileage, and parts before you agree to have the work performed. Get an estimate before any work begins, including emergency service. If the on-site estimate doesn't match the price quoted on the telephone, have the job done by someone else.
- Check identification. Most legitimate locksmiths will arrive in a clearly marked vehicle and provide identification. Remember that you will be allowing a stranger into your home.
- Be wary of “necessary” drilling. Understand that it isn’t routine for a locksmith to insist on drilling the lock to open it. Most locksmiths have the skills to open almost any lock.

- Demand an invoice. You can't dispute a charge without proof of how much you paid and what you paid for. Insist on an itemized invoice that includes parts, labor, mileage and service charges. The invoice should also include the business name and address. Use your credit card to pay for locksmith services for added security.

### For More Information

Find BBB Accredited locksmiths [here](#) before you have an emergency. Keep their number in your wallet or phone, in case you find yourself in need of services later on. Find out more about BBB [Accreditation Standards](#). If you've been the victim of a locksmith scam, be sure to report it at [BBB.org/ScamTracker](http://BBB.org/ScamTracker). Your report can help expose scammers and protect other consumers. [Source: BBB Scam Alert | July 24, 2020 ++]

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## Tax Burden for Florida Retired Vets

### As of July 2020

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

### Sales Taxes

**State Sales Tax:** The state sales tax rate is 6%, and the average FL sales tax after local surtaxes is 6.65%. Florida has a higher state sales tax than 55.8% of states

- Groceries and prescription drugs are exempt from the Florida sales tax. Some items may not be eligible for these reduced sales tax rates, such as expensive clothing, unhealthy food or drinks like soda, and certain non-essential pharmaceuticals. Florida does not treat candy or soda as groceries, which means they are not subject to reduced grocery sales tax rates.
- Counties and cities can charge an additional local sales tax of up to 1.5%, for a maximum possible combined sales tax of 7.5%. Refer to <http://www.tax-rates.org/florida/sales-tax-by-county> for a listing of rates by county.
- If you buy goods and are not charged the Florida Sales Tax by the retailer, such as with online and out-of-state purchases, you are supposed to pay the 6% sales tax (less any foreign sales tax paid) for these items yourself as the Florida Use Tax. Florida collects state sales tax on most material purchases as well as on the rental of houses/apartments, rental of material goods, admissions fees, and services such as pest control and cleaning.
- Counties and cities may apply a "discretionary sales surtax" in addition to the Florida sales tax, on all purchases up to \$5,000 in their jurisdiction. Most counties use sales tax proceeds to fund education or transportation development. A 6% "tourist development tax" can also be collected by counties on seasonal (6 months or less) accommodation rentals (including hotels, condominiums, timeshares, etc.).
- There are yearly tax holidays set by the Florida legislature during which no sales taxes are collected, often during the holiday season or sometimes preceding hurricane season. Back-to-school tax holidays often exempt common school supplies like clothing and books.

### Excise Taxes

An excise tax is a tax directly levied on certain goods by a state or federal government. The most prominent excise taxes collected by the District of Columbia state government are the fuel tax on gasoline and the so-called "sin tax" collected on cigarettes and alcoholic beverages. Florida collects an average of \$615 in yearly excise taxes per capita, one of the highest average per capita excise taxes in the country.

- Florida's Sales Tax is collected as a percentage of the final purchase price of all qualifying sales, and is collected directly from the end consumer of the product. DC's excise taxes, on the other hand, are flat per-unit taxes that must be paid directly to the District of Columbia government by the merchant before the goods can be sold. Merchants may be required to attach tax stamps to taxable merchandise to show that the excise tax was paid.
- Even though excise taxes are collected from businesses, virtually all DC merchants pass on the excise tax to the customer through higher prices for the taxed goods.

**Alcohol:** Liquor \$6.50 per gal | Wine: \$2.25 per gal | Beer: 48¢ per gal. Note that Florida state taxes on hard alcohol vary based on alcohol content, place of production, size of container, and place purchased. Also, the IRS also collects a federal excise taxes on alcoholic beverages, which are included separately in the final purchase price.

**Cannabis Tax:** N/A

**Cellphone:** The average tax collected on cell phone plans in Florida is \$16.57 per phone service plan, one of the highest cellphone taxes in the country. Florida's average cellphone tax is ranked #4 out of the 50 states. The Florida cellphone tax is already included in the service plan price you pay to your service provider, and may be listed as "Misc. taxes and Fees" or "Other" on your monthly bill.

**Cigarettes:** \$1.34/pack of 20. Lower than 52% of the other 50 states - ranked #26 out of the 50.

**Fuel:** 40¢ per gallon, one of the highest gas taxes in the country. This is in addition to the federal excise tax of 18.4¢ per gallon on gasoline and 24.4¢ per gallon, on diesel. Florida's excise tax on gasoline is ranked #8 out of the 50 states. The tax is included in the pump price at all gas stations in Florida.

**Vehicle:** Florida collects a registration fee and a title fee on the sale or transfer of cars and motorcycles, which are essentially renamed excise taxes. Unlike standard excise taxes, however, the end consumer must pay the tax directly to the Florida Department of Transportation and receive documentation (registration and title papers) proving the fees were paid.

### **Personal Income Tax**

Florida is one of seven states that do not collect a personal income tax.

### **Property Taxes**

Property taxes are collected on a county level, and each county in Florida has its own method of assessing and collecting taxes.

- The median property tax in Florida is \$1,773 per year for a home worth the median value of \$182,400. Counties in Florida collect an average of 0.97% of a property's assessed fair market value as property tax per year.
- Florida is ranked number twenty three out of the fifty states, in order of the average amount of property taxes collected.
- Florida's median income is \$53,595 per year, so the median yearly property tax paid by Florida residents amounts to approximately 3.3% of their yearly income. Florida is ranked 18th of the 50 states for property taxes as a percentage of median income.
- The exact property tax levied depends on the county in Florida the property is located in. Refer to <http://www.tax-rates.org/florida/property-tax#Counties> for median property taxes by County.

The homestead exemption for all residents applies to all property taxes, not just city and county taxes. Annual increases in the assessment of homestead property are limited to 3% of the prior year's assessed value, or if lower, the percentage change in the Consumer Price Index for the prior year, as long as there was no change in ownership. The homestead exemption is a property tax exemption of up to \$50,000 on homestead property. The first \$25,000 applies to all property taxes. The additional exemption up to \$25,000 applies to the assessed value between \$50,000 and \$75,000 and only to non-school district taxes. To qualify, the taxpayer must own the property and make it his or her permanent residence or the permanent residence of his or her dependent as of January 1 of the tax year.

- For more information go to <https://floridarevenue.com/property/Documents/pt113.pdf> and read the Property Tax Exemption for Homestead Property brochure.

- For more details on property taxes go to <http://floridarevenue.com/property/Pages/Home.aspx> and find the link for the county property appraiser for the county in question.

### Inheritance & Estate Taxes

No Florida estate tax is due for decedents who died on or after January 1, 2005. If the estate is not required to file Internal Revenue Service (IRS) Form 706 or Form 706-NA, the personal representative may need to file the Affidavit of No Florida Estate Tax Due ([https://floridarevenue.com/Forms\\_library/current/dr312.pdf](https://floridarevenue.com/Forms_library/current/dr312.pdf)) to release a Florida estate tax lien. If Florida estate tax is owed, download the [Filing Requirements for Florida Estate Tax](#) document for more information.

### 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>.
- Excise Taxes (i.e. gasoline, cigarettes, cellphones, automobiles, beer, wine, and liquor: <http://www.tax-rates.org/taxtables/excise-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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To review information for new residents refer to <http://www.stateofflorida.com/moving-to-florida.aspx>. For general information on Florida taxes, visit the Florida Department of Revenue site <http://dor.myflorida.com/dor/taxes> or call 800-352-3671. [Source: <http://www.tax-rates.org> & <https://floridarevenue.com/pages/default.aspx> | July 2020 ++]

\* General Interest \*



## Notes of Interest

July 16 thru 31, 2020

- **TRICARE TENS Treatment.** As of June 1, 2020, TRICARE no longer covers [transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation \(TENS\)](#) for the treatment of lower back pain. If you were previously approved for TENS treatment for low back pain, be sure to discuss alternate treatment methods with your provider to avoid unexpected out-of-pocket costs.
- **Courage.** An amazing display can be seen at [https://youtu.be/dJSqz\\_Pnu3Y](https://youtu.be/dJSqz_Pnu3Y) as a Yemenis fighter runs under fire across open terrain for over 2 minutes without being hit.
- **Census.** The U.S. Census Bureau has announced this week it is sending reminder postcards this week to an estimated 34.3 million households. This will be the final mailing before census takers begin visiting nonresponding households across the nation in mid-August. Responding now minimizes the need for census takers to visit homes to collect responses in person.
- **USAHEC Collections.** The US Army announced this week that historically significant papers from the 1960-70s Vietnam era are now available at <https://arena.usahec.org/web/arena> for review and research online.



- **Social Distancing.** The US Navy is considering looking into proximity-tracking wearables to enforce social distancing, with devices that will provide haptic feedback when two or more people are too close to one another. The devices would be part of a system linked to a cloud system that could update database The almost dystopian concept effectively throws privacy out the window, and would even segregate feedback by what “team” the wearer belongs to, in order to prevent devices from going off when working closely with one another.
- **Gold Star Families.** The U.S. House of Representatives has passed a proposal from two Maine lawmakers to give families of fallen military service members free access to national parks. Independent Sen. Angus King and Democratic Rep. Jared Golden introduced the Gold Star Families Park Pass Act, which passed 21 JUL as part of the National Defense Authorization ActThe proposal would give immediate family of the service members access to the National Parks and Federal Recreational Lands Pass Program.
- **Census takers.** If approached they can be easily [identified](#) by a valid government ID badge with their photograph, a U.S. Department of Commerce watermark, and an expiration date on the badge. To confirm a census taker’s identity, the public may contact their [regional census center](#) to speak with a Census Bureau representative. Households can still respond now by completing and mailing back the paper questionnaire they received, by responding online at [2020census.gov](#), or by phone at 844-330-2020.

[Source: Various | July 31, 2020 ++]

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## Taiwan-China Dispute

### Update 07: Island Nation Says China Stepping Up Threats



**Taken Feb. 10, 2020, and released by the Republic of China (ROC) Ministry of National Defense, a Taiwanese Air Force F-16 in foreground flies on the flank of a Chinese People's Liberation Army Air Force (PLAAF) H-6 bomber as it passes near Taiwan.**

A day after Defense Secretary Mark Esper said the U.S. remains steadfast in its support of Taiwan, that nation’s foreign minister said China appears to be a stepping up of its threat to use force to take control of the island. China is sending military planes near Taiwan with increasing frequency and have become “virtually a daily occurrence,” Joseph Wu told reporters, adding that such flights are more frequent than reported in the media. Wu is Along with Chinese military exercises simulating an attack on Taiwan, the flights by China are causing major concern for Taiwan's government, Wu said. “What it is doing now is increasingly preparing to use force to resolve the Taiwan problem,” Wu, said. Wu is a Taiwanese politician currently serving as the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of China under current President Tsai Ing-wen since 26 February 2018.

Esper, speaking 21 JUL at an event hosted by the International Institute for Strategic Studies, said America remains steadfast in its support of Taiwan. The Donald Trump administration “remains committed” to Taiwan, even as the

actions from Beijing become “more aggressive” toward its neighbor, he said. “We’ve seen [China] build up their military, we’ve seen them be more assertive, they got hundreds, if not over a thousand, missiles aimed at Taiwan. And we’ve seen President [Xi Jinping] and his party really take this to a new level,” Esper said. “So we remain committed to regional peace and security. We will live up to our commitments to Taiwan, which is all in the interest of a secure and stable region, if you will.”

He said that commitment includes potential future arms sales, the most recent of which led to China announcing it would sanction American defense company Lockheed Martin. The secretary also said he hoped to travel to China before the end of the year “in order to enhance cooperation on areas of common interest, establish the systems necessary for crisis communications, and reinforce our intentions to openly compete in the international system in which we all belong.” China claims the self-ruling island democracy as its own territory and threatens to use the People's Liberation Army to bring it under its control. The sides split in a civil war in 1949 when Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalists fled to the former Japanese colony as the Communist Party took control in mainland China.

Beijing has cut ties with the island's government since Taiwan elected independence-leaning President Tsai Ing-wen in 2016 and has sought to isolate it diplomatically while raising the military threat. Despite that, Tsai was reelected this year by a wide margin. Wu said China appeared to have grown in confidence following its crackdown on opposition voices in the former British colony of Hong Kong, facilitated by the national legislature's passage of a sweeping security law. “If international society does not give China a sufficiently clear signal, I believe China will take it that international society will not impede it in doing other things,” Wu said. “This is what we are extremely worried about.”

Wu stressed the need for coordination with allies such as Japan and the U.S., neither of which has official diplomatic ties with Taiwan but which maintain close relations. U.S. law mandates that Washington ensure the island can maintain a credible defense and treat all threats against the island as matters of grave concern. Another ally in the region looking nervously toward Washington is Taiwan. The island nation has long been in Beijing's crosshairs, but China's recent crackdown in Hong Kong has led to speculation that it may look to move on Taiwan more quickly than previously expected.

Support among Taiwanese for political unification with China has long been weak and has fallen further following the crackdown in Hong Kong. That comes as Chinese Communist Party leader and President Xi Jinping pursues an increasingly assertive foreign policy, leading to speculation he may attempt a military confrontation in the region. [Source: Associated Press | Aaron Mehta | July 22, 2020 ++]

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## **China's Territorial Claims**

### **Update 07: US Says Beijing's Claims in South China Sea Unlawful**

The Trump administration upped the ante with China on 13 JUL by issuing a direct challenge to Beijing's South China Sea claims. US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said in a statement that the US rejects all Chinese claims beyond the 12-nautical mile territorial area around the Spratly Islands, citing in particular Beijing's claims to the waters surrounding Vanguard Bank off of Vietnam, Luconia Shoals of Malaysia, the area within Brunei's exclusive economic zone and Natuna Besar of Indonesia. “We are making clear: Beijing's claims to offshore resources across most of the South China Sea are completely unlawful, as is its campaign of bullying to control them,” Pompeo said. “The world will not allow Beijing to treat the South China Sea as its maritime empire.” The US challenge comes amid heightened tensions between the two superpowers over trade, Covid-19, human rights and it is almost certain to attract a response given how sensitive sovereignty issues are to the Asian giant.

China in recent months has seen local residents in Hong Kong, Tibet and Xinjiang call for greater autonomy; tried to tamp down deadly clashes on its border with India; and faced an increasingly defiant electorate in self-governing Taiwan, which it considers a rogue province. The US dispatched in early July two aircraft carriers and four other

warships to the sensitive South China Sea (SCS) for “exercises” at the same time China was holding its own exercises around the Paracel Islands, putting muscle behind Monday’s announcement. Analysts said Monday’s statement lays out a marker that Washington intends to align its foreign policy with a 2016 unanimous decision by a tribunal under the 1982 UN Law of the Sea Convention that rejected China’s claims to the area. Beijing has dismissed the judgment as a “sham”.

But this justification is a bit tricky as the Trump administration has frequently condemned legal decisions by international bodies, particularly those that go against the US. Also the US never formally ratified the 1982 convention. “It is a little hypocritical that the US has not ratified the convention,” said Kelsey Broderick, an Asia analyst with the Eurasia Group. “Probably other states like Vietnam and Malaysia will be happy to ignore that. But Beijing certainly will be happy to point that out.” Beijing under President Xi Jinping has embarked on an ambitious island-building spree in the South China Sea, extending its sovereignty claims over much of the area with “facts on the ground” in defiance of competing claims by Southeast Asian neighbors. In support of those claims, it has deployed missiles and jamming equipment on newly built artificial islands and challenged US ships and aircraft operating in the region.

The Chinese embassy in Washington decried the US move. “Under the pretext of preserving stability, it is flexing muscles, stirring up tension and inciting confrontation in the region,” an embassy spokesperson said in a statement. “We advise the US side to earnestly honor its commitment of not taking sides... and stop its attempts to disrupt and sabotage regional peace and stability.” Pompeo – who’s been dubbed Trump’s “attack dog” on China – said Monday’s strengthening of US policy was aimed at bolstering international rule of law and halting Beijing’s use of coercion to grab resources, harass fishermen and intimidate its neighbors.

Analysts in Washington said the announcement could play well with the international community given its nod to international law and competing claims, even if it is not immediately clear what options the Pentagon has. “I doubt the United States will take substantial action,” said Zack Cooper, a research fellow at the American Enterprise Institute. “But it would be easier now for US forces to assist these countries if they were challenged within their rightful exclusive economic zones.” A country’s exclusive economic zone, according to the United Nations, extends some 200 nautical miles beyond the coast giving it exclusive rights to various resources including oil, seafood and wind power.

Washington’s latest salvo could infuriate China and potentially lead to another retaliatory round. “China is likely not going to like this,” said Broderick. “It raises tension across the board creating more chances of an accident.” On 13 JUL, Beijing announced sanctions against three US senators, a human rights ambassador at large and a commission. This followed a US decision last week to sanction four senior Chinese officials in Xinjiang it deemed guilty of human rights violations. China has detained some 1 million Uyghurs in internment camps, according to the UN. Beijing claims they are job retraining centers.

Broderick adding that one possible retaliatory step China might consider would be to declare an “air defense identification zone” in the region, requiring anyone entering the airspace to identify themselves. The US in the past has routinely ignored such demands citing the importance of freedom of navigation in international territory. In addition to its potential mineral wealth, the South China Sea is strategically vital given its proximity to Taiwan and its sea lanes, through which some US\$5 trillion in goods transit every year. “The statement is very much in line with the overarching trajectory of the relationship,” said a former senior US air force official.

Other analysts said the US statement could provide fodder for Trump’s re-election effort, allowing him to argue that even as he stared China down, his likely opponent and former vice-president Joe Biden along with then-president needed to press back harder and this new position helps do that,” said Michael Green, senior vice-president for Asia at the Center for Strategic and International Studies. “I just hope the administration is talking to these countries to be sure our new position dissuades Chinese coercion without tempting smaller states to do things that could provoke Beijing and we would then own,” added Green, a former National Security Council official. [Source: South China Morning Post | Mark Magnier | 14 Jul, 2020 ++]

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## **My WWII Story**

### **Memories of a Merchant Marine**



Like many children who grew up during the Great Depression, I had a very modest upbringing in the farm country of Long Island through the 1930s. I was 1 when it began. I have some memories of my father but he was not really in our lives growing up. My mother, Evelyn, loved us and did all she could for her three boys, who remained very close. Joe was the oldest and Jerry was the youngest. I was the middle son who everyone called “Jack” and many still do to this day. I was 13 when my mother decided to move us all north from Long Island to Waterbury, Conn., in 1941. Waterbury was a progressive industrial city in those days and had more opportunities as one of the largest brass-manufacturing cities in the world.

Soon after we moved to Waterbury, the United States entered World War II following the sudden attack on Pearl Harbor. My older brother Joe had already joined the Army as a paratrooper in the 82nd Airborne. I was too young to enlist but had hopes of joining the Navy when I became of age. I visited the Navy recruiter in May 1944 at 16 but they told me I had to be 17 to join the Navy. I was discouraged until I heard I could join the Merchant Marines. So it came to be that I left high school with my mother’s blessing and joined the Merchant Marines as a 16-year-old in 1944.

I did three months of training at Sheepshead Bay in Brooklyn before I was assigned my first Liberty Ship in September 1944. The ship was SS Michael Moran. Most of the crew were seasoned deckhands. I was the youngest by far. They could see I was a hard worker and they made me feel welcome right away. The ship was one of thousands of Liberty Ships designed and built to bring the U.S. war effort across two oceans. It was an impressive ship with five large storage areas called “holes.” Each “hole” was two stories deep and could hold tons of cargo. The ship was also equipped with a three-inch gun on the bow, a five-inch gun on the stern, and eight 20 mm machine guns. I was assigned to one of the 20 mm guns as a “feeder.” That was quite a thrill. We would hold practice drills with the Navy gunners who were onboard to man the artillery. I remember every third bullet was a tracer round that lit up the sky to show the path of the bullets. It was a sight to see.

We got underway from Boston Harbor with a full load of Army trucks and k-rations to take to Cherbourg, France. When we got to open water, we met up with dozens of other U.S. ships from the south and formed a large convoy that would cross the Atlantic together. The convoy was around 60 ships with a radius of over 5 miles. It was impressive. The cargo ships were positioned in the middle of the convoy while the U.S. destroyers and Canadian Corvettes defended the perimeter against the constant threat from German submarine attacks. You would often hear depth charges being dropped to fend off the German U-boats.

We finally arrived in Cherbourg safely and began the work of unloading the cargo. I was struck to see German prisoners of war on the docks. They were brought there as laborers under close supervision from the U.S. Army. I have a vivid memory of getting up close with one of the German prisoners. The head of our deck crew sent me to secure the ship to dock with another line. I left the ship dockside and began rigging up another rope to secure the ship to the dock. The rope was soaking wet which made it very heavy to hoist by myself. One of the G.I.s guarding the POWs saw me struggling and ordered a German prisoner to help me. Before I knew it, a captured German POW came

over and began helping me. He was about the same age as me. We finished the job together in no time. I thanked him and returned back to my ship. It was just a brief encounter but it has always stayed with me. It's funny how things happen sometimes.

Upon leaving Cherbourg, the empty Liberty Ship was sitting high in the water. This was a position of safety. A Liberty Ship sitting low in the water was a clear signal to the Germans that the ship, was full and made it a prime target for U-boats. I was reminded after the war how deadly those waters were. Just after we left Cherbourg, a converted transport ship, SS Leopoldville carrying 2,235 Allied soldiers, was arriving in Cherbourg on December 24. The transport ship was torpedoed by a German U-boat less than 5 miles off the coast of France where we had just left. We never knew because the War Department kept the tragedy a secret. They waited until after the war to confirm Léopoldville was sunk by the German Submarine U-486, killing 763 American soldiers from the Army's 66th Infantry Division on Christmas Eve 1944.

I returned to the States to board my second ship, SS Paul Buck out of Portland, Maine. We were bound for Marseille, France, but this time there was no convoy and no escorts. We were a lone vulnerable ship with a full load of cargo. We traveled in a zigzag course to avoid detection from German U-boats. I recall that once we were underway, there wasn't a lot to do. Thankfully there were always colorful seamen on board quick with a story or two to help pass the time. I enjoyed listening to the stories of the "old sailors." I still remember one in particular who could hold us spellbound. He would often sing an old song from World War I. The song impressed me so much that I can still remember it to this day.

I turned 17 in Marseille while on Paul Buck. We unloaded in Marseille, and took on a full cargo of medical supplies bound for war-torn Poland. We traveled through the North Sea. While en route, we saw waves of Allied bombers and fighter planes returning from their raids on Germany. I recall the thrill when some of the fighter planes would tip their wings acknowledging us. The trip was long but our route was shortened considerably because the Russians had taken control of the Kiel Canal in East Germany. Allied vessels could now use this canal which saved us many hours at sea on our way to Poland where we delivered our cargo.

After another trip to Hull, England, I was assigned to SS Thomas Clyde. This ship had the best crew of any Liberty Ship I was on. We sailed to Buenos Aires to deliver supplies there and then had orders to go to Antwerp, Belgium. This ship was memorable to me because while on board, we got the news that the Germans had surrendered to the Allies. The war was over in Europe! I remember how happy we all were as the crew and I celebrated V-E Day together at sea.

We arrived empty in Antwerp and took on a full load of ammunition. Although the war in Europe was over, the fight against the Japanese was far from over. We were still waiting for official orders, but I suspected we would be sent to the Pacific where the ammunition was needed. I remember having a really bad feeling about taking that trip. I knew if we delivered a full load of ammunition to the Pacific, we would be a prime target for the Japanese and the kamikaze pilots we had heard so much about.

We did not know it at the time, but while we were in Antwerp waiting for our orders, President Harry S. Truman's heavy cruiser USS Augusta was also in port only two berths from our ship. Truman was traveling to attend the Potsdam Conference with Winston Churchill and Joseph Stalin to establish the postwar order. It was there that Truman informed the Allies of "a powerful new weapon" and formally proclaimed to Japan to surrender unconditionally or meet "prompt and utter destruction". Japanese Prime Minister Kantarō Suzuki did not respond and 11 days later the United States dropped atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Japan surrendered on Aug. 15, 1945. Suddenly, World War II was over. We were then given our orders to deliver the load of ammunition. The orders were to Swanson, South Wales.

I feel to this day that had the war kept raging with Japan, our orders would have been different and Truman's decision took us out of harm's way. It may have saved my life and the lives of our crew. We know it saved the lives of thousands of U.S. servicemen who were faced with the invasion of mainland Japan. For that I am grateful. Merchant Marines paid a terrible price during World War II. They died at a rate of 1 in 26. That was the highest rate of casualties

of any service. All told, 733 American cargo ships were lost in troubled waters. I know the war would not have been won without the service of the Merchant Marines, many who made the ultimate sacrifice.

I remained in the Merchant Marines until 1952 before I married and settled down in Connecticut. My wife, Teresa, and I raised seven children, have 13 grandchildren and 13 great grandchildren. Outside of my family, nothing in my life has been as significant to me than the time I spent as a Merchant Marine during World War II. We were all part of something bigger and our country came together like never before to win over tyranny. I was very lucky. I lived to tell about it. [Source: Legiontown | John F. Keane | July 15, 2020 ++]

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## Iran Tensions

### Update 12: Iran's Refurbished Mockup Aircraft Carrier in Use Again

Iran has moved a mock-up U.S. aircraft carrier to the strategic Strait of Hormuz, satellite images show, suggesting it will use the look-alike vessel for target practice in war games in a Gulf shipping channel vital to world oil exports. The use of dummy American warships has become an occasional feature of training by Iran's Revolutionary Guards and its naval forces, including in 2015 when Iranian missiles hit a mock-up resembling a Nimitz-class aircraft carrier.



Iran's refurbished mockup aircraft carrier, used previously as a simulated U.S. target during a February, 2015 Iranian naval war games exercise, is seen towed by a tugboat near Bandar Abbas, Iran July 25, 2020. Satellite image

Tehran, which opposes the presence of U.S. and Western navies in the Gulf, frequently holds naval war games in the strategic Strait, the conduit for some 30% of all crude and other oil liquids traded by sea. One of the images taken on 26 JUL by U.S.-based space technology firm Maxar Technologies showed an Iranian fast attack boat moving toward the model U.S. carrier in the strategic waterway. Another image showed model planes lined up on the deck of the fake carrier. "We cannot speak to what Iran hopes to gain by building this mock-up, or what tactical value they would hope to gain by using such a mock-up in a training or offensive exercise scenario," said Commander Rebecca Rebarich, the spokeswoman for the U.S. Navy's Bahrain-based Fifth Fleet. "We remain confident in our naval forces' ability to defend themselves against any maritime threat."

Tensions have spiked between Iran and the United States since 2018, when U.S. President Donald Trump withdrew from Iran's 2015 nuclear deal with six powers and reimposed sanctions that has sharply dropped Tehran's oil exports. Iran's Guards in April said Tehran would destroy U.S. warships if its security is threatened in the Gulf. Iranian officials have repeatedly threatened to block Hormuz if Iran is not able to export oil or if its nuclear sites are attacked. There have been periodic confrontations between the Iranian Guards and the U.S. military in the Gulf in recent years. U.S. officials have said closing the Strait would be crossing a "red line" and America would take action to reopen it. Iran cannot legally close the waterway unilaterally because part of it is in Omani territorial waters. However, ships that sail it pass through Iranian waters, which are under the responsibility of the Iran's Guards naval force. [Source: Reuters | World News | July 27, 2020 ++]

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## Mail Service

### Cost-Cutting Plan Could Delay Deliveries



**Postmaster General Louis DeJoy and a custom made "Priority Mail" box that organizers said contained two million signed petitions from postal customers asking Congress to approve emergency funding for the Postal Service**

Mail deliveries could be delayed by a day or more under cost-cutting efforts being imposed by the new postmaster general. The plan eliminates overtime for hundreds of thousands of postal workers and says employees must adopt a “different mindset” to ensure the Postal Service’s survival during the coronavirus pandemic. Late trips will no longer be authorized. If postal distribution centers are running late, “they will keep the mail for the next day,” Postal Service leaders say in a document obtained by The Associated Press. “One aspect of these changes that may be difficult for employees is that — temporarily — we may see mail left behind or mail on the workroom floor or docks,” another document says.

The changes come a month after Postmaster General Louis DeJoy took over the sprawling mail service. In a memo titled “PMG Expectations and Plan,” the agency said the changes are aimed at “making the USPS fundamentally solvent which we are not at this time”. The memo cites deep revenue losses from a decade long decline in mail deliveries that has been exacerbated by the coronavirus pandemic and says an overdue “operational pivot” is needed to ensure the agency’s health and stability. Postal Service officials, bracing for steep losses from the nationwide shutdown caused by the virus, have warned they will run out of money by the end of September without help from Congress. The service reported a \$4.5 billion loss for the quarter ending in March, before the full effects of the shutdown sank in.

Single-piece, first-class mail volume fell 15 to 20% week to week in April and May, agency leaders told Congress. Losses will increase by more than \$22 billion over the next 18 months, they said. Bills approved by the Democratic-controlled House would set aside \$25 billion to keep the mail flowing, but they remain stalled in the Republican-controlled Senate. Congress has approved a \$10 billion line of credit for the Postal Service, but it remains unused amid restrictions imposed by the Trump administration.

A spokesperson said 15 JUL that the agency is developing a business plan to ensure it will be financially stable and continue to provide reliable, affordable and secure delivery of mail and packages. While the plan “is not yet finalized, it will certainly include new and creative ways for us to fulfill our mission, and we will focus immediately on efficiency and items that we can control,” said spokesperson Dave Partenheimer. The memo cites U.S. Steel as an example that the Postal Service is far from “untouchable.” In 1975, the steel giant was “the largest company in the world,” the memo states. “They are gone.” In fact, U.S. Steel remains a leading steel producer, with more than 27,000 employees as of earlier this year.

The COVID-19 pandemic has put the Postal Service in a double crisis, said Mark Dimondstein, president of the American Postal Workers Union, which represents more than 200,000 postal workers and retirees. As many as 12,000 postal workers have fallen ill, with at least 64 fatalities, and the economic contraction has caused a dramatic drop in letter and other flat mail volumes. A spike in package deliveries that has buoyed the agency during the pandemic is likely to be temporary, Dimondstein said, adding that the outbreak has sharply increased expenses for personal protective equipment, deep cleaning of facilities and temporary workers to replace postal workers who get sick. “Postal workers are tremendously dedicated to the mission of getting the mail out,” Dimondstein said, but the new policies

could cause delays that will further drive down revenues. “It’s the customer who will suffer if the mail slows down,” he said.

Democratic Rep. Bill Pascrell of New Jersey denounced the proposal to delay mail delivery, saying it would be a “stunning act of sabotage against our postal service.” “Trump and his cronies are openly seeking to destroy the post office during the worst public health crisis in a century,” Pascrell said. With states increasingly relying on voting by mail to continue elections during the pandemic, destabilizing the Postal Service not only threatens the economy and the jobs of 600,000 workers, but is also “a direct attack on American democracy itself,” Pascrell said. Trump opposes expanding voting by mail, arguing that it will trigger fraud, even though there’s no evidence that will happen. Trump, Vice President Mike Pence and other top administration officials frequently vote absentee themselves.

Trump also has called the Postal Service “a joke” and said that package shipping rates should be at least four times higher for heavy users like Amazon. But shipping and packages are actually a top revenue generator for the Postal Service, and critics say Trump is merely looking to punish Amazon founder and CEO Jeff Bezos in retaliation for unflattering coverage in The Washington Post, which Bezos owns. For most Americans, mail deliveries to homes or post boxes are their only routine contact with the federal government. It’s a service they seem to appreciate: The agency consistently earns favorability marks that top 90%. The memo outlining potential mail delays was first reported by The Washington Post. [Source: The Associated Press | Matthew Daly | July 16, 2020 ++]

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## **IRS Summons**

### **What It Is**

An Internal Revenue Summons is an official order to produce information or provide testimony to aid in an IRS investigation. Summonses may be issued to the taxpayer being investigated or to third parties who may have information that the IRS wants to use in its investigation. If you receive a summons, you should immediately consult with a tax litigation attorney to determine what information you are required to produce, what arguments you have for refusing to disclose certain information, and whether you may incriminate yourself by producing certain information.

Before you receive a summons, you should receive several other notices from the IRS, beginning with an Information Document Request. An IDR is a more informal notice, but will often be requesting the same information as the summons. The IRS would prefer that you respond and give them the information they want without requiring the issuance of an official summons, which can be enforced by a federal district court. If you do not respond to the summons the IRS will have to demonstrate to the court that the summons is necessary to obtain information that may be relevant to a legitimate investigation. The taxpayer will be asked to show why the summons is not proper, and a failure to respond to the summons after a district court orders it enforced will usually result in a citation for contempt which can include time in jail.

It's difficult to say exactly how you should respond to a summons because each situation will present unique facts and circumstances. It is a challenge to fight the IRS on the validity of a summons, but it may be worth the effort if the IRS has overstepped its legal authority or the requested information is protected. In some cases, you may be well advised to simply give the IRS the information it wants. However, in other cases you may want to resist handing over the information because it may incriminate you. There may be other situations where information is protected by the attorney-client privilege. Most taxpayers will not be aware of all the factors they should consider before deciding to produce information, and a taxpayer should be accompanied by their attorney when being questioned by the IRS to be sure they are not inadvertently incriminating themselves, which could trigger a criminal tax investigation. Your tax attorney may also decide to record the interview with the IRS.

If you do have arguments to contest the summons, you may also be able to negotiate with the IRS, rather than take your case to district court. This can save you time and money by avoiding litigation expenses. An IRS summons is

NOT a notice that you want to ignore. It signals that the IRS is very serious about your case. Instead, contact a tax controversy attorney to develop a plan for handling your IRS summons. For further info watch the four minute video at <https://youtu.be/ReiwWC2kBrS>. [Source: <https://www.bragertaxlaw.com> | July 2020 ++]

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## Coronavirus Vaccine

### Update 07: Kremlin Attempting to Steal Vaccine Research

Russian hackers are attempting to steal coronavirus vaccine research, the American, British and Canadian governments said 16 JUL, accusing the Kremlin of opening a new front in its spy battles with the West amid the worldwide competition to contain the pandemic. The National Security Agency said that a hacking group implicated in the 2016 break-ins into Democratic Party servers has been trying to steal intelligence on vaccines from universities, companies and other health care organizations. The group, associated with Russian intelligence and known as both APT29 and Cozy Bear, has sought to exploit the chaos created by the coronavirus pandemic, officials said.

American intelligence officials said the Russians were aiming to steal research to develop their own vaccine more quickly, not to sabotage other countries' efforts. There was likely little immediate damage to global public health, cybersecurity experts said. The Russian espionage nevertheless signals a new kind of competition between Moscow and Washington akin to Cold War spies stealing technological secrets during the space race generations ago. The Russian hackers have targeted British, Canadian and American organizations using malware and sending fraudulent emails to try to trick their employees into turning over passwords and other security credentials, all in an effort to gain access to the vaccine research as well as information about medical supply chains.

The accusations against Russia were also the latest example of an increasing willingness in recent months by the United States and its closest intelligence allies to publicly accuse foreign adversaries of breaches and cyberattacks. The American government has previously warned about efforts by China and Iran to steal vaccine research. Attributing such attacks, however, is imprecise, an ambiguity that Moscow takes advantage of in denying responsibility, as it did Thursday. Still, government officials, as well as outside experts, expressed strong confidence that Cozy Bear, controlled by Russia's elite S.V.R. intelligence agency, was responsible for the attempted intrusions into the virus vaccine research. "We condemn these despicable attacks against those doing vital work to combat the coronavirus pandemic," said Paul Chichester, the director of operations for Britain's National Cyber Security Center.

The head of the center, Ciaran Martin, told NBC News that the cyberattacks were first detected in February and that no evidence had emerged that data was stolen. Government officials would not identify victims of the hackings. But the primary target of the attacks appeared to be Oxford University in Britain and the British-Swedish pharmaceutical company AstraZeneca, which have been jointly working on a vaccine, said Robert Hannigan, the former head of G.C.H.Q., the British intelligence agency. Oxford scientists said on 16 JUL that they had noticed a surprising resemblance between their vaccine approach and the work that Russian scientists had reported. Though Russia could be seeking to steal the vaccine data to bolster its own research, it could also be trying to avoid relying on Western countries for any eventual coronavirus vaccine.

While AstraZeneca has announced it will make the Oxford vaccine available at cost, governments and philanthropies have paid huge sums to the company to secure their place in line, even without any guarantee it will work. The United States has said it will pay up to \$1.2 billion to AstraZeneca to fund a clinical trial and secure 300 million doses. Russia could find itself near the back of the line if the vaccine proves successful. "Russia clearly doesn't want to disrupt vaccine production, but they don't want to be dependent on the U.S. or the U.K. for production and discovery of the vaccine," said Mr. Hannigan, now an executive at the BlueVoyant cybersecurity firm. "It not impossible to think Kremlin pride is such that they don't want that to happen." An intense international race is underway to develop a vaccine for the coronavirus that has already killed 580,000 people and upended daily life around the world. More than 155 vaccines are under development, including 23 being tested on humans. Some vaccines work by altering another

common virus to mimic the coronavirus to prompt an immune response without making people sick. The research by Oxford and AstraZeneca is based on one such pathogen, a chimpanzee adenovirus. Russia's Ministry of Health is trying to use two other adenoviruses but is not as far along in its testing as the Oxford researchers are.

Some officials suggested the Russian attacks have not been hugely successful but were widespread enough to warrant a coordinated international warning. Across the globe, intelligence services have stepped up their focus on information surrounding the virus. The F.B.I. director, Christopher A. Wray, accused China last week of "working to compromise American health care organizations" conducting Covid-19 research. "Russia is not alone," said John Hultquist, the senior director of intelligence analysis at FireEye, a Silicon Valley cybersecurity firm. "A lot of people are in this game even if they haven't been called out yet. The whole pandemic is absolutely riddled with spies."

Chinese government hackers have long focused on stealing intellectual property and technology. Russia has aimed much of its recent cyberespionage, like election interference, at weakening geopolitical rivals and strengthening its hand. "China is more well-known for theft through hacking than Russia, which is of course better now for using hacks for disruption and chaos," said Laura Rosenberger, a former Obama administration official who now leads the Alliance for Securing Democracy. "But there's no question that whoever gets to a vaccine first thinks they will have geopolitical advantage, and that's something I'd expect Russia to want." Still, a Russian intrusion could inadvertently damage some vaccine data and additional security protocols to protect from future cyberattacks could impose a burden on researchers. Private firms are more at risk than the public, said Mike Chapple, a former National Security Agency computer scientist who teaches cybersecurity at the University of Notre Dame. "The potential harm here is limited to commercial harm, to companies that are devoting a lot of their own resources into developing a vaccine in hopes it will be financially rewarding down the road," he said.

The Kremlin mocked the 16 JUL announcements and Russian officials said they did not know who could have hacked the companies or research centers in Britain. One Russian official said the accusation was an attempt to discredit Moscow's own work on a vaccine. Dmitri S. Peskov, the spokesman for President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia, told reporters that the accusations were unacceptable. "Russia has nothing to do with these attempts," he said. Cozy Bear is one of the highest-profile, and most successful, hacking groups associated with the Russian government. It was implicated alongside the group Fancy Bear in the 2016 hacking of the Democratic National Committee. Though Cozy Bear is believed to have breached the committee's computers, it played no known role in releasing stolen Democratic emails.

Cozy Bear "has a long history of targeting governmental, diplomatic, think tank, health care and energy organizations for intelligence gain, so we encourage everyone to take this threat seriously," said Anne Neuberger, the National Security Agency's cybersecurity director. The malware used by Cozy Bear to steal the vaccine research included code known as "WellMess" and "WellMail." The Russian group has not previously used that malware, according to British officials. But American experts say the tactics used in trying to obtain access to the vaccine data bear all the hallmarks of Russian intelligence officials. And American officials said they were confident in attributing the attacks to the Russian hacking group. The American, British and Canadian governments said Cozy Bear used recently publicized weak spots in computer networks to get a foothold. If organizations do not immediately patch a vulnerability that a software company has identified, their networks can be exposed to hacks. Once Cozy Bear hackers exploit those gaps to gain entry to a computer system, they create legitimate credentials to maintain access even after the hole is patched.

While the various Russian hacking groups often share similar targets, they are run by different intelligence agencies for different purposes. Hackers with Cozy Bear are after information but do not generally release it publicly, according to government and outside experts. Fancy Bear, which works for Russian military intelligence and is also known as APT28, will often publicize the information it steals. Cozy Bear's ties are to the S.V.R., the Russian equivalent of the C.I.A., according to current and former officials. Unlike other Russian hackers, Cozy Bears operations are sophisticated, stealthy and hard to detect. "Their job is quiet, old-fashioned intelligence collection," said Mr. Hultquist, the cybersecurity analyst. [Source: New York Times | Julian E. Barnes | July 16, 2020 ++]

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## **Covid-19 Victims**

### **Nurse's 117-Days to Recovery**

Nurse case manager Sharon Tapp recalls laying in a Bethesda, Md., hospital bed, feverishly ill from COVID-19, asking for a bedpan. Then, in what seemed to be the very next moment, she found herself in another bed in an unfamiliar room at what seemed to be a different hospital, surrounded by people she didn't know. "It was like, why am I here? I woke up and I was like, Johns Hopkins? I didn't come here," Tapp, 60, said in a voice still raspy from a healing tracheotomy. "I was looking around at all the people, and I was like, why am I here?" Tapp was there because she'd just survived a months-long battle with COVID-19, a fight that required doctors to put her in a medically induced coma after flying her by helicopter to Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore.

Tapp's illness was so severe that at one point she needed a heart bypass machine to provide oxygen to her disease-battered body, said Dr. Alba Azola, a physical medicine and rehabilitation resident at Hopkins. "It's basically the bypass machine they use for open heart surgery," Azola said. "They have to circulate the blood outside your body to oxygenate it because your lungs are not capable of oxygenating your blood." Tapp spent a month on the machine, "which is really unheard of. It's a really long time," Azola said. "COVID pneumonia completely prevented her lungs from being able to provide oxygen," Azola said. "The inflammation of her lungs was such that she could not oxygenate her blood through her lungs."



**Tapp and Dr. Azola on hospital discharge day**

Tapp's ordeal started in early March, while she was on the job at Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Washington, D.C. She suspects she contracted COVID-19 from a patient with whom she spent about 10 minutes "delivering my spiel" about her role in his medical care. Soon afterward, the patient was transferred to an isolation room and tested positive for coronavirus. About two weeks later, on 18 MAR Tapp started experiencing fatigue, weakness, chest pain, a high temperature and headache. Her local urgent care center tested her for COVID-19 and told her to quarantine for 14 days at her home in Lanham, Md., based on her flu-like symptoms. Five days later, the urgent care center called her to let her know that she'd tested positive for coronavirus. With a temperature of 102 degrees, Tapp asked her boyfriend to drive her to the emergency room at Suburban Hospital, a Johns Hopkins medical center in Bethesda.

"The folks saw me walking in and they knew. They said, 'This girl needs help.' They took me in right away," Tapp said. Tapp's condition continued to worsen, and within 10 days of her admission she was transferred to Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore -- not that she knew it, because she was out of it by then. Tapp wound up spending a total 117 days in the hospital, including two months in a medically induced coma. Doctors transferred Tapp between intensive care and cardiac care units, keeping her alive with various equipment as she fought off double pneumonia and heart and lung failure. At one point she was on a ventilator, the bypass machine, and a dialysis machine because her kidneys had shut down.

Tapp awoke with a tracheal tube in her throat and a feeding tube in her stomach. Tapp laughs when she recalls how, right after she woke up, none of the medical staff wanted to break the news about how long she'd been

unconscious and deathly ill. "A lot of people walked through the room, doctors and everybody. They said, 'Miss Tapp, you look so good!' I would say to myself, well, how was I looking before?" she chuckled. "Everybody's coming through, the physical therapists, the respiratory specialists: 'Oh, Miss Tapp, you look SO good!'" Then her family came in and broke the news about what she'd been through during the past couple of months. Tapp has spent the weeks since her awakening going through rehabilitation. She had to relearn how to perform basic tasks like standing, walking, swallowing, chewing and sipping from a straw. She still needs a walker to get around and oxygen if she exerts herself too much, but she's no longer on dialysis. "Considering where she came from to where she is today, it's just a miracle," Azola said.

Tapp has worked at the VA Medical Center for 13 years, where she coordinates and assist veterans with their discharge from the hospital. She plans to return, but "not this year! Not in 2020," Tapp said. "I really got to get myself together. It's a long recovery road." **Her advice to the healthy?** "Wear a mask. Wash your hands. Social distance. Those are the three things I would tell people," Tapp said. "It's no joke. It's a serious thing. You know, I really don't still have a taste. People ask me, what are you going to eat when you get home? Right now, I don't have a taste." [Source: U.S. News & World Report | Dennis Thompson | July 20, 2020 ++]

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## Have You Heard?

### Freedom Isn't Free | Rogue Report | Haircut

#### Freedom Isn't Free

Have you ever wondered what happened to the 56 men who signed the Declaration of Independence?

- Five signers were captured by the British as traitors, and tortured before they died.
- Twelve had their homes ransacked and burned.
- Two lost their sons serving in the Revolutionary Army; another had two sons captured.
- Nine of the 56 fought and died from wounds or hardships of the Revolutionary War.
- They signed and they pledged their lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honor.

What kind of men were they?

- Twenty-four were lawyers and jurists.
- Eleven were merchants, nine were farmers and large plantation owners; men of means, well-educated, but they signed the Declaration of Independence knowing full well that the penalty would be death if they were captured.
- Carter Braxton of Virginia, a wealthy planter and trader, saw his ships swept from the seas by the British Navy. He sold his home and properties to pay his debts and died in rags.
- Thomas McKeam was so hounded by the British that he was forced to move his family almost constantly. He served in the Congress without pay, and his family was kept in hiding. His possessions were taken from him, and poverty was his reward.
- Vandals or soldiers looted the properties of Dillery, Hall, Clymer, Walton, Gwinnett, Heyward, Rutledge, and Middleton.
- At the battle of Yorktown, Thomas Nelson, Jr., noted that the British General Cornwallis had taken over the Nelson home for his headquarters. He quietly urged General George Washington to open fire. The home was destroyed, and Nelson died bankrupt.
- Francis Lewis had his home and properties destroyed. The enemy jailed his wife, and she died within a few months.



- John Hart was driven from his wife's bedside as she was dying. Their 13 children fled for their lives. His fields and his grist-mill were laid to waste. For more than a year he lived in forests and caves, returning home to find his wife dead and his children vanished.

So, take a few minutes and silently thank these patriots. Remember: freedom is not and was never free! We need to thank these early patriots, in prayers, words, and deeds, as well as those patriots that are now still fighting to keep our freedom! We owe it to them to proclaim our patriotism now.

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### **Rogue Report**

- The Washington Redskins yielded to advertiser pressure and dropped their Redskins name, bowing to claims it's insensitive. And it didn't stop there. Hershey's announced Tuesday they are changing the name of Payday candy bars because it is offensive to people who don't want to work.
- Jeffrey Epstein's pimp Ghislaine Maxwell was denied bail Tuesday and will stay in jail. It was a year ago the nation was surprised to hear that Epstein had committed suicide while in federal custody in New York. If you think you were surprised by Epstein's suicide, how do you think HE felt?
- President Trump acknowledged in his press conference Tuesday that a federal execution took place Tuesday. The U.S. government executed its first convicted prisoner in seventeen years, a white supremacist. CNN said it just shows that under Trump, white people get to go to the front of every line.
- Portland protesters expressed a desire to destroy all vestiges of white privilege. The next day, the first inmate the feds executed since 2013 was a white supremacist. The executioner showed the Neo-Nazi a selfie of his daughter with an NBA player, and he died before they could strap him in.
- Joe Biden dismissed Trump's charges about his mental capacity and pointed out his excellent physical shape. Like many people getting up there in years, he periodically suffers some stiffness in his lower back. So last week Joe Biden went to a chiropractor, who referred him to a paleontologist.
- The London Daily Mail quoted Swedish teen climate activist Greta Thunberg saying preserving ocean life is just as important as defeating the virus. I think ocean life is adapting just fine. Modern sea gulls wouldn't know what a fish looks like, but they know what time McDonald's opens.

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### **Haircut**

One day a florist went to a barber for a haircut. After the cut, he asked about his bill, and the barber replied, 'I cannot accept money from you, I'm doing community service this week.'

The florist was pleased and left the shop.

When the barber went to open his shop the next morning, there was a 'thank you' card and a dozen roses waiting for him at his door.

Later, a cop comes in for a haircut, and when he tries to pay his bill, the barber again replied, 'I cannot accept money from you, I'm doing community service this week.'

The cop was happy and left the shop.

The next morning when the barber went to open up, there was a 'thank you' card and a dozen donuts waiting for him at his door.

Then a Congressman came in for a haircut, and when he went to pay his bill, the barber again replied, 'I cannot accept money from you. I'm doing community service this week.'

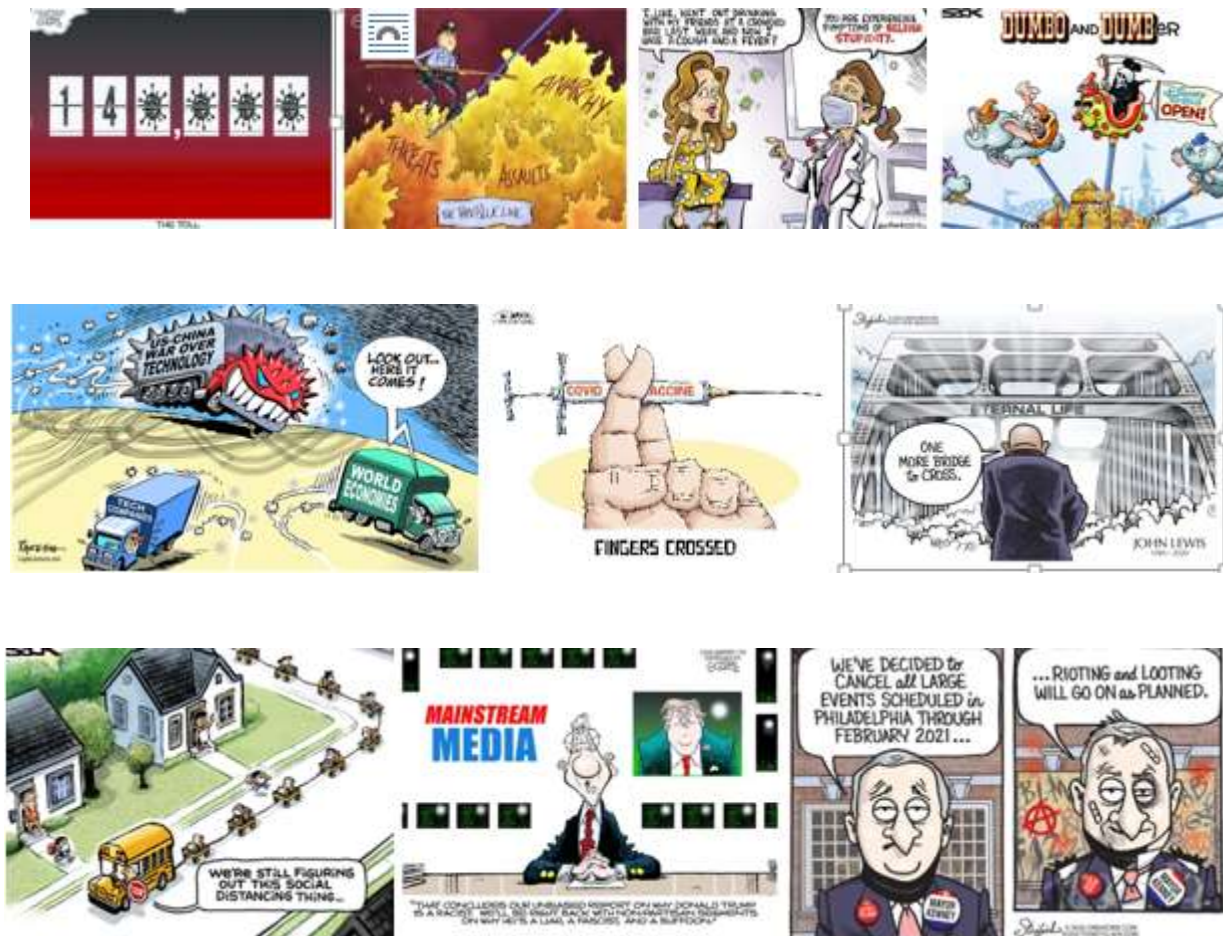
The Congressman was very happy and left the shop.

The next morning, when the barber went to open up, there were a dozen Congressmen lined up waiting for a free haircut.

And that, my friends, illustrates the fundamental difference between the citizens of our country and the politicians who run it.

As Ronald Reagan said: "Both politicians and diapers need to be changed often and for the same reason."

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## Thought of the Week

"Why does a woman work ten years to change a man's habits and then complain that he's not the man she married?"  
--- Barbra Streisand

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